

**Stirring Words**  
**Women and**  
**the making of**  
**modern food writing**

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## **Abstract**

Twentieth-century women have shaped modern food writing, bringing a gastronomic approach to everyday practice. Yet their impact has had little scholarly consideration. In this thesis I examine the work of women who defined food writing into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and argue the genre is fundamentally a female form.

I begin 200 years ago when women emerge as professional food writers, and I explore 19th century discursive and economic conditions which lead them to create a hybridised genre. I argue that gastronomic literature, previously exclusively in the male domain, moves into the female domain in the 20th century, thanks to M.F.K. Fisher and Elizabeth David who place everyday cooking practice in a framework of literature, history and culture. Through the lens of Michel Foucault's theory of transdiscursivity, I argue M.F. K. Fisher and Elizabeth David feminised what was deemed the male domain of gastronomic writing and masculinised the female mainstay in food writing, the cookery book.

I argue that Claudia Roden, within the framework of transnationalism and cultural hybridity, offered ethnographic exploration of other culinary cultures; and Charmaine Solomon, informed by Luce Giard's(1998) study of everyday practice, exemplified the embodied intelligence of culinary practice. I conclude that contemporary women food writers such as Nigella Lawson and Kylie Kwong have expanded the genre as a female form and, in the world of the Internet and all-pervasive social media, their influence, and the work of others, calls for further research.

*This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.*

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

*Helen Greenwood*

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## Introduction: Opening our Eyes and our Mouths



“One has to live, you know. You can’t just die from grief or anything. You don’t die. You might as well eat well, have a good glass of wine, a good tomato. Better than no wine and a bad tomato, or no crust of bread. Since we must live, we might as well live well, don’t you think?” M.F.K. Fisher<sup>1</sup>

credit: personal photo

When I emerged after nine years out of a fog of hospital corridors always smelling of antiseptic and my young daughter was no longer going monthly or every few months onto a ward or into a theatre for a procedure or an emergency, I began to salvage my kitchen skills. Nothing too ambitious. It was enough to reprise dishes I’d cooked before she was born, those years before I had to cook for a child who couldn’t swallow properly.

Cooking for a child unable to eat normally taught me lessons. How to cook a sweet potato and beef casserole so she could eat it as a puree. How to intensify every dish with olive oil and butter calories so she could put on a little weight. How to think about flavour in very tiny portions. How not to cry when she couldn’t eat. After

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<sup>1</sup>qtd. in Lazar, 1992. xv

several, surgical interventions, meals were less onerous. More adventurous cooking was possible. Thinking about eating was easier. My job as a restaurant reviewer and food writer was less painful.

I headed to the book shelves and plucked out old friends whose spines were slightly faded. Books by Charmaine Solomon, Claudia Roden, Marcella Hazan, Stephanie Alexander, Penny Smith, Paula Wolfert and Penelope Casas greeted me with familiar recipes and memories of good times. I riffled their pages, some marked with messy fingerprints, and found comfort. It wasn't just the recipes that embraced me. Their words did too. Their introductions told remarkable stories. Their anecdotes belied their scholarly approach. Their voices, fluid and controlled, made their subject alive. They were – and are – wonderful writers about food.

My admiration turned to curiosity. *Why do women write about food?* Women write about food for many reasons. They write about food to praise and make public the domestic, the everyday and the ordinary. They write about food to confirm identity, belonging, survival and a share of space in the world.

*Is women's food writing as significant as their recipes?* Writing and cooking demand intelligence and imagination, and their writing is personal and familial, ethnic and existential. It is knowledge – ingested, embodied and illuminated. Writing and cooking demand memory and they write about food in homage to their silent precursors who passed on their “nourishing knowledge” (Luce Giard 154).

*How have women writers contributed to the field of food writing?* Generations of readers have ‘consumed’ their food writing (and continue to devour it) and enough of a



canon exists for it to be considered a genre. I have chosen, as did Bloom (350), to use the term 'genre' to describe the range of women's writing about food, from journalism (which is my background), through history, memoir, autobiography, biography and essays, to novels with recipes and cookbooks with memoirs (Brien 1).

For me, writing about food is a way of understanding the world. I began my career as a food journalist prompted by the 1980s' zeitgeist, an undergraduate degree in sociology and the legendary Margaret Visser. When the Canadian classicist published her book, *Much Depends on Dinner: The Extraordinary History and Mythology, Allure and Obsessions, Perils and Taboos of an Ordinary Meal* in 1986, I was hooked - and not just by the title. Here was a woman who wrote about food like a scholar. Without recipes. Without photographs. With a bibliography. With relevance and wit and charm and generosity. My next discoveries were the great M.F.K. Fisher, Elizabeth David and Jane Grigson, then the marvellous Sri Owen, Paula Wolfert, Madhur Jaffrey, Roden and Solomon.

These are some of the many women who created the genre of food writing, and this is their story. In telling this story, a cacophony of voices sounds out. There is my voice as a participant observer of practices with which I have engaged in my career. There are the voices of the women who nurtured the food writing genre, some well-known, others lesser known, and all deserving of being known. In order to capture and examine their voices and their contribution to food-writing, I begin by pondering the genre's beginnings. What are the conditions of possibilities which lead to its existence?

In my research, I follow women food writers whom I have encountered, and I share what it is to be a woman food writer. While food writing is a genre, food writing is not generic. So in Chapter one, I go back to the 19th century when women food writers such as Eliza Acton, Isabella Beeton, Marion Harland and Hannah Maclurcan become professional and, once published, create food writing as a mass-market and middle-class genre. These are the women who lay down the tracks for others to follow.

In Chapter two, I examine two significant, 20th century food writing figures: M.F.K. Fisher, the American whose food writing is lauded as literature, and Elizabeth David, credited with changing eating habits in Britain. Aware of their importance and legacy, I try to avoid hero-worship. I reveal them as authors who do more than create individual texts. They shift modes of thinking, initiate a discursive practice, producing possibilities and rules for the formation of other texts – Foucault’s concept of a transdiscursive position (217). I describe how they turn the tables in food writing with their melding of the genre’s feminine and masculine forms, uttered by female voices.

The next cohort of female voices in food-writing I dub the second wave. They begin publishing in the late 1960s and some still do. Claudia Roden is one of them and the subject of Chapter three. She introduces Middle Eastern ingredients such as hummus and couscous to British supermarkets; she is also an exemplar of the scholar cook. Roden’s ethnographies of particular places and specific cultural sites break ground for food writers and the genre. Her narratives of exile, cultural

hybridism, transnationality and the concept of 'the other' weave through food writing today. Another second-wave food writer, Charmaine Solomon, is instrumental in the 'Asianisation' of the Australian palate. Chapter four is about Solomon's practice of culinary intelligence every day, in the practice of the everyday. She exemplifies the embodied knowledge and culinary intelligence of women food writers.

To conclude, I return to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to the work of Kylie Kwong, and Nigella Lawson whose first book, *How to Eat*, celebrates its 20 years since publication this year. Lawson has also been confronted with someone who couldn't eat properly, in her case a husband suffering from throat cancer. What she calls the "expansive, jaunty hobbyist approach traditionally taken by men" in the kitchen has never been her approach. "When I wrote *How to Eat*, I had a baby, a toddler, and a terminally ill husband and a job, so the way I cooked and approached food had to fit into my life. I didn't and still don't go at it as if I've got days," says Lawson (Nourse 2018). She writes ecstatically and practically about eating and cooking, and has carried off a television persona based on her curvaceous figure, exotic looks and licking of wooden spoons. Both the popular and academic press debate whether Lawson's agency and image is that of a feminist. I have never been in doubt, instantly loyal to a woman whose imaginative kids' recipes rescue mealtimes. On a more serious note, Lawson's style and skills establish her as a food-writing pace-setter for women on screen and in print.

Kwong intrigues me because she is a chef, cookbook author and television presenter who, these days, writes extensively and almost solely on social media. Her prolific presence on Instagram shares her original cooking approach of Chinese techniques and ingredients, along with Indigenous Australian ingredients. Her posts also reflect her Buddhist values of community, contribution and compassion. She refers constantly to good works done by others. She emphasises her sustainable sourcing of seafood and procurement of ethically-grown and indigenous ingredients, and promotes the work of farmers' markets and her local drop-in centre for street people with which she is involved. This is food writing for social change.

Throughout this thesis, I am guided by scholarly voices that help me analyse and appreciate the women of modern food writing. I explore their "deeply cultured and storied milieu" (Probyn 50). I shift focus on food writing from text to context, from style to situation, and from words to women which allows me to examine women significant to the genre and its conditions of possibility. I draw on the work of Amy J. Devitt and Michel Foucault, Edward Said's and Sami Zubaida's meditations on exile and cosmopolitanism, and Luce Giard's lyrical thoughts on women's work in the kitchen.

Giard importantly points to the connections between cooking and writing. My research into the cultural importance of women writing about food aims never to neglect their literary attributes. Food writers have varying skills, ambitions and success; the best of them have a distinctive voice and style and a narrative sense. They can be novelistic, in the case of M.F.K. Fisher, an essayist, in the case of

Elizabeth David, a historian, in the case of Claudia Roden or an educator, in the case of Charmaine Solomon.

Great food writing is imagination, intellect and inspiration at play, everyday. The best food writing is literary, popular and scholarly – it is not the purple prose of nostalgia or the bite-by-bite description of the last meal we ate. We want stories told well, our senses tickled, and our eyes, not just our mouths, opened. Food writer Kate Bernot argues that “The mark of great food writing ... is its ability to delicately bridge the gap between the average person's sensory experience of a meal with a larger story” (2011). She writes:

Ultimately, we must hold food writing to the same standards that society holds any other writing: it is successful when the reader puts down the page and realizes that he or she will never quite think of a mundane experience in the same way, but in the simplest actions, finds him or herself a part of a larger narrative (2011).

Food writing is part of a larger narrative, too. It is part of every, and any, tale we tell – whether we glean history from food remains in an archeological dig or face our planet’s future food security as climate changes. Nothing is disconnected from food and every mealtime reminds us of this. Food writers remind us that the earth produces what we grow, a farmer grows what we eat and a cook puts our meal on the table. It is how people grow, cook, eat and write about food that makes a culture; as Laura Shapiro says, “Food talks – but somebody has to hear it” (6). My argument

is that women hear the message, write about it and shape the food-writing genre -  
and always have.

## Chapter One: Fashioning a Female Voice



SUPPER TABLE.

**The Supper Table**, from Isabella Gardners' copy of *Mrs. Beeton's Every-Day Cookery and Housekeeping Book*

Ethos, values, vocabulary and context define the “delectable rhetoric of food writing” (Bloom 1).<sup>2</sup> What's more, like any genre, food writing has a pantheon of writing legends, a range of styles (functional, aesthetic, rhetorical, informative) and a set of narrative conventions. Food writing tends to organise these conventions – plot, character, locations and even design – into recognisable entertainment (Turner 37); and Dani Valent’s review of a hip Melbourne cafe illustrates how much of modern

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<sup>2</sup>“Given the ubiquity of the genre and its many manifestations, it's time to analyze common elements of the rhetoric of food writing in ways that will be useful to teachers and students, as readers and writers of food oriented essays and creative nonfiction, autobiographical and travel writing, and restaurant reviews” (Bloom 350).

food writing fits the definition of narrative entertainment like a beard on a barista, that is, perfectly:

There's nothing like a plate of tripe and pig's ear at 8am to make you think about the concept of breakfast. But there I was, tucking in, tonguing tripe, slurping ear, happy as a (heartily carnivorous) clam at high tide, with nary a thought for the smashed avocado mountains dotting Melbourne breakfast plates for miles around.

I had my epiphany and I'll say it here and I'll say it now: breakfast orthodoxy begone. Let us leave the poached hordes to their soft eggs and their candied bacon, to their self-righteous bircher rubble, to their sad, wilted spinach. Give me a breakfast sozzled with chilli oil and let me see that I'm alive.

In short, give me breakfast at Lawyers, Guns and Money, the new legal district cafe from chef Victor Liong (Valent 2016).

Stylistically, Valent's restaurant review captures food writing's 21<sup>st</sup> century voice.

She sets a scene (the eating venue), installs a protagonist (a breakfaster), constructs a plot (a series of eating experiences) and finishes with a denouement (the judgment).

Valent laces her story with literary tropes and rhetoric such as alliteration and exhortation. She rarely uses a noun without an adjectival embellishment. She furnishes her sentences with a precise vocabulary and muscular verbs. She employs with alacrity the first person, "I", to convey confidence in herself and her opinion



and assumes, also confidently, that her audience knows or cares about candied bacon and smashed avocado.

How Valent came to this speaking position<sup>3</sup> intrigues me. As Probyn observes, the stakes involved in speaking our selves are considerable: she sums them up as a question of who speaks for whom, why, how and when (2)<sup>4</sup>. Valent speaks from an authoritative position that presupposes the right to speak for others and to others. She speaks from the rostrum of a newspaper restaurant review column, directing her words at an audience hungry to boost its cultural capital and accumulate culinary experiences. As a former restaurant reviewer, I have occupied a similar position. I have met people who regurgitate opinions they have read as evidence of their cultural capital, and I know that people feed on words written about food for financial gain.<sup>5</sup>

People also feast on restaurant reviewing – and other forms of food writing – for pleasure. Food writing can summon a fun encounter, a novel idea, a provocative notion or an uneasy taboo; its language can trigger sensory reactions, sensual thoughts or difficult memories. The pleasure in reading about food can be vicarious, when people learn about a place they are unlikely to visit, and personal, when people read about a possibility with which they can engage. Food writing can stir creativity, conviviality or communality, and is as diverse as the responses it evokes.

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<sup>3</sup>Morris, *The Pirate's Fiancée* (3-7).

<sup>4</sup>“What remains unspoken in this particular arrangement is a tangible sense of who is speaking and where they are actually speaking from.”

<sup>5</sup>The words of Valent and other restaurant reviewers are often quoted in marketing material.

As a genre, contemporary food writing is wide-ranging and includes journalism (which is my background), history, memoir, autobiography, biography and essays. It hosts specialists in science or nutrition or health or the environment (or any combination); it welcomes miscegenation between forms, such as novels with recipes and cookbooks with memoirs (Brien 1). Food writing is catholic in its technology, too. The genre grew with the print medium – books, magazines and newspapers – then grafted itself onto radio, television and internet platforms. In 2018, food writers can be found on Twitter and Instagram; there are food bloggers and food podcasters; and there are food writers who shift seamlessly across media.

A prime exponent of switching between page and screen is Nigella Lawson who made her name writing cookbooks and presenting food on television.<sup>6</sup>The British author's style and delivery have both become benchmarks in food-writing: sensual and intimate, soothing and confident, mother-earth and mistress-pleasure. Even people who aren't interested in food know about her persona. Here she is writing about a vegetable; note how she sets the scene, establishes characters and traces a narrative arc:

... my mother thought nothing of eating an entire cabbage, dressed just with butter and white pepper, in one undistracted sitting. I have inherited that

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<sup>6</sup>"When I write a book, the words really inhabit the page and get behind the page. But on TV, you want the viewer to have the same experience as you in the kitchen, and you need to unite visually. I do a running commentary and really try to use words in a very precise way and try to be evocative with my language." Murphy, Interview with Nigella Lawson *Food & Wine* magazine. See also Diamond and Wu, *Radio Cherry Bombe* 2015 podcast.

desire to wallow in the splendor of just one bowl of food, and in the singularity of its deliciousness (*Simply Nigella*224).

Lawson has sung the praises of most of the ingredients she cooks – and her audience has responded with an enthusiasm that has been dubbed “the Nigella Lawson effect”<sup>7</sup>. When Lawson sang the praises of goose fat to make those “Perfect Roast Potatoes”<sup>8</sup>, readers and viewers raced to the supermarkets and their purchases noticeably increased the sale of goose fat. She is not the first woman writer to have this impact. The “Nigella Lawson effect” is, in fact, a reference to another British woman food writer, Delia Smith, whose own effect on the British culinary zeitgeist was so prominent that the *Collins English Dictionary* included Smith’s first name only in its 2001 edition.<sup>9</sup>

Smith and Lawson are among the many women who, as cultural and economic intermediaries, have influenced taste and ideas about food – especially with high-status consumers (Johnston and Baumann 165). Along with M.F.K. Fisher, Julia Child, Elizabeth David, Jane Grigson, Margaret Fulton and Charmaine Solomon, to name a few, they have laid down the conditions of possibility for the food-writing genre. Yet, whether they write about cooking ingredients or culinary history, recipes or restaurants, for pleasure or practical purposes, the role of these women in the

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<sup>7</sup>[“Nigella Lawson Effect Boosts Semolina Sales.” \*The Telegraph\*, 2018.](#)

<sup>8</sup> In *Christmas: Food, Family, Friends, Festivities*.

<sup>9</sup>“Delia Cooks up a Place in History.” BBC News. 2001

food writing genre has mostly escaped serious or scholarly consideration.<sup>10</sup> I argue that these women are a fundamental source of the food writing genre.

My argument follows that of Amy J. Devitt whose concept of genre shifted the focus from the effects of a genre to the sources of those effects. She argued that it is time to relinquish old notions of genre as forms and texts, and embrace new notions of genre as reflecting human experience and social relationships (573). Likewise, Rick Altman argued that as well as a body of texts or a textual structure, genre should be treated as a complex situation, “a concatenated series of events” which are repeated in a recognisable pattern (84).

This chapter looks at the discursive and economic conditions for food writing shaped by women’s voices and experiences. It examines the conditions of possibilities that allowed the rise of women food writers.

### **Food Writing Rises**

The first documented use of the term “food writer” was in *The New York Times* in 1950. According to the American food writer Molly O’Neill, “... the phrase made its debut in a story by Jane Nickerson about a press trip to the manufacturing plant of Tabasco sauce in Louisiana” (O’Neill 2003). As mass media reached its zenith, “food writer” was used to describe newspaper and magazine columnists who wrote mostly about cooking and recipes in printed publications.<sup>11</sup> Food writers (including

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<sup>10</sup>See Steve Jones and Ben Taylor (1).

<sup>11</sup>Australian cook and author Stephanie Alexander recalled the term in “those very first issues of [Australian] *Epicurean*, those brilliant ones with Les Mason doing the covers which are now actually collector's items” (Alexander, personal interview, 2014). By 1985, in Australia, food editor and author

chefs) had already broadcast on radio by then; when television made an appearance, they migrated to this newer broadcast technology.<sup>12</sup> After the dawn of the internet in 1995, food writers went online, tracking old formats (magazines, newspapers and television) and embracing new formats (blogs, video blogs and podcasts).

The roots of food writing lay in even older technological ground. The genre emerged in the US, Britain and Australia as a result of “technological and social developments that would eventually enfranchise audiences and give them a powerful voice in the constitution and maintenance of new genres” (Altman 182).<sup>13</sup> Two of these developments were mass-production print methods and rising middle-class consumption. Food writing flourished in these conditions because the genre recognized the role of women in the rise of the middle-class household, and their place in the changing economic and social schemes. Its authors adopted the speaking positions of mentors and matrons, and aimed to educate, encourage and exhort middle-class women to take on the proper running of a middle-class household.

Aimed at women and written mostly by women, the genre’s best-known forms were ‘the household management guide’ and ‘the everyday cookery book’. These guides and manuals offered wide-ranging instructions for meal preparation, managing

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Margaret Fulton wrote in her introduction to *The Great Cooks of Australia Cookbook* that it included “contributions from well-known food writers and columnists, broadcasters and authors” (vii).

<sup>12</sup>See Kathleen Collins 2012

<sup>13</sup>Altman (182) also points to cheaper printing, postal developments and the revolutionary ideas that led to new and smaller groups being able to create and disseminate information more widely and quickly.

servants, treating illnesses, budgeting and cleaning.<sup>14</sup> Iconic books of this period included the 'modern' precision of *The Book of Household Management* (1861) by English-born Isabella Beeton; the storytelling and preaching of Marion Harland's *Common Sense in the Household: A Manual of Practical Housewifery* (1883); Fannie Merritt Farmer's *Boston Cooking School Cookbook for Americans* (1896) which brimmed with "directness and novelty" (Shapiro 110); and *Mrs Maclurcan's Cookery Book: A Collection of Practical Recipes, Specially Suitable for Australia* (1898) by Hannah Maclurcan, a hotelier in north Queensland, whose writing reflected a "distinct local flavour" (O'Brien 1).

The hunger for this type of household and culinary instruction arose from several societal shifts. According to Mennell (223), one such shift was the sheer speed of urbanisation in Britain. The first quarter of the 19th century saw a rapid growth of towns. Urban residents had to purchase rather than grow their own food which made them less attuned to the produce of the land. They cooked less than the rural population, too, which interrupted the handing down of knowledge and tradition. This increase in the urban population and the decline in the agricultural labour force ruptured "the continuity of folk knowledge in cookery" (Mennell 222-3).

In the US, a similar break in the transmission of knowledge came about as women's traditional responsibilities became less relevant in a burgeoning industrial economy (Shapiro 12-13). Mills and factories pushed the producing and manufacturing work of the household outside the home and into an organized labour force. Feeding the

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<sup>14</sup>Somewhat like the women's magazines of the 20th century and the 'life hacks' of the 21st century.

family, for instance, once the chief responsibility of the house-hold was outsourced to the factory floor. Industrially-made products replaced hand-made food and freed up women to find employment outside the home. Paradoxically, as more women moved into the workforce, a woman's role in running the home and creating domestic happiness became a more powerful sentimental ideal- and not just for the middle-classes: the home also became a refuge for the working masses who toiled in the factories and the offices, down the mines and on the wharfs (Shapiro 12-15).

The rupture in the handing-down of culinary skills, the growing aspirations of a middle-class urban audience and the idealising of the domestic space provided ripe conditions for the growth of food writing. A large, lucrative market for its manuals - the Victorian-era version of the lifestyle guide - opened up. Beeton's *The Book of Household Management* sold 60,000 copies in the year after its volume publication and close to two million by the end of the decade (Zlotnick 2012), and is still in print. Catering for the increasingly literate "social-climbing wives of business and professional men" (Mennell 234) who sought guidance on the niceties and practicalities of running their homes proved a boon for publishing and its newest genre.

### **Mistresses of Home Management**

One American whose mission to encourage a woman to believe in the worth of her housewife self and the importance of running a home well was Mary Virginia Terhune. Her pen-name was Marion Harland, and her *Common Sense in the Household: A Manual of Practical Housewifery* was published in 1883. Harland was a

successful novelist before she turned her hand to domestic cookbooks and she began *Common Sense* with a quote from Charles Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby*. She spoke with ease and good-humour to her female readers in a voice flavoured with her strong Presbyterian faith (Smylie 2005), using terms of encouragement such as "profession" and "life-work" (3):

I speak not now of the labors of the culinary department alone; but, without naming the other duties which you and you only can perform, I do insist that upon method, skill, economy in the kitchen, depends so much of the well-being of the rest of the household, that it may safely be styled the root – the foundation of housewifery. I own it would be pleasanter in most cases, especially to those who have cultivated a taste for intellectual pursuits, to live above the heat and odor of this department. It must be very fine to have an efficient *aide-de-camp* in the person of a French cook, or a competent sub-manager, or an accomplished head-waiter who receives your orders for the day in your boudoir or library ... Such mistresses do not need cookery-books (Harland 3-4).

Harland's voice of a guardian angel intoning from on high is a hallmark of domestic cookbooks from the late 18th to the early 20th centuries. This food writing served to mark the boundaries within which the housewife was expected to perform in the construction and maintenance of the private sphere (McLean 1). Yet, even within those boundaries, Harland's writing possessed an individual style and voice. Yes, Harland seemed to see that pleasure lay in duty, intelligence rested in economy and



strength resided in self-effacement (McLean 1-2). But Harland also promoted womanhood as strong, intellectual and capable of independent living:

You are mistress of yourself, though servants leave. Have faith in your own abilities. You will be a better cook for the mental training you have received at school and from books. Brains tell everywhere, to say nothing of intelligent observation, just judgment, a faithful memory, and orderly habits  
(Harland 8).

Harland's voice had spirit, wit, sophistication and a novelist's instinct for the right word. She was a revelation to me because 19th century food writers have mostly been portrayed as matronly, didactic and humourless, and their writing as uncreative and replicating a rigid format (McLean 1-2). This unflattering portrait emerged from the enormous success of the doyenne of the domestic cookbook in Britain, Isabella Beeton.

The book that bears her name, *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management*, was first published in 1861 when Beeton was 25 and has never been out of print. Nicola Humble<sup>15</sup> credits Beeton with having "so successfully ventriloquised that matronly voice that it continues to reassure us down the centuries, even when most of what Beeton herself wrote, thought and felt is long forgotten" (2005). Humble writes that:

The crisp, authoritative tones of her book, along with its immense size and heft, and the range and assurance of its advice have all encouraged

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<sup>15</sup>Nicola Humble is editor of the Oxford World's Classics edition of Beeton's book, and professor of English Literature at Roehampton University.

generations of readers to imagine Mrs Beeton as a stately matron, doling out the fruits of long years of domestic experience (OUP Blog 2011).<sup>16</sup>

Beeton, however, was not the overbearing Victorian we had been led to believe. She was a sprightly, bold young woman who, after a “highly unconventional upbringing”, had taken herself to learn pastry-making in Germany which, according to one of her sisters, was considered “ultra-modern and not quite nice” (Humble 2011). When she returned, Beeton married a young entrepreneurial publisher, Sam Beeton, and worked alongside him for the rest of her brief life, contributing to his publications. Her successful book was based on her articles about food and household management. She wrote for her husband’s lifestyle publication, the *Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine*, which she also edited (Humble 2011).

Like Harland, Beeton was a professional writer, though as a journalist not a novelist. Beeton reported on the Paris fashion shows and wrote fashion columns, translated French novels for serialisation and wrote about domestic management. She may not have known “a thing about cookery”, as her biographer, Kathryn Hughes contends (181), but she had the skills to compile the *Book of Household Management* (Zlotnick 2012). Beeton has been lauded as an innovator, one of the first cookbook writers to produce recipes with ingredients at the head, and praised for being more accurate about timing and temperatures than her predecessors (Hughes 2014). Beeton and her husband have also been revealed recently as plagiarists. They gathered and

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<sup>16</sup>According to Humble, this model of the author was deliberately encouraged by Beeton’s husband, and by later publishers who tacitly avoided all mention of the author’s untimely death four years after *Household Management* was published (OUP Blog 2011).

published recipes and cooking instructions almost word for word from books as far back as the Restoration (Hughes 2014).

Among the recipes which Beeton copied were those by her influential predecessor, Eliza Acton.<sup>17</sup> Another professional writer, Acton's career spanned the early to the mid-19th century. The eldest of five children of a brewer, Acton's ambition was to be a poet. According to Bee Wilson, Acton's first book, published in 1826, when she was 27, was a volume of romantic poems. A decade later she offered her publisher, Longman, a second volume: "They suggested she write something more practical. So she did, applying herself to years of experiments at the stove before venturing into print" (Wilson 2011).

An elegant writer with a subtle voice and an underlying wit<sup>18</sup>, Acton's 1845 book, *Modern Cookery for Private Families*, was regarded by many food writers, including the late Elizabeth David, as the most distinguished book of the period (Mennell 213). David wrote in a preface to a 1968 edition, that *Modern Cookery* "has been my beloved companion" by a "peerless writer" and is "essentially one to be read, as it is written, with intelligence and understanding and application" (xxviii-xxx). David also thought that Acton's book was "the final expression, the crystallization of pre-Industrial England's taste in food and attitude to cookery" (xxix). She wrote that radical changes were about to overtake English cooking and that, while Acton acknowledged some of them, others Acton ignored: "In 1840 for example, there had

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<sup>17</sup> See Hughes 2014. See also Mark Brown 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Wilson writes: "She dispenses her sly wit sparingly, like truffles. 'The Publisher's Pudding', we are told, 'can scarcely be made too rich' (it is studded with Jordan almonds and muscatel raisins) in contrast to 'The Poor Author's Pudding', a modest bread-and-butter affair" (2011).

been launched a commercial product called Birds Custard Powder. What we know as modern cookery, and it had little to do with Eliza Acton's version, was on its way" (xxix).

### **Manuals for the Domestic Gendered Self**

Each generation of professional women food writers marked a shift in the genre and in the context in which it flourished. The growth of urban living, for instance, can be seen in Acton's book, when compared to its predecessors, and in Beeton's book, when compared to Acton's. Acton was more cosmopolitan in outlook and was writing for a more urban middle-class audience than her forerunners, while Beeton's book was the first written unambiguously for an urban, middle-class audience (Mennell 213). Beeton's audience, many of whom were still on the lower echelons of the middle class, evinced concern about table settings, handling domestic help, social etiquette, seasonally-available food and menu-planning (Mennell 213). Beeton's efficient use of language arrived 20 years earlier than Harland's mellifluous tones, each author addressing different concerns in different circumstances.

In the fast-moving Victorian-era, women food writers promised and delivered guidelines for their readers to negotiate the rapidity of their changing world. The discursive and economic conditions in which women food writers worked meant they were speaking to women "... whose lives were very different from those of their mothers and grandmothers, [and] who needed detailed advice on everything – from buying the latest fashions to how to choose a trustworthy shop-keeper, from how to manage servants to how to plan a dinner party – precisely because all those things

were new” (Humble 2011). New nutritional theories, technologies and commercial food products added to the anxieties of aspiring middle-class housewives.

As professional writers, Acton, Beeton and Harland addressed the everyday concerns of their audiences. Their cookbooks evolved as a palatable mixture of explanation and instruction, of contemporary novelties, innovations and mores. They dished out this mixture in Tables that explained nutrients, exact measurements for cooking, and the occasional recommendation of a newly-patented gadget.<sup>19</sup> They created a language that assuaged anxiety and proposed role models – and even offered happy endings (Zlotnick).<sup>20</sup> They fashioned a new kind of gendered domestic self, even while acknowledging what hard work it was.

Through their food writing and the publication of their work, these influential 19th century professional food writers had successfully brought the role of food and all its accoutrements – from household management and nutrition to manners and matters of taste – into the public realm. Yet their speaking position addressed actions and activity mostly in the private realm; they spoke to an audience of women whose concerns and agency were located in the domestic sphere.

### **Genres Blend**

For middle-class and educated women, writing culinary manuals and household guides was a source of personal expression and income. Travel writing had also

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<sup>19</sup> See Farmer 2000.

<sup>20</sup>Zlotnick compared the domestic novel of the period and the household management book and argued that the latter transformed the drudgery of housework into an ideal of domesticity, a fantasy that good management and organisation can create a perfect home, “without disorder, chaos, frayed nerves, bad temper and exhaustion” (2102).

provided a career as women responded to demands for non-specialist writing on academic and popular subjects (Saunders 18). In a survey of the long and productive life of the professional writer Louisa Stuart Costello (1799-1870), Clare Broome Saunders argued that Costello adopted the most lucrative genres in each decade; like Acton who moved from poetry to popular cookbooks, Costello moved to commercial novels and travel writing when poetry publishing declined (15).

Like their sisters writing household management manuals and cookery guides, women were drawn to write personal travelogues and scholarly touring guides by their intellectual interests and their material conditions. The structure of the literary marketplace was a factor too because it hindered as well as supported scholarly women (Saunders 15). Travel writing, argued Saunders, provided these women with the space to explore their intellectual interests in a popular and commercially viable form without trespassing on areas of male authority or alienating a female readership (138).

According to Saunders women writers, bound by constraints of acceptable areas for female intervention, manipulated traditional forms to produce their own hybrid (Saunders 138). Travel writing hybrids included personal travelogues that recorded an individual reaction instead of a general observation (137); narrative styles imported from popular fiction by writers to colour texts (142); and authors' inserting their scholarly interests, from architecture and history to landscape and literature. Travel writing, as Jan Borm suggested, can perhaps best be judged not as a genre but

as “a collective term for a variety of texts both predominantly fictional and non-fictional whose main theme is travel” (13).

Food writing evolved as a hybrid in a way similar to travel writing. Taking food as their theme, women cross-pollinated traditional forms of the genre – recipes and memoir, menus and shopping lists, diaries and event planning, household management tips and medicinal advice – and food writing blossomed. Food and travel became one of the genre’s best-matched marriages.<sup>21</sup>In fact, I argue that food writing mirrored travel writing to the point that that they informed each other as genres. Travel writers from Isabella Bird to Freya Stark could not ignore eating habits while they explored China or the Middle East; and the expansion of dining culture in travel was in evidence in publications as successful as the *Guide Michelin*, itself a hybrid of food and travel. Key 20th century food writers such as Elizabeth David and M.F.K. Fisher, whose work is examined in the next chapter, read travel books and wrote about food as a result of their travels. Their contemporary, Sybille Bedford, confounded readers with her celebration and connoisseurship of food and wine, in memoir and travel, fiction and reportage, analysis and biography.

As women pushed back at discursive constraints, food writing continued to evolve as a hybrid genre. Scholars have argued that, until the end of the 19th century, food writing was gendered, with gastronomic literature an expression of the public sphere and therefore masculine, and cookery books, associated with domesticity,

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<sup>21</sup>In Australia, the high-end magazine *Gourmet Traveller* has led the way in a glossy food and travel writing amalgamation. Newspaper sections in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Australian*, *The Age* and *The Sun-Herald* all feature food in their travel writing regularly and frequently.

and feminine (Ashley et al 153). Women food writers broke through the “domestic ideology” of 19th century women’s food writing which had encouraged them to regulate their hunger “for food, for sex, and for public acclaim” (McLean 16). They began to draw on the male domain of gastronomic literature that celebrated intellectual and sensual pleasure, and to develop an appetite for food culture beyond the confines of domesticity. They began to transgress the bounds of domesticity and claim a place for a “culinary joie de vivre” (Jones and Taylor 175-8).

Other changes were afoot. Increasingly international travel gave women food writers the opportunity to experience other food cultures. In political discourse and as a force for social change, food was a weapon wielded by suffragettes in their hunger strikes and by unions on their picket lines. The foment rumbling around Europe in the fight for the rights of women, workers and ethnic groups culminated in a world war. At the end of the Great War, the long 19th century finally came to a close. Women had broadened their boundaries beyond the domestic sphere – and moved their domestic selves – into the world at large.

Adventurous and pleasure-oriented, these women pioneered food writing which embraced scholarship, travel writing, aesthetics, literature, gastronomy, autobiography and everyday practice.<sup>22</sup> They wove their love of learning, art, literature, science and travel into a larger, more complex tapestry of food writing. By

1928, Virginia Woolf could write that:

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<sup>22</sup>Under the entry of “food writing genres”, McLean’s index lists individual entries for “autobiographical cookbooks; culinary autobiography; domestic cookbooks; gastro-autobiographical cookbooks, gastronomic cookbooks; gastronomic literature; gastronomic memoir; gastronomic tour guides” (189).



There are books on all sorts of subjects which a generation ago no woman could have touched. There are poems and plays and criticism; there are histories and geographies, books of travel and books of scholarship and research; there are even a few philosophies and books about science and economics (79).

And there would be books about food that no woman could have previously written – a dictionary written with gastronomic gusto, scholarly essays that blaze with sensual imagery, and a recipe book with a surreal blend of public and private pleasure.<sup>23</sup> The following chapters focus on 20th and 21st century women food writers who defined the delectable rhetoric of modern food-writing. The next chapter develops this argument through a close analysis of two of the genre's finest craftswomen, M.F.K. Fisher and Elizabeth David.

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<sup>23</sup>M.F.K. Fisher penned a delicious gastronomic dictionary; Elizabeth David's scholarship rarely disguises her appetite; and Alice B. Toklas's recipe book defies ordinary description.

## Chapter Two: Turning the Tables<sup>24</sup>



credit: taste.com

"I'm not a writer really you know, only a self-made one ..."

Elizabeth David (*Writing at the Kitchen Table* 179)



credits: parisreview.org via *Gourmet* (left) flavorwire.com (right)

"I've always been a writer, but eventually found I could earn some money by it."

M.F.K. Fisher (*Conversations with M.F.K. Fisher* 169)

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<sup>24</sup>"What has been removed, in short, is the famous 'operating table'; ... the table where, for an instant, perhaps forever, the umbrella encounters the sewing-machine; and also a table, a *tabula*, that enables thought to operate upon the entities of our world, to put them in order, to divide them into classes, to group them according to names that designate their similarities and their differences – the table upon which, since the beginning of time, language has intersected space" (Foucault xviii-xix Preface).

In the previous chapter, I argued that, from the 19th century to the 20th century, women's food writing evolved as a hybrid genre as women pushed back at their economic, social and discursive constraints. Women, especially from the middle classes, began to transgress the bounds of domesticity, and to feed their appetites for knowledge and travel. Women food writers reflected this shift and began to draw on the male form of gastronomic literature that celebrated intellectual and sensual pleasure.

Two women who inherited this legacy would be vital to food writing's evolution in the 20th century. In this chapter I examine how M.F.K. Fisher and Elizabeth David shared a sensibility drawn from similar *habitus* – the largely unconscious ideas and the deeply ingrained habits and dispositions we all possess as a result of our life experiences.<sup>25</sup> Both Fisher and David viewed food not as an end in itself but as a way of entering and explaining the world. These two women transformed the genre by breaking down divisions between feminine and masculine approaches to writing; they feminised the male domain of gastronomic literature and masculinised the female mainstay of the cookery book. I argue that, as authors, Fisher and David were (in Foucault's terms) transdiscursive in that they produced the possibilities and the rules for the formation of other texts. They established “a theory, a tradition, or discipline” in which other authors and other books found a place in the sphere of their discourse (Foucault 216-18). I argue that they transformed food writing into a

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<sup>25</sup>As conceptualised by Bourdieu, *habitus* is the physical embodiment of “cultural capital” (see Chapter 3), the internalised, embodied history of an individual, unconsciously and consciously obtained and practised (*Distinction* 77). It is the way individuals perceive the world and react to it.

female form, in a language that configured female desire (McLean 1-2), which we now consider is the food writing genre.

### **A Tale of Two Women**

In 1928, Virginia Woolf spoke to the privileged and educated women of Cambridge University about fiction. In her lecture, famously known as *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf urged the students to write all kinds of books, on any subject, however trivial or however vast, not only for the good of the world but for their own good (107-8). Meanwhile, a young Fisher and a younger David, who were to write the groundbreaking food books of the 20th century, were contemplating their future.<sup>26</sup>

David was a 14-year-old boarder pupil at St Clare's Ladies Private School, in Tunbridge Wells, 90 miles directly south of Cambridge. Born on Boxing Day in 1913, David had grown up in a Jacobean manor house in rural Sussex. The death of her beloved father just before she turned 11 had unsettled the whole family, and the wilful David was now separated from her home, three sisters and cousins. On a rare visit to St Clare's, David's autocratic mother was appalled to see her daughter wielding a lacrosse stick and despatched the bookish, taciturn teenager to Paris where David took art lessons and a French civilisation course, became fluent in French and acquired a taste for couture clothing (Cooper 28-31).

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<sup>26</sup>Both women were ripe fruit for Virginia Woolf's vision of a blossoming world which would make room for women and their creative power. In the final words of *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf shifts her gaze a century ahead of her time and proposes the "fantastic" suggestion that we might "... see human beings not always in their relation to each other but in relation to reality" (111-112).

Restless and rebellious, David travelled to Italy and Greece at the outbreak of the Second World War, and lived in Egypt and India.<sup>27</sup> She returned to England to live in 1946 and her first cookbook, *A Book of Mediterranean Food*, published in 1950, was instrumental in shaping how British people ate and viewed food. She wrote seven other authoritative books, including two on English food. Her final cookbook and social history was published posthumously. Four compilations of her cookery, by her editor and executor of her estate, Jill Norman, were published after David's death in 1992. She died one month after Fisher.

Fisher, who was born Mary Frances Kennedy in Michigan in 1908, was finishing her college degree at UCLA when Woolf gave her famous lecture. Fisher was dating heavily and "trying to get a Gertrude Lawrence tan ... She affected the boy-crazy, clothes-conscious, clueless pose of a stereotypical coed even as she aspired to become the first female editor of the [college newspaper, *Tawney Kat*] paper" (Reardon 40, 42). Fisher also met the man who would be her first husband and whose last name she would later append to the initials of her own name.

After her first sojourn in France, Fisher spent most of her life in California. She began her writing career in the 1930s and wrote almost to her death in 1992. Fisher was the author of 27 books – fiction and non-fiction, and her best-known titles are linked to food: *Serve it Forth* (1937), *Consider the Oyster* (1941), *How to Cook a Wolf* (1942), *The Gastronomical Me* (1948) and *An Alphabet for Gourmets* (1954). They have been re-

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<sup>27</sup>Even before her father's death when she was 11, David had been restless: several times she had run away from home, telling a friend, later: "It was the usual thing, walking down the drive with your suitcase. You must have done it" (Cooper 19).

published several times as a single volume called *The Art of Eating*, first in 1954 and more recently in 2004 as a 50th anniversary edition.

### **Searching for Something**

Sheila Rowbotham, socialist feminist theorist and writer, argued that social freedoms masked feminism's decline in the Jazz Age and during the Depression. She contended that by the 1930s, women had retreated into "suburban villas buying things and absorbing household hints with a nagging sense that something was missing (172)."

Fisher and David pedalled their well-heeled way into maturity in the slipstream of a generation that emerged after a world war and women's enfranchisement, and went searching for that missing 'something'. Neither woman, both educated and privileged, had suffered the economic travails which affected working- and lower-middle class women. Their money, status and family forbearance protected them. David's parents had connections to political and artistic milieux, as well as to the aristocracy – David was presented at Court for her 'debut'. Fisher's social standing as the daughter of a newspaper editor endowed her with family pride and an unshakeable self-belief.

Fisher began her search by boarding a ship for France. The just-married "bored, underachieving Whittier debutante" with a half-finished college degree and a fondness for story-writing couldn't wait to "get the hell out of California" (Reardon 43). As the wife of an American academic who had a job in Dijon, she busied herself, and learned French, tutored English, studied French literature and history, and

attended sculpture classes. She also acquired an appreciation of food and wine, and her Francophilia was to be life-long.<sup>28</sup> Fisher recalls dining at the *Aux Trois Faisans* restaurant after she had just arrived in Dijon in 1929:

The first night, as I think back on it, was amazing. The only reason we survived it was our youth ... and perhaps the old saw that what you don't know won't hurt you. [...] we ate the biggest, as well as the most exciting, meal that either of us had ever had.

... Everything that was brought to the table was so new, so wonderfully cooked, that what might have been with sated palates a gluttonous orgy was, for our fresh ignorance, a constant refreshment. [...] that night the kind ghost 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 (*The Art of Eating* 401).

French food made a lasting impression on David, too. In Paris, the nearly 18-year-old attended art classes and enrolled in a course called French civilisation at the Sorbonne, and then decided to try for a diploma in the course. She experienced French cooking for the first time while boarding with Madame Barette (whom David called Madame Robertot in her writing) and her greedy, bourgeois family in their Parisian and Normandy homes (Cooper 28-32). David later wrote in her book *French Provincial Cooking* that only when she had returned to England in 1931 from her 18

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<sup>28</sup>She also wrote several memoirs of France as well as Time Life's *The Cooking of Provincial France*.

months in France did she realise the family had instilled in her a taste for a kind of food “quite ideally unlike anything I had known before” (24).

So what emerges from those days is not the memory of elaborate sauces or sensational puddings, but rather of beautifully prepared vegetables like *salsifis à la crème*, purees of sorrel, and *pommes mousseline*. Many egg dishes, and soups delicately coloured like summer dresses, coral, ivory or pale green, a salad of rice and tomatoes, another of cold beef, and especially, of course, Léontine’s chocolate and apricot soufflé... (24)

Neither David nor Fisher had grown up with either the joy of cooking or the art of eating.<sup>29</sup> An upper-class child confined to nursery, nanny and a diet of bland, apparently nourishing food, David recalled in ghastly detail the plain mutton and beef, boiled potatoes in dry flakey mounds, watery marrows, green turnip tops, slippery and slimy junket, greasy jam roly-poly, dry and stodgy rice pudding, and mugs of hated milk (Chaney 23). David’s rare pleasant memories were of Nanny’s illicit cooking over the nursery fire: sticky fudge, high summer berries warmed with sugar, and dawn-picked mushrooms cooked in fresh thick cream (Cooper 16-17). Forbidden fruit indeed.

Fisher’s childhood was dominated by her maternal grandmother who adhered to the strictures of Dr Kellogg’s diet and brought to the household her strong abhorrence of

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<sup>29</sup>Instead, they grew up with the same dominant domestic science discourse that was in countries such as the US, the UK and Australia. Imbued with the excitement of scientific discovery and technological innovation, domestic science promised women reform (Shapiro 4-5). Cloaked by the masculinity of science, it dispensed a language of the nutritional, the practical and the housewifely, aimed squarely at female responsibilities for family. The almost body-phobic asceticism of domestic science trumped any natural, pleasurable and visceral *gourmandisme*.



sensual pleasure, whether in food or drink or any other activity (Reardon 14). When Grandmother Holbrook was away, rare steak, beef roast and a glass of red would hit the table as well as her mother's desserts (15). Mary Frances learnt what she did and didn't like to eat, and how a good meal could be a feast, and later wrote: "Without my first eleven years of gastronomical awareness when Old Mrs. Holbrook was in residence I probably would still be swimming in unread iambs instead of puzzling over the relationship between food and love ..." (*The Art of Eating* 38-39).

### **The Language of Food**

Fisher's piecing together of the love and food jigsaw had its epiphany during her formative writing years in Dijon. Here, in a town once considered the epicentre of gastronomic France, she learned to speak a language of food. In this discourse, Fisher spoke of shopping for food, cooking food and eating food as a site of leisure and pleasure.<sup>30</sup> She evoked visceral reactions and bodily needs such as appetite and hunger, abstinence and desire:

But now when I think of the hot quarrelsome laughing meals, the Sunday dinners in the formal *salle à manger* and the enormous suppers so soon afterwards, when Papazi produced his weekly triumph of a tart as big as a cartwheel, with all the apple slices lying back to belly to back in whorls and swoops; the countless birthdays and name-days and saint-days with their champagne and their truffled geese; the ordinary week-day suppers, 'light' after the heavy meal at noon, when soufflés sighed voluptuously at the first

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<sup>30</sup>My thanks to Professor Catherine Driscoll for this observation.

prick, and cold meats and salads and chilled fruits in wine and cram waited for us ... no, when I think of all that, it is the people I see. My mind is filled with wonderment at them as they were then, and with dread and a deep wish that they are now past hunger. They were so unthinking, so generous, so stupid (*The Art of Eating* 420).

David's food appreciation began in Cairo during World War II where she revelled in the colourful, cool, spicy food prepared by her *suffrage* (servant), Suleiman (David, *An Omelette and a Glass of Wine* 24). David's language of food was cool and considered, rarely about her but always about her responses. In her first book, a love-letter to the Mediterranean, she wrote:

The ever recurring elements in the food throughout these countries are the oil, the saffron, the garlic, the pungent local wines, the aromatic perfume of rosemary, wild marjoram and basil drying in the kitchens, the brilliance of the market stalls piled high with pimentos, aubergines, tomatoes, olives, melons, figs, and limes; the great heaps of shiny fish, silver vermilion, or tiger-striped, and those long needle fish whose bones so mysteriously turn out to be green. There are, too, all manner of unfamiliar cheeses made from sheep or goat's milk; the butchers' stalls are festooned with every imaginable portion of the inside of every edible animal (anyone who has lived for long in Greece will be familiar with the sound of air gruesomely whistling through sheep's lungs frying in oil) (*A Book of Mediterranean Food* xv).

## Food as Place

Recalling southern, sunnier climes, David vividly and elegantly sketched smells, colours and manners, engaging readers with her choice adjectives, taut verbs and observations like the mysterious green fish bones. David wrote *A Book of Mediterranean Food* in dismay upon her return to a grey England of food rationing and cooking restrictions, and with nostalgia for the plentiful, varied, delicious food and cookery to which she had become addicted (*A Book of Mediterranean Food* 5). Even if you didn't know the circumstances in which she wrote, you could sense the joy and the longing in her words in the passage above – indeed she had lamented that, “Ever since, I have been trying to catch up with those lost days” (*French Provincial Cooking* 24).

In mourning those lost days, David spoke of food as place and belonging; cooking and eating conjured up forgotten faces, rooms vacated, markets visited and kitchens left behind. She had lived and travelled and belonged elsewhere for intense periods, and ingested the history and geography of real food – in her youth in Normandy, in the south of France with her mentor, Norman Douglas, when stranded in Greece with her lover after war broke out, and while working in cosmopolitan Cairo. Back in England, David's purpose was “to bring a flavour of those blessed lands of sun and sea and olive trees into their English kitchens” (*A Book of Mediterranean Food* xvi) – and into her life in England. If David couldn't go back to the blessed places of sun and sea, the tastes of sun and sea could come to her:

*Taramá* is the name given to dried, salted, pressed, and slightly smoked cod's roe, sold out of a barrel – a favourite *mézé* in Greece and Turkey. Genuine Greek *taramá* can be bought from King Bomba's Italian Produce Stores, 37 Old Compton Street, London W1. ... The taste of Greek *taramá* is not unlike that of the more heavily smoked but less salt English cod's roe, which can be treated in the same way (*A Book of Mediterranean Food* 151-2).

Fisher's first book *Serve it Forth* likewise portrayed places and people.<sup>31</sup> She recounts the preparation of snails by the grandfather in the family with whom she and her husband boarded, her expeditions with the local Club Alpine, whose elderly members planned marvellous meal stops, a meal in a Swiss village which meanders into a meditation on the social status of vegetables, and a wintry February in Strasbourg where she ate little sections of tangerines she had dried in her pensione.

My pleasure in them is subtle and voluptuous and quite inexplicable. I can only write how they are prepared. In the morning, in the soft sultry chamber sit in the window peeling tangerines, three or four. Peel them gently; do not bruise them, as you watch soldiers pour past and past the corner and over the canal towards the watched Rhine. Separate each plump little pregnant crescent. If you find the Kiss, the secret section, save it for Al. ... Take yesterday's paper (when we were in Strasbourg *L'Ami du Peuple* was best because when it got hot the ink stayed on it) and spread it on top of the

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<sup>31</sup>Fisher had compiled notes, jottings and literary pieces about her first trip to France. She embedded them in culinary essays which eventually became *Serve it Forth*, published in 1937, five years after she had been to France (Zimmerman 122-3).

radiator. The maid has gone, of course – it might be hard to ignore her belligerent Alsatian glare of astonishment (Fisher, *The Art of Eating* 27).

Unlike David, Fisher's evocation of belonging to people and place is overtly self-referential. In her stream-of-consciousness style, high-flown phrases and poetic bursts, Fisher usually trained her lens on herself as "the heroine of every tale": charming waiters, playing the perfect host, being the ideal guest, or seducing her husband with the kiss of a toasted tangerine (Reardon 105). At the same time, Fisher was a cool observer of meals, mores, customs, rituals and notions of gastronomy, mostly French. Her wide-eyed wonder and native cunning reminded me of the innocent, naive American abroad who is exposed to adventure, art and pleasure in works by Mark Twain, Henry James, Edith Wharton, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway.

### **Injecting Erudition**

Both Fisher and David were bibliophiles. During her time in France, Fisher had plunged deeply into French writers – Honoré de Balzac, Jean-Baptiste Racine, Pierre Corneille, Georges Sand, Alexandre Dumas, Marcel Pagnol and Colette (Reardon 67) – and would later translate the gastronome, Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin. After she returned to the US, she spent hours in the Los Angeles Public Library (Zimmerman 125-6) where she graded her husband's student papers and browsed the library's collection of historic texts in translations and recent editions. The descriptions of food and feasts she found in old cookery books and manuscripts were the genesis of *Serve it Forth* which she augmented with her first-hand accounts. David went on

board the boat on which she and her lover sailed from Marseilles at the outbreak of war in 1939 lugging copies of cookbooks by admired food writers Ambrose Heath and Marcel Boulestin. She also took “works by Victorian travellers, seventeenth century poets and playwrights, several history books, Homer, Robinson Crusoe and about a hundred paperback thrillers which she said could be thrown overboard after use” (Cooper 60-61).

In their first books, David and Fisher leant heavily on the authority of other authors, weaving in material gleaned from scholars, historians, novelists and essayists. Henry James, Robert Byron, Lawrence Durrell, D.H. Lawrence, Gertrude Stein and Norman Douglas were among those David quoted in chunks and slabs in *A Book of Mediterranean Food*. It was surprising to return to this book after many years and realise how much David relied on these heavy-weights – and how timeless David’s sparse prose has proved. Yet, according to Cooper, David was initially unsure of her voice and conscripted these iconic authors to help her evocation of time and place, and make Mediterranean food less alien to her British readers (141).<sup>32</sup>

Across her work it is clear that Fisher had no such misgivings about her voice. She seemed to have waved her culinary pen airily over her historical research, and adroitly plucked out names and dropped them into her gastronomic musings on feasting, fasting, old age, memory, places, people, belonging and loss. She quoted the Roman conqueror and banquetor, Lucullus; excerpted a passage from a 15th century cookbook in the collection of The Harleian Mss; referred to Gervase

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<sup>32</sup>In another effort to appeal to Brits whose idea of foreign food was French, David’s mixture of culinary lore and carefully-chosen recipes leant heavily towards France.

Markham's 1615 treatise on English household cookery; described the Italian futurist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's theories; and doffed her hat to cookery writers such as Marion Harland. It was amusing to return to *Serve it Forth* after many years, and find Fisher's voice sometimes worldly and sometimes banal – and how much she mentions her hero, Brillat-Savarin.

### **Women Gastronomes**

Throughout *Serve it Forth*, Fisher served forth lashings of erudition and personality in homage to Brillat-Savarin, who she warned would haunt her book (*The Art of Eating* 6). She was right. In this passage, as in so much of what she wrote, you can hear that Fisher aimed for his aphoristic style, wit and insight:

Until well into the sixteenth century French cooking developed little. Lordly kitchens aped the British in the length, breadth, and depth of their enormous meals.

Restaurants there were none, unless you could so name that redoubtable hostelry *La Tour d'Argent*, old then, older today. Now it serves *crêpes Suzette* and *canards pur-sang*, but in 1533 it was still dishing forth such favourites of the Middle Ages as dormouse pasty and a mixed pie of snake, porpoise, swan, and plum-stuffed crane (*The Art of Eating* 75)

In emulating Brillat-Savarin – and other members of the gastronomic genre – Fisher became the American female 20th century counterpart of a 19th century French male gastronome. Women, wrote Lucius Beebe in the *New York Herald Tribune's* positive review of *Serve it Forth*, were “supposed to confine themselves to home economies

[sic]" (Zimmerman 155). Fisher didn't. Her androgynous pen name masked a voice far removed from women's generic food writing. Instead, Fisher wrapped the themes of hunger and appetite around eating and cooking, like the puff pastry on a beef Wellington.

Like Fisher, David made little concession to the prevailing perceptions of women's food writing as either "upbeat journalese" or "cheerful practicalities" (Cooper 14). Her delivery was in the spirit of the writer and sybarite Norman Douglas, whose influence on David was akin to Brillat-Savarin's on Fisher. David absorbed Douglas's erudite talk of the Classical past and the Mediterranean present (Chaney 242), and he taught her unforgettable lessons: authenticity, the study of original sources, understanding cause and effect, and knowing every innkeeper, restaurant owner and market stall holder wherever he lived or travelled. When he spoke about figs, he knew from which garden those figs came, the history of the trees, the type of soil in which they grew, the pests and invasions of that particular property and how many times it had changed hands (*An Omelette and a Glass of Wine*, David 123-4).<sup>33</sup>

David lapped up learning. She had an excellent memory and a librarian's love of accuracy and she summoned her skills to treat her subject with an erudition that would put male writers to shame. This passage, one of David's more loquacious in *A Book of Mediterranean Food*, illustrates her immaculate English and economically elegant prose:

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<sup>33</sup>David acknowledges the life lessons Norman Douglas taught her: "Always do as you please, and send everybody to Hell, and take the consequences" (qtd. in *An Omelette and a Glass of Wine* 120).



## PARTRIDGES COOKED KLEPHTI FASHION

*Klephtis* (from the word meaning 'to steal') was the name given to the original Greek brigands, who had their headquarters in the mountains of Thessaly and harried the Turks (and anyone else who seemed suitable prey) during their 200 years' occupation of Greece - the original Resistance Movement in fact.

Their method of cooking birds and meat wrapped up in paper in a primitively constructed oven has come to be known all over Greece as 'Klephti cooking'.

The partridges, seasoned with mountain herbs, are wrapped up in paper with a little fat and any vegetables which may be available (in Greece partridges are not treated with the reverence accorded them in England) and placed in an earthen pot, narrowing at the top, called a *stamna*. This pot is then laid on its side in a hollow dug at the edge of a bank of earth, and buried. Underneath the pot the earth is scooped out to make room for a fire of resinous pinewood or charcoal, and this is left slowly burning for 2 or 3 hours (113).

By injecting erudition into their food writing, Fisher and David attempted to inscribe food practices within a literary, historical and cultural framework and "gesture toward the myths, histories and memorable meals which lay beyond the home" (Jones and Taylor 178). In doing so, they were among the first to dominate what Mennell describes as the 'ill-defined margin' between a gastronomic essay and the cookery book (271). From the margins, both Fisher's voluptuous, visceral voice and

David's cerebral, elegant voice sounded out loudly and a new food writing genre emerged.

### **Class Unconsciousness**

Fisher and David spoke about meals and atmospheres and appetites where nothing was vulgar or base; all was thoughtful and refined. In their food discourse, the art of eating well translated into the art of living well. Both these arts prized authenticity, elevated simplicity to sophistication and made pleasure paramount. The two women displayed, to quote Pierre Bourdieu, "... an immediate adherence at the deepest level of the habitus to the tastes and distastes, sympathies and aversions, fantasies and phobias which, more than declared opinions, forge the unconscious unity of a class" (*Distinction* 77).

Writers who turned eating into a social ceremony and an affirmation of aesthetic refinement were, to take Bourdieu's view, imposing forms and formalisms on the appetite. They denied the mean and primary function of consumption, and censored the crudely material reality of eating, such as noise or haste (196). They epitomised what Bourdieu, in his survey of the space of life-styles and *habitus*, regarded as the concern of the bourgeoisie to eat with all due form. Josh Ozersky (2014) contended that "All [food writers] were alike card-carrying members of the upper bourgeoisie, and their target readers, then as now, were people just like them, or people who wanted to be just like them."

In any case, readers hungrily consumed Fisher's and David's display of their *habitus*. David's readers, whether in a suburban villa or an urban walk-up, were moved to

imagine their version of a place in the sun and imagine it in the English context. Carter described this as the “Elizabeth Davidisation of the English Cuisine ...the cuisine of a particular class, of the new class of emergent intelligentsia that began to surge upwards in the 1950s” (105). Similarly, Fisher’s readers absorbed her stylised language which shifted “the emphasis from substance and function to form and manner” (Bourdieu *Distinction* 196)<sup>34</sup>. As Fisher wrote:

For myself, I think people will always eat, and even learn the basic rules of how to do so, without books. Therefore it is the writers who can turn eating into an [a]esthetic delight, making its intrinsic grossness delicate, who please me most and who will always do so (qtd. in Reardon, *A Stew or a Story* 101).

From writing to recipes, Fisher and David made it all seem simple. They were aided by their class and cultural capital which veiled the reality that this simplicity required hard work and discipline – for them and for their readers. It is no easy matter to make a golden-hued consommé or replicate a ground-cooked partridge or even, these days, to shop for good produce. Nor is it easy to write well. But Fisher and David not only preached they also practised their dedication to aesthetic delights in food and literature. Their reward was that their food writing transported them and their readers to other worlds. As Angela Carter wrote “... these are women to whom food is not an end in itself but a way of opening up the world. And,

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<sup>34</sup>Bourdieu wrote that, “In opposition to the free-and-easy working class-meal, the bourgeoisie is concerned to eat with all due form” (196). It makes me uneasy, Bourdieu’s romanticising of the working-class meal as much as Fisher’s romanticising of the middle-class consommé dinner.

indeed, they are all women: this is, at the highest level, a *female form*" (126my emphasis).

### **Food Writing is a Female Form**

That this carefully-crafted, seemingly-effortless and wonderfully erudite food writing is a female form is fundamental. Fisher and David illuminated the margins which Mennell had identified in food writing. They femininised what was once deemed the male domain of gastronomic writing and masculinised the female mainstay in food writing, the cookery book. Fisher and David also introduced the leitmotifs and motivations for today's food writing. Fisher, it could be argued, "invented first-person food writing as we know it today" according to Ozersky:

Fisher swept away the bombast and pomposity of nineteenth-century epicurean food writing ... She had what few writers have, a distinctive style, and like her contemporary, Ernest Hemingway, whom she in many ways resembled (though not physically), it was as much a moral as a literary one (2014).

David, I would argue, invented the "invocatory cooking", as Carter called it, which we emulate to this day. Carter described it as a kind of witchcraft that transcended the here and now:

But it is not only verbal magic; she gives you the formulas to do it yourself. You, too, can prepare a similar *daube* [stew] which will contain in its vinous

aroma all the magic of Provence. And this without any of the pain, inconvenience and inevitable disillusionment of actual travel (105).

As the founders of a new discursive practice, Fisher and David undoubtedly occupied what Foucault called a transdiscursive position, i.e. their work established a tradition or discipline in which other authors and other books would find a place.

They were:

... unique in that they are not just the authors of their own works. They have produced something else: the possibilities and the rules for the formation of other texts. In this sense they are very different, for example, from a novelist, who is, in fact, nothing more than the author of his own text (217).<sup>35</sup>

They not only made possible a certain number of analogies and resemblances in their work which others could re-use, but they also introduced a certain number of differences in their own work which made it possible for them and others to expand the food discourse (217-18).

Other women would follow in Fisher's and David's footsteps (see Chapter 3) and, I argue, current food writing is consequential upon all of these women's practice. The next generation of significant women food writers would map out more possibilities,

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<sup>35</sup>"Perhaps it is time to study discourses not only in terms of their expressive value or formal transformations but according to their modes of existence. The modes of circulation, valorization, attribution, and appropriation of discourses vary with each culture and are modified within each. The manner in which they are articulated according to social relationships can be more readily understood, I believe, in the activity of the author function and in its modifications than in the themes or concepts that discourses set in motion" (Foucault 220).

tease out more strands in food writing, and consolidate the genre as a female form.

Among the women who traced their food writing DNA to David and Fisher was

Claudia Roden<sup>36</sup>. In this respect, I will examine Roden's work, bearing in mind

Virginia Woolf's dictum: "For we think back through our mothers if we are women"

(76).

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<sup>36</sup>David returned the compliment, recommending Roden's *A Book of Middle Eastern Food*, to her readers in her own book *A Book of Mediterranean Food* (xvi).

## Chapter Three: Exile and Ethnography



“I want to get to the heart of each region. I want to hear it from the people themselves. I don’t want to be a historian – I want to see how they see their own history.”

Claudia Roden(2014)

credit: ukjewishfilm.org

In the previous chapter, we saw how Fisher and David wrote food as it had never been written before. They were founders of transdiscursivity in the realm of food writing, establishing a tradition or discipline in which other authors not only found a place, but were able to expand the discourse (Foucault 216-18). Fisher and David mapped a trail for a new generation of women food writers whom I have dubbed the ‘second wave’<sup>37</sup> (see Appendix). From the 1960s through to the late 1990s, these second-wave women food writers traced deeper routes (and roots) in the genre and

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<sup>37</sup>They were a generation removed from their ‘first-wave’ predecessors: 10 to 30 years younger than Elizabeth David and 15 to 35 years younger than M.F.K. Fisher.

tramped trans-national paths in culinary territories, at that time still unfamiliar to Western eyes. They broadened the boundaries of food writing; more than travelogues, their work served as ethnographies of particular places and specific cultural sites.

This second-wave included two writers who have particular significance for my own food writing career: Claudia Roden, whose work is examined in this chapter, and Charmaine Solomon, the subject of the next chapter. Importantly, both these writers directly influenced cultural eating patterns. Roden (born 1936) mined her own experiences to write influential surveys of Middle Eastern and Jewish foods, changing how Westerners viewed the two cuisines. Charmaine Solomon (born 1930) used her culinary and writing skills and her mixed colonial heritage to make Asian food palatable to an Australian public. Furthermore, Roden and Solomon occupied prominent positions in the culinary and gastronomic food writing field from the mid to late 20th century. They possessed symbolic, social and cultural capital which contributed to the production of this space.

Like their first-wave predecessors, the second-wave women food writers were middle-class, educated and privileged. They were also as literary, scholarly and trustworthy in their food writing. Unlike their predecessors, this generation of women food writers matured in a media landscape of mass market publication and television. Well-known and well-regarded, they were able to assure and reassure their readers (and viewers) that simplicity was sophisticated, novelty was desirable



and the exotic was authentic (and vice versa).<sup>38</sup> The flavours of the culinary field were changing like the colours of the global map.

Mobility, immigration and disintegrating colonialism dominated the post-1945 lives of nearly all the second-wave women food writers, transforming them into expatriates or exiles. In their trans-national states of being, the tension of confronting cultures – and cultures confronting other cultures – surfaced in their writing as leitmotifs of displacement and differentness. In 1968, Roden wrote:

“My compilation of recipes is the joint creation of numerous Middle Easterners, who like me, are in exile, either forced and permanent, or voluntary and temporary. It is the fruit of nostalgic longing for, and delighted savouring of a food that was the constant joy of life in a world so different from the Western one” (*A New Book of Middle Eastern Food* 13).

Roden exemplified the profound influence of second-wave women food writers on the genre – and on culinary history, cultural thinking and everyday practice.<sup>39</sup>

### **Observation, Immersion, Ethnography**

It's 2014. Claudia Roden has just received the cover mock-up for the updated edition of *The Food of Italy*, her region-by-region survey of Italian cooking. She wasn't happy. She told me:

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<sup>38</sup>The authenticity that this generation of women food writers invoked had not yet been worn down to a clichéd sliver – in fact, they rarely used the words “authentic” or “authenticity”. They also showed great respect for their subject and the subjects about whom they wrote.

<sup>39</sup>As an emerging food writer, I was very much influenced by Roden and her contemporaries; as a secular Jew, a dormant sociologist and an amateur cultural scholar, I felt particularly close to Roden.

I hate it. It's a photo of roast peppers stuffed with bits of tomato, something that has been doing the rounds of the magazines for a few years. Roast peppers are in Italy obviously but they are everywhere in the Mediterranean – and in Australia, yes (2017).

Roden said she had chosen a very different photo to the one on the mock-up. She felt her choice of “an Italian shop selling salamis and cheeses” was more representative of how Italians have changed and yet not changed the way they cook and eat: “It hasn't changed in the sense that it's become something totally other- not at all. But there have been changes and I wanted to reflect that.” I said that if she didn't get the cover she wanted, then the book wouldn't be her. “Exactly,” she replied. “I'm glad to hear you say that because it will give me more ammunition to say it's not me.” (2017)

Roden got her way. On 20th March later that year, the 25th anniversary English edition of *The Food of Italy* appeared with the cover photo of a modern Italian *salsamentaria* (delicatessen) called Ruggeri in Rome's Campo dei Fiori. The image encapsulated Roden's ambition to write about real people eating real food. She wrote:

I don't want to reconstruct the lost world myself ... but I want to find it [where] it still exists. I don't want to bring back anything that people don't cook. I am really looking for what [people] are doing today. I can see what it was in the past but [...] I don't want people to start eating food of the past if they're not eating it today. It's what's been passed on, what remains of tradition because society changes and because [a] way of life changes over the decades or centuries – things do change. The food doesn't stay still and

cuisine doesn't stay still but [...] it has a way of changing and remaining itself, and that's what I'm finding (2017).

As Luce Giard wrote, "Like culture, social groups do not live in immobility and their tastes do not remain unchanging" (186) and Roden's writing reflected what Giard referred to as: "the signs of real time and those of biological, psychological, familial, and social time [which] superimpose themselves, by completing or restricting themselves, on the choice of dishes and the organization of meals" (187).

Roden's research reflected the changes since Elizabeth David's book about Italian food in 1954. In the first edition of "my Italian book", Roden noted that chestnut flour cake or *castagnaccio*, from Lucca in Tuscany, was a very ancient cake and was on sale in supermarkets (109). She observed that Piedmontese had reduced the amount they ate (*The Food of Italy* 9). She wrote:

Italians have started to 'rediscover' their individual heritage in the old everyday foods of the countryside. They call it *il recupero* and *la rescoperta*. ... Poor peasant dishes like polenta and bean soup and those based on bread or dried chestnuts or made with offal or wild plants are particularly popular (*The Food of Italy* 4).

Roden spent a year travelling up and down Italy, researching<sup>40</sup>, at the dining table, in kitchens, on the road and on trains, "with the whole carriage joining in" (*The Food of*

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<sup>40</sup>Roden's book appeared after she spent a year on a series of articles for the British *Sunday Times Magazine*, published as *The Taste of Italy* and added material collected on other trips (*The Food of Italy* 1). She wrote "The selection reflects what is popular in Italy today, what I liked best and what I feel you will most enjoy cooking and eating. I did not try to be comprehensive". Missing are traditional pastries, dishes with ingredients that would make her readers squeamish or be too hard to find in the

*Italy* 1). She went to kitchens, inns, markets and slaughterhouses to find growers, farmers, peasants, home-bakers and butchers doing the simple act and ordinary things. The original photos captured unnamed men and women: a prosciutto maker in Parma, a *parmigiano* and *pecorino* seller in Palermo, a mushroom spruiker in a Treviso market, a shepherd in Molise and women in flowered dresses hand-making pasta in Bologna.

Restaurants, local and tucked away, were a ready-made source of recipes, stories and history for *The Food of Italy*. In Abruzzi, Roden met “Signor Stanziani ... in the village square where older men sit and talk of their days cooking in the far corners of the world” (133). She included a roast lamb with mint recipe from Stanzani’s Villa Santa Maria cooking school. In Sicily, Roden tracked down a recipe for pasta a *picchipacchi* (pasta with raw tomato sauce) she had eaten in a Trapani restaurant where “a whole football team ordered what sounded like pikpak” (184). In Rome’s Trastevere quarter, Signor Severino (of Da Serverino in Rome) gave Roden his mother’s *frittata di patate* (potato cake) recipe and she wrote:

He entertains his clients with Roman jokes and his piano playing when he feels in the mood. One morning, he produced one Roman dish after another so that I could taste while he explained the culinary past and recited a little poem he had written celebrating saltimbocca (*The Food of Italy* 124).<sup>41</sup>

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UK. Included are “more of the luscious modern sweets”, reduced fat in some recipes and, generally, a presentation of food in a more “nouvelle cuisine” manner (5).

<sup>41</sup>Compare to Elizabeth David: “... I also remember an especially excellent dish of skate with black butter on the menu of one of those rough and noisy but efficiently run little bistros which are typically Lyonnais. On this particular occasion we were sitting at a table next to the one at which the

As a participant observer with entrée into villages, private homes and restaurant kitchens, Roden immersed herself in the everyday and excavated below the tourist tropes of pasta, pizza and piazza. She wandered the back streets of Naples, encountered a wedding party in Sicily, met nuns making almond pastries in a monastery and watched fishing boats bringing their catch into a tiny Ligurian port (1). Roden travelled alone, without plans and pre-arrangements; her research method depended on the kindness of strangers:

I cannot name all those whose food I ate, who gave me recipes and information, who let me see them at work and took me to see cheese and salami and pastry makers, who extended the hospitality of their homes and taught me about Italy, but I am grateful to them all, and something of what they told me is in this book (*The Food of Italy* 212).

Roden's unearthing of recipes mirrored ethnographic work as James Clifford defined it: "a characteristic attitude of participant observation among the artefacts of a defamiliarized cultural reality" (542). Roden observed, noted and wrote from particular spaces and specific cultural sites; she was a participant observer and a detached interrogator of the places and practices she studied (Giard xxxix).

I was often invited to watch people cook in their homes. There's a certain intimacy in the kitchen that you don't have when you are entertained in the living room, where it's quite formal. Now this is advice for anthropologists

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patron-cook was entertaining friends, eating his own midday meal and apparently doing the cooking at the same time" (*French Provincial Cooking* 43-44)

who want people to speak to them: go in their kitchens rather than in the living room (*Roden Discusses Food and Culture* 2017).

Roden reflected Clifford's view that "...ethnographic humanism begins with the different and renders it (through naming, classifying, describing, interpreting) comprehensible. It familiarizes" (562). American food writer Joan Nathan said Roden always included the ethnography and history of the kitchen and table, and the genealogy of recipes, dishes and ingredients:

She traces the migration of each recipe and adds stories about the process of cooking, etiquette of serving and table manners, as well as the sequence and ritual of the meal. Roden is intensely interested in addressing the continuity of taste, techniques, and combination of ingredients. She often points out how modern cooking methods such as pounding, stuffing and shaping are surprisingly similar to the procedures of our ancestors (*Encyclopedia*).

Before bringing her ethnographic humanism to Italian food, Roden had applied her approach to other cuisines. Her first book, *A Book of Middle Eastern Food*, published in 1968, was her exploration of the culinary Middle East, "... a broad and fluid term which today means different things to different people" (14). In Roden's hands, recipes revealed history and *habitus*.

### **Cairo: *Habitus* and 'Cultural Capital'**

It's 1959. Claudia Roden was just married. Her parents, who had fled Cairo during the Suez crisis in 1956, were in London, too. On Friday nights, her family welcomed visitors from all over the Middle East into her parent's house where, "it seemed that

we had never left Cairo. The smell of sizzling garlic and crushed coriander seeds in the kitchen, or of rose water in a pudding" (*Jewish Food* 3) reminded the exiles of the homes they had lost and the way of life they had left behind. "People said, 'I'll give you my recipe because I want you to remember me,'" she said (*About Culture and Food* 2015). Roden started collecting their recipes on scraps of paper. She tested the recipes at home, not with a view to publication, simply to keep hold of her family's roots because, she said, "I didn't want to lose them" (2017). The recipes recall the place she had left behind, Cairo.

The Cairo Roden knew was a cosmopolitan city in a crumbling colonised world. Edward Said recalled the 30 years spent as a family resident in this "malleable" (269) city with its "ultra-European and ultra-Islamic Arab cultures" (275) and its Arabic dialect he described as:

... virtuosically darting in and out of solemnity, colonial discipline, and the combination of various religious and political authorities, retaining its quick, irreverent wit, its incomparable economy of line, its sharp cadences and abrupt rhythms (273).

Said wrote that, "Only in that Cairo, at that time, could my family and I have made sense, with our carefully subdivided existence and absurdly protected minority status" (270). The same could be said of Roden. Educated in Egypt in circumstances that permitted her to literally watch the world go by from the verandah of her affluent childhood home on the Nile, she grew up a polyglot in a well-to-do Jewish household where the women didn't work and guarded their cooks' recipes. Her

parents were born in Aleppo and her Istanbul-born grandmother spoke Ladino, an old Sephardic language (Roden 2002). Roden spoke French and Arabic at home, her nanny spoke Italian and she attended The English School Cairo.

We were a huge extended family. Many of my childhood memories are of celebrations at long tables and of sitting in a large family circle and being served mezzes or coffee and syrups with pastries. I grew up with *kibbeh*, *tabboule*, *baba ghanouj*, *humous*, *megadarra*, *konafa*, *ma'amoul*, as well as dishes that originated in medieval Spain. Along with French and Italian food. We had a cook called Awad who came from a village in upper Egypt and learnt to cook our dishes from my mother. Our nanny, Maria Koron, came from a village in Slovenia that was then part of Italy. When we were small, she cooked for us, too (2017).

At 15, Roden went to Paris for the final three years of high school<sup>42</sup> then to London where she enrolled at St. Martin's School of Art – she wanted to be a muralist or a film-maker<sup>43</sup>. She encountered “distressingly greige” food, and struggled to stomach meals of false creams and cauliflower with curdled cheese (2017). Before she could finish her art studies, the 1956 Suez Crisis in Egypt disrupted her plans as thousands of Jews, her parents among them, were expelled by Gamal Abdel Nasser in the wake of the stand-off between the Egyptians, and the English, French and Israelis. To support her family, Roden quit art school and took a job with Alitalia in

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<sup>42</sup>“Ms Claudia Roden.” SOAS. University of London.

<sup>43</sup>Roden. Interview by Rachel Cooke, 2012



Piccadilly.<sup>44</sup>There was no possibility of returning to Cairo. Roden's physical connection with her homeland was severed.

Roden may have left Cairo but Cairo did not leave her. Instilled in her was the city's character. Historically, Cairo was famously tolerant, open and sophisticated. It had accepted different faiths; it had sat at the crossroad of many cultures; it had outlived caliphate after caliphate, empire after empire from the Ummayyad and Abbasids to the Ottoman and British. Roden grew up in the final throes of what Sami Zubaida referred to as "... the golden age of Middle Eastern cosmopolitanism ... that thrived in the late nineteenth and into the first half of the twentieth century in the major metropolises of the Middle East" (36-37).<sup>45</sup>For her part, Roden described it eloquently and with more than a little sadness:

The Egypt I knew was a French-speaking, cosmopolitan Mediterranean country in which life for the better-off was a sort of continuation of the *Belle Epoque* in an annexe of Europe with colonial-style clubs, opera and ballet and entertaining on a grand scale. Egypt had been part of the Ottoman Empire and a British protectorate. It was led by a foreign (Albanian) dynasty, a court made up of exiles from the Turkish aristocracy, and a royal council that spoke

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<sup>44</sup>"My father was ashamed that a woman in his family was working. He felt he should be the family provider." (Interview by Elfreda Pownall, 2014).

<sup>45</sup>Roden thanks Zubaida for reading "bits of first drafts" of *The Book of Jewish Food* and helping her with *A Book of Middle Eastern Food*. Zubaida is Emeritus Professor of Politics and Sociology at Birkbeck, University of London and, a Visiting Hauser Global Professor of Law in Spring 2006, at New York University School of Law. He is a regular participant at the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery, and organized a conference at the London School of Oriental and African Studies in 1992 which focused on the culinary cultures of the Middle East. The conference papers were published with co-editor, Richard Tapper, as *Culinary Cultures of the Middle East*.

limited Arabic. The Jewish community had a happy and important place in the mosaic of minorities – which included Copts, Armenians, Syrian Christians, Maltese, Greeks and Italians, as well as British and French expatriates – living among the Muslim majority<sup>46</sup> (*Jewish Food* 4).

As a privileged, Jewish Cairene, Roden was the repository of an intricate upbringing of myriad opportunities and constraints, of cultural and economic capital, of gender, culture and religion. She spoke from a position of what she is and what she was, what she sees and what she saw, her *habitus*.<sup>47</sup> For Pierre Bourdieu, *habitus* is internalised, embodied history, unconsciously and consciously obtained and practised, which presupposes one's chances of success in navigating the unwritten rules of society. *Habitus* is produced by "The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence ... the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product" (Bourdieu 53-54). Roden's *habitus* seeped into her language and her thoughts about food:

Our Cairo had been two cities that turned their backs on each other. One looked like Paris, because Khedive Ismail, who ruled in the middle of the nineteenth century had wanted to pull Egypt into Europe and had brought in European architects to build it. The other had narrow meandering streets, mausoleums, and public baths; fountains with curvy iron grilles and windows screened by wooden lattices; Coptic churches and mosques with

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<sup>46</sup>One of those British expatriates for a few years during the Second World War was Elizabeth David, who credits her servant, Suleiman, with her understanding of the fresh, local produce that she learnt to shop for and cook.

<sup>47</sup>See also Chapter Two.

minarets rising into the sky like delicately embroidered candles. But our cooking was also from other cities. We made Istanbul pies, Aleppo cracked wheat salads, Castilian almond and orange cakes, egg flans from Fez<sup>48</sup> (*Jewish Food* 4).

Roden, I argue, became aware of her *habitus* through reflecting on her exile. She grew nostalgic for Cairo's Sephardic flavours which had diffused into its Jewish diaspora, and recalled her maternal grandmother's eggplant and spinach pies and her paternal grandmother's lamb with mint. As she drew upon the recipes, cooking practices and ways of eating that were, in part, her cultural inheritance, Roden became cognizant of what she had lost – and what had been lost. And so began her study of Middle Eastern food. For the next nine years, she searched literally high and low for recipes and stories about Middle Eastern food – from classical Arab documents in the British Museum Reading Room to tales from Iraqi workers in carpet warehouses (Roden 2014). In her food writing, she also juxtaposed the prosaic and the *recherché*:

Behind the seemingly inexhaustible range of subtly varying and intriguing minced meat balls, one can discern the creative spirit responsible for the luscious designs which decorate Arab pottery, carpets and minarets. It inspired in cookery a rhythmic and prolific repetition as it did the floral geometric patterns, endless variations on a theme. Each district and each town has striven to offer its own particular speciality for a meat ball (267).

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<sup>48</sup>That orange and almond cake became Roden's signature. It leapt out of the back pages of her book (*New Middle Eastern Food* 486) and became one of the most copied recipes ever, often unacknowledged.

Roden was also aware that *A Book of Middle Eastern Food* was the “fruit of nostalgic longing for, and delighted savouring of a food that was the constant joy of life in a world so different from the Western one” (*Middle Eastern Food* 13). As she said years later:

To immigrants, food is a link with the past, that part of their culture that survives the longest, passed on from one generation to another. It is kept up when clothing, language and music have been dropped. When the environment is hostile to their foreignness, they might turn to the cooking of their roots for comfort (*Roden Discusses Food* 2017).

In exile, Roden not only became aware of her Cairene *habitus*<sup>49</sup>, she also became acutely aware of how little Britons knew about her world. In the 1960s people joked about the hummus, she recalled: “To make the soil rich, you mix up all these dead leaves, and cook! So they were laughing at that, laughing at *fulmedames*, and calling it fool-me-damn” (Worley 2015). Her reaction to their ignorance was to write rich and deep descriptions of *habitus* in her cookbook – and not just through the recipes: “I have allowed myself to include riddles, proverbs and sayings, in the hope that through them a little of the wit and spirit of the peoples of the Middle East may be discovered” (*Middle Eastern Food* 18).

Roden turned foreign ways of doing food to English-speaking culinary account (Ferguson 230) and her crossing of culinary boundaries had an impact on English-

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<sup>49</sup>Roden quoted the Arab saying, “He who has a certain habit will have no peace from it” (13). Said put it this way, “... the *habitus*, the coherent amalgam of practices linking habit with inhabitance” (176).

speaking food culture, particularly British food culture. No longer funny words, hummus and pita became part of English-speaking food language. English supermarkets turned to Roden for advice on ingredients to stock. She suggested couscous, bulgur, haloumi, chickpeas and filo pastry. Other ingredients she had used in her book such as pomegranate molasses, tahina, harissa, za'ater and dukkah later became "part of the new eclectic modern English cuisine" (*Roden Discusses Food* 2017). Her traditional orange and almond cake became a cafe and home-baking fixture in Australia in the 1990s; these days the recipe is the poster-girl for gluten-free dieters.<sup>50</sup>

After the success of *A Book of Middle Eastern Food*, Roden became a professional food writer. She filed as a 'gastronomic foreign correspondent' for several national newspapers, including the Sunday Times. She hosted a BBC television series, *Claudia Roden's Mediterranean Cookery*, in 1987. In 1992, "in celebration of a unique contribution to the food that we eat in Britain today" (2012), Roden received the Glenfiddich Trophy and was inducted to the James Beard Hall of Fame for the influence that she had on food in America.<sup>51</sup> She wrote another 16 cookbooks in

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<sup>50</sup>In the 1980s, every cafe worth its name listed her never-fail, super-moist, flourless orange and almond cake. In the 2010s, every cafe and bakery sold orange and almond cake because it was gluten free, and kept for days and days. The cake was not just emblematic of Roden's successful crossing of cultural boundaries. It was also emblematic of its Sephardic origins. Its absence of butter made it suitable for the everyday and Passover dietary rules, and it recalled lands where almonds and oranges grew.

<sup>51</sup> 'Ms Claudia Roden.' SOAS. London University. She has also won other international awards for her cookbooks.

English,<sup>52</sup> including the monumental survey of a cuisine and its culture, *The Book of Jewish Food*.

### **The Other – Reversal of Glance – Familiar Strange, Strange Familiar**

In 1997 *The Book of Jewish Food* with its evocative subtitle, *An Odyssey from Samarkand and Vilna to the Present Day* won the Andre Simon Memorial Fund Food Book of the year.<sup>53</sup> The project was vast – it took Roden 16 years – and no one has attempted anything like it before or since.<sup>54</sup> Roden's complicated travels through time and tradition took her into Ashkenazi and Sephardic cooking, on waves of migrations across continents from North Africa to the north of England and from Moorish Spain to the steppes of the Urals.

Roden's editor at Penguin where *A Book of Middle Eastern Food* was published, Jill Norman, came up with the idea. "It was an obvious follow-up and it took some persuasion. Claudia wasn't on sure ground with Ashkenazi food – even though she had been married to an Ashkenazi Jew. Her background was Sephardic and she could use her own and her family's resources to do her research. She wasn't convinced she could do the research necessary to come to grips with Ashkenazi food" (2017).

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<sup>52</sup>That figure doesn't include updates and reprints.

<sup>53</sup>*The Book of Jewish Food* was first published by Alfred Knopf in the US in 1996 and then by Penguin Viking in the UK in 1997. In 1998, it won the Jewish Quarterly/Wingate Book Prize for Non-Fiction and was the 1998 Glenfiddich Food Book of the Year.

<sup>54</sup>No wonder Yale made her a visiting professor and the Dutch honoured her with a Prince Claus medal.

Ashkenazi food was outside Roden's experience of the cooking of Sephardi Jews from the Iberian Peninsula, North Africa, Italy and the Middle East. The milieu of the Ashkenazi Jews was Middle and Eastern Europe and from the 10th century, when they each emerged, until the 20th, when they came together for the first time, Ashkenazis and Sephardis were separate cultures in separate geographic areas. As Roden said, "There was a time when Sephardim and Ashkenazim did not marry each other's daughters" (*The Book of Jewish Food* 15). However, Roden had lived in the Ashkenazi world since the age of 15 and married into a Russian Jewish family, so she had "long been familiar with Eastern European food" and her confidence grew when researching the book. She realised "how many gems there were" (13).<sup>55</sup>

Roden's research, tracking remnants of Jewish communities around the world, threw up paradoxes and characteristics of the Jewish diaspora, too. Jews had settled in almost every country and, in every country, wrote Roden, the communities were complex and subdivided into groups. In Venice, for instance, ladies who cooked for an old people's home explained to her that there were Spanish, Levantine, German and Southern Italian styles of cooking in the community (11). She gave up the idea of the book as "a grand comprehensive project"; it was, as a friend said, like "walking on quicksand" (*The Book of Jewish Food* 11-12):

Scattered as the Jews have been over virtually the whole surface of the earth, residing in lands not their own for 2,000 years, part of different cultures and

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<sup>55</sup>Ashkenazi cooking has long been the subject of much disdain and many jokes from Sephardi Jews and even among Ashkenazi Jews themselves.

traditions, it was impossible to attempt to cover all their cooking, from Babylon to New York (11).

On the advice of her American editor, Judith Jones, Roden selected “only the most delicious” (14) food through a complex set of criteria of certain countries, representative dishes and old recipes still in use. She varied flavourings or methods to recreate the best dishes and tempered authenticity with the modern taste for lighter foods. She also allowed the more numerous Sephardic cooking styles to outnumber the less diverse Ashkenazi cooking (12-13) while identifying their commonality through their festivals, customs and dietary laws.

Roden’s acknowledgement of the difference between Ashkenazi and Sephardic food identified the innate “otherness” between the culinary traditions. Sephardic cooking hails from Africa, Europe, the Middle East, Asia Minor and the Subcontinent. It reflected the Sephardic experience from the eighth to the late 17th century living in the Islamic world and, though much was poor food, a great deal was shaped by the aristocratic elite and court traditions (Roden 182). Ashkenazi cooking originated in Eastern Europe and was, for the most part, “peasant food of the shtetl – the provincial townlets and villages that represented the Jewish experience ... during the past three centuries” (39).

Flavoured with legacies of the past (39), the sweet and sour cabbage of Germany, the cucumber and yoghurt salad of Poland, the borscht of Russia, the strudel of Hungary, the kasha (buckwheat) of the Ukraine were ingrained with the “perpetual struggle between crushing poverty and insecurity ... flight and destruction, with a



succession of restrictions, expulsions and massacres" (39). For Roden, this was 'the other' Jewish food; for me, an Australian Ashkenazi Jew, this was 'my' food. As the child of concentration camp survivors, each mouthful of traditional Ashkenazi dishes was laced for me with the (dis)taste of the 20th century Holocaust; each dish came with a side-serving of persecution and survival stories – and the aftertaste was the Jew as 'the other'.

The spectre of the Jew as 'the other' in the history of the Christian Occident hovers over any discussion of Jewish cuisine, whether Ashkenazi or Sephardi. Despite mentioning "otherness" only fleetingly,<sup>56</sup> Roden's book of recipes, history, stories and anecdotes implicitly bear witness to otherness and the Jew as the other. These concepts were fundamental to her survey of Jewish food and culture. M.F.K Fisher and Elizabeth David had already written the foreign and the unfamiliar into the heart and hearth of British, American and Australian homes, but Roden was the Jewish archetype: a foreigner within, an outsider on the inside, the other.

Roden's position gave her the kind of powerful perspective that scholars such as Luce Giard sought (Giard xxxviii-ix). Roden's inherent grasp of the concepts of 'otherness' and 'the other' enabled her to reverse her analytic glance and make the multiplicity of practices she observed visible and intelligible (xxxviii). Giard called this intellectual journey "a strange adventure" (xxxix). Roden controlled her distancing of places and practices on her "strange adventure", and this allowed her

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<sup>56</sup>"... there was always, even centuries ago, a touch of otherness in Jewish cooking, a cosmopolitanism which broke even through ghetto walls. Jewish culinary interests were always wider than those of their immediate environment"(10).

to step back and marvel at them, interrogate them, and return meaning and form to them (Giard xxxix). Roden went on temporal and spatial travels in her cooking and writing, and came back from her journey having recreated the concept of food practices which then informed her food writing.<sup>57</sup>

For me, an assimilated Australian Jew with tribal roots and atheist beliefs – the “other but not” (Probyn’s excellent phrase),<sup>58</sup>Roden, in a book about Jewish food, brilliantly captured what it is to be Jewish today.<sup>59</sup>She didn’t traffic in the tropes of the exotic other or the clichés of the haimish (homey). She juxtaposed the familiar (gefilte fish and chicken noodle soup) and the less familiar (Indian Baghdadi chicken and rice croquettes).She gave perspective to the taboos of *kashrut*, the Jewish dietary laws, and she dug deep within the identity of Jews who viewed their food as a symbol of continuity (11).

I would argue that Roden’s adventures stemmed from her experience as an exile. As Said wrote: “Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience” (185) and he described a “unique pleasure in this sort of apprehension” (186):

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<sup>57</sup>She moved from “the same to otherness” and her perspective was “a reversal of the analytic glance” that Luce Giard sought in her own work (xxxviii-xxxix).

<sup>58</sup>I am the “other but not” in the Jewish diaspora, “the other but not” in the Jewish world and “the other but not” in the Gentile world.

<sup>59</sup>It had taken many years for me to understand my Jewishness – in contrast to my Judaism – and that it derived from tradition, custom, history and legacy. Along the way, I tried to cope with the concept of god taught in religious Sunday school, negotiated the chasm between my parents’ complete lack of Jewish religious education and the various forms of synagogue worship in Melbourne (Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, ultra-Orthodox, Hasidic), learnt Hebrew, struggled with the political reality of Israel and the Palestinians, and fought the visceral grip of my parents’ Holocaust history. I was, as Said depicted in his own *habitus*, negotiating the “crowded but highly rarified cultural maze” (273) of my *habitus*.

Seeing ‘the entire world as a foreign land’ makes possible originality of vision. Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, and awareness that – to borrow a phrase from music – is contrapuntal (186).

Roden’s “strange adventure” extended to her venturing farther afield, literally and figuratively, in her ethnographic “experience of the foreign”.<sup>60</sup> In the 16 years during which she researched *The Book of Jewish Food*, “Roden went to fifteen countries looking for Jews, and nearly as many countries where she wasn’t looking but found them anyway” (Kramer 2007).<sup>61</sup> When Roden found Jews, sometimes by cold-calling numbers in a telephone book from a hotel room as she did in Turin (Kramer 2007), she harvested her material affectionately and with respect:

People gave me recipes, invited me to eat with them and to watch them cook, told me about their lives and those of their parents and grandparents, and about their trades. They sent me articles and other source material, lent me books and photographs, invited me to hear lectures and attend conferences, gave me all kinds of advice and information, and pointed me in the right directions (*The Book of Jewish Food Acknowledgements* page).

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<sup>60</sup>Antoine Berman (1992).

<sup>61</sup>According to Kramer, Roden financed the first of these trips by writing two more cookbooks in the late 1980s. The first, *Mediterranean Cookery*, grew out of a television series that she was putting together for the BBC. The second, *The Food of Italy*, began as a year of region-by-region pieces for the *London Sunday Times Magazine*.

Roden wrote each recipe with a reminiscence or a story or a folk-tale at its kernel. She was the Scheherazade of “an uprooted, migrating people and their vanished worlds” (*Jewish Food* 3). Her story-telling was deeply bound in the “radical otherness”, this “irreducible alterity” (Stamelman 21). She sought to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange – which is also at the heart of the anthropological endeavour. No wonder that people began to refer to her as a cultural anthropologist, a description she has always discounted.

### **Scholarship, Respect and the Subject**

It's 2017. Claudia Roden is fresh from attending the annual Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery. Elizabeth David and her editor, Jill Norman, a food writer in her own right, were among the 21 people who turned up. Roden found herself among a group of like-minded people who discussed anything that grabbed their attention. Till then, people from disparate disciplines had no meeting point to share their fascination with food-related subjects. Today, the Symposium – which has just added a podcast called *Ox Tales* to its repertoire – is an international network of people. Roden tapped into it most recently for the five-year research for her book, *The Food of Spain* (2017).

Despite being held at Oxford University and the fact that academics attend its three days in July, the Symposium is adamantly non-academic. Part of the reason, Roden said, is that academia wasn't interested in food as a subject until recently: “The only time they talked about food [then] was women's studies” (2017). Roden is adamant, too, that she is not an academic. She cringed when I raised the reference to her in

newspapers and books, at events and talks, as a cultural anthropologist<sup>62</sup> and said she had been upbraided for claims to cultural anthropology made about her (2017).<sup>63</sup> Although Roden has proven herself an accomplished ethnographer, a painstaking researcher and a precise writer, she has said:

I've always felt a bit of a fraud. You see, I have never been to university, but I was brought up to be gregarious, so when I was researching *The Food of Italy* [1989, new edition 2014] and *The Food of Spain* [2012] I would travel all over the country and, as I went, I asked everyone I met for recipes. For example, on a train I would say, 'I'm a British journalist, researching your cooking – what is your favourite recipe? And how do you make it?' And once they had launched into the recipe someone on the other side of the carriage would call out, 'That's not how my mother makes it' – and, there you are, the whole carriage is talking about food! I would do the same thing in shop queues. I often ask about what their grandparents cooked. I want to get to the heart of each region. I want to hear it from the people themselves. I don't want to be a historian – I want to see how they see their own history. And, of course, I test all the recipes to get the very best one. I'm terribly interested in a dish or a taste, not just as a scholar. I want really good dishes – and for that I need background (Roden 2014).

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<sup>62</sup>As the Franke Visiting Fellow at the Whitney Humanities Center at Yale, Roden gave a talk in 2010 entitled, 'A Good Soup Holds History and Culture: Reconstructing Worlds through Food' and was described as a one who had "turned the pleasures of eating into a division of cultural anthropology".

<sup>63</sup>See also Roden 'About Culture and Food.' 6 November 2015

Roden also said she would rather not be tied to “the rules that scholars observe which is to put footnotes everywhere, references, and the bibliography in a proper way. If I had all the time I would do it but I don't” (2017). A better description of Roden, first coined by the British author, Paul Levy, might be that of a “scholar cook” (qtd. in Heldke, note 9, 241).<sup>64</sup> The *New Yorker* magazine echoed this nomenclature in describing Roden as “the youngest, and last, of a triumvirate of hungry, highly literate, and ethnographically indefatigable women who helped transform how Britain cooked” (Kramer 2007).<sup>65</sup>

Ethnographer, scholar cook or culinary historian, Roden finds the heart of every cuisine on which her focus falls. In a 27-page section of *A Book of Middle Eastern Food* titled, “A Cuisine Shaped by a Tumultuous History” (30), Roden wove together the history and stories of empires and colonialism, customs and rituals, and court cuisine and dietary laws, beginning with this taut summary:

A look into the past of the Middle East, a region strategically located athwart the crossroads of great cultures, shows it constantly beset by endless currents and cross-currents, great and small wars and all-embracing empires with factional and dynastic rivalries. All this, with the shifting allegiances, cultures and subcultures and people spilling from one part to another, has affected the kitchen very much to its advantage. Here is its story (30).

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<sup>64</sup>Levy had named Elizabeth David as the inspiration for – and the original example of – a group of people he calls “scholar cooks”. Heldke noted that “among the scholar cooks, presumably, the anthropologist cooks are just one subspecies”, and named diplomat-turned-fish-specialist, Alan Davidson and Jane Grigson as other scholar cooks (note 9, 241).

<sup>65</sup>According to Kramer in *The New Yorker*, Elizabeth David was the first and Jane Grigson was the second.

She might disavow being an academic but her 32-page introduction to *The Book of Jewish Food* distilled the essence of a diverse, complex and historically-baffling cuisine, as Talmudic in its intricacies and interpretations as the religion that accompanies it:

It is the cooking of a nation within a nation, of a culture within a culture, the result of interweaving two or more cultures. ... Jewish history spans more than three millennia and has touched most parts of the globe, but each dish represents a unique historical experience in a particular geographic location  
(*Jewish Food* 10)

In her 2012 book, *The Food of Spain*, with its 609 pages and five years of work, Roden continued her hallmark probing of food culture:

When the autonomous communities (as the historic regions are now called) gained political recognition and the right to govern themselves in 1978, people felt free to celebrate their regional heritage ... organizations were formed in the last 10 years to preserve their culinary heritage by recording recipes. Such organizations have collected 900 recipes in Catalonia, 600 in the Balearic Islands of Majorca and Minorca, and 900 in Galicia! (*Food of Spain* 12).

Roden acknowledged that her autodidactic appreciation, literate writing and scholarly research stem from predecessors such as Elizabeth David and M.F.K. Fisher: "I too am a salient product of my history. I am from the old world. I have a vast library with thousands of cookbooks, and I love to read and browse them. I probably belong to the last generation in which people will talk in this way" (Vered

2012). Roden also acknowledged and valued the symbolic and cultural capital which allowed her generation to pursue their mission:

We were writing because we wanted to communicate something and to educate. We really wanted to pass on something that we thought mattered and we shouldn't lose. Whereas now I think food writing has become something glamorous and everybody wants to be in [it] – and to be a chef is hugely glamorous – before it was the lowest of the low. Also now it's a question of celebrity and because of television, so much of food is entertainment (2017).

Roden's commitment broke ground for the food writing genre. Her works were ethnographies of particular places and specific cultural sites; her narratives had roots in exile, cultural hybridism, transnationality and the other; they reflected post-World War II mobility, middle-class aspirations and a mastery of new technologies. Roden was an exemplar of second wave woman food writers who drove their *métier* in new directions with true stories, impeccable scholarship and an informed understanding of colliding cultures. The next chapter will examine the work of Roden's contemporary, the Australian food writer, Charmaine Solomon, through the practice of the everyday.



## Chapter Four: Everyday Culinary Intelligence



credit: hungryaustralian.com

“I could not resist the challenge of sharing the culinary traditions of Asia with people who live in western countries and cook in western kitchens.”

Charmaine Solomon (*The Complete Asian Cookbook* 14)

As noted in the previous chapter, Egyptian-born Claudia Roden grappled with exile and nostalgia through her recipes and stories from the Middle East. Roden wrote about the cuisine of her place of origin and its neighbours through the prism of her experiences which included her transnationality, her cultural hybridism and her

being 'the other'. This chapter examines the practices of another woman who has had an impact on the food-writing field, Sri-Lankan born Charmaine Solomon.

Solomon rendered Asian food palatable to an Australian public through her journalism and cookbooks. *The Complete Asian Cookbook* was famously influential and arguably her most famous publication. Through the lens of Luce Giard's *Doing-Cooking* (149-247), I argue that the everyday cooking practised by Solomon required intelligence, intellect and imagination. Like Roden, Solomon left her home land. Unlike Roden, Solomon was a voluntary exile, what today we call 'an economic migrant'. She and her husband Reuben left Ceylon, as Sri Lanka was then known, in 1959, because speculation about currency devaluation and political instability loomed over their future (Britain 73). The couple's migration was part of the mobility and transnationalism which marked the post- World War II period. Millions of displaced people were on the move and colonial rule was in retreat. Reuben, a dance-band musician, was an old-hand at moving countries. Born in Rangoon (now Yangon) in 1921 to a Sephardic Jewish family (Veitch, obituary 2009), he had walked out of Burma on what he called "The Trek" of refugees fleeing the Japanese invasion in 1942. He headed to India, finally arriving in Calcutta (*Family Stories* 6). After the end of the war, he took up an offer to play with an orchestra in England then, pining for the warmth and food of Asia, he accepted a contract with a hotel in Colombo in Ceylon where he met Solomon (*Family Stories* 6-7).

Solomon had also been to London. She did a secretarial course and stayed for 15 months. She, too, was cold and miserable but her efforts paid off. She returned to Colombo and her secretarial work earned her “three times the salary of a [local] journalist” (Britain 72) which is what she had been before she left. She had worked at *Ceylon Daily News*, an English-language newspaper, after landing a job as assistant to the women's pages editor at the age of 18. By 19, she was a reporter for the paper, covering social events and interviewing royalty, film stars, movie directors and authors.<sup>66</sup> She wrote a food column, too, called *Oceans of Notions (Charmaine's Kitchen 2018)*.<sup>67</sup> Years later, Solomon said she had no cooking experience but her aunts and other women in her family were reputable home-cooks.

My family connections with the culinary arts were impeccable, my father's cousin Miss Hilda Deutrom having written the first cookery book published in Ceylon. The publisher wanted a new edition, and I was sent to Aunt Hilda to ask her advice on what should and shouldn't be changed (*Family Stories 5*).

Australia beckoned because one of Reuben's brothers, also a musician, had already settled there and could get work for Reuben. When they set up house in Sydney, Reuben worked in a dance band at night, leaving Solomon at home. Solomon recalls

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<sup>66</sup>One of the celebrities Charmaine interviewed was a cabaret singer whose husband, Reuben Kelly Solomon, a dance band musician, had moved to Ceylon with his wife. Reuben Solomon had fled Burma, first to India in 1942, then to England in 1946, before moving to Ceylon. He divorced his wife, and he and Charmaine married in Colombo in 1956 (Veitch, *Obituary* 2009)

<sup>67</sup>If there is any job that exemplifies the practice of the everyday, it is journalism. Daily, weekly or monthly, a journalist follows instructions, meets deadlines and files stories about everyday and not-so everyday people.

they ate a lot of mince at that time: “And pasta was easy to cook. Australian food was pretty dull back then. I am not a fan of overcooked vegetables (2013).<sup>68</sup>

You have to remember that as a young wife and mother in Sri Lanka I never had to cook. I lived in a five star hotel (in those days) with my husband, Reuben, who was the leader of the hotel’s orchestra, and an ayah (nanny) for each child. We had meals in the international restaurant. Before I married, I lived with my maiden aunts, and servants did the cooking and cleaning. It was quite a steep learning curve coming to Australia. Plus we weren’t wealthy immigrants, as the government restricted the amount of money we were permitted to take out of the country at the time we left Ceylon (2013).

Solomon taught herself to cook “as a diversion during the long nights I waited for Reuben to come home from nightclub gigs” (2013). She was nervous about being the only adult in the house (*Family Stories* 1) with sleeping children and no television to distract her: “With his encouragement, I became quite a decent cook. I found that I loved cooking. But even more, I loved his praise. It’s a good thing he was so appreciative!” (2013).

Solomon’s confidence in her cooking grew enough that in 1964 she entered the 'Butter White Wings Bake Off' competition run by *Woman’s Day*, then one of Australia’s leading women’s magazines. She won second prize. More importantly,

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<sup>68</sup>By 1998, Solomon’s memory of Australian food was more positive. She wrote, “I revelled in the quality ingredients – fine flour and sugar, fresh butter and cream, excellent fruit and vegetables, although at the time the range was more limited. The only things I missed were the spices and tropical herbs” (*Family Stories* 5).

she met the magazine's renowned food editor, Margaret Fulton, who discovered Solomon had secretarial skills, asked her to join the staff of *Woman's Day* (Fulton, 2015).<sup>69</sup> Solomon said she was responsible for taking the recipes developed in the *Woman's Day* test kitchen and writing them so they were clear and easy to understand: "[It] was the kitchen staff's responsibility to make sure the recipes worked and it was my job to write them so that people could follow them" (2014). Solomon spoke about recipe-writing and the importance of their accuracy and clarity:

Well, they've got to work and they've got to taste good. And they've got to be clear to the person following them. ... My job was to get the recipes that girls gave me from the test kitchen and write them so they were foolproof (2014).

Recipes were the lifeblood of women's magazines in the 1960s and 70s. Along with household tips on cooking, cleaning, decorating and gardening, recipes sold magazines. The recipe pages were torn out and taped to fridges or collected in books or pasted onto index cards. *Woman's Day* and other magazines had commercial, practical and personal responsibilities to their predominantly-female audience. Solomon had half a million plus readers (Gibbs 34) who weren't afraid to complain if

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<sup>69</sup>"She had been a very good secretary in London and she came in as my secretary. Then she was very anxious do a book and she ended up doing her first book for Kevin Weldon" (Fulton 2015).

something went amiss, and advertisers who kept watch on circulation. Producing recipes for women's magazines required expertise and precision.<sup>70</sup>

Eventually, Solomon became food editor at *Woman's Day* and her first book, *The South East Asian Cookbook*, was published in 1972. Her third book, *The Complete Asian Cookbook* appeared four years later. A decade and a half on, she recalled:

In 1975, with two small books on the subject to my credit, I was asked to write this book – over 500 pages on the cooking of Asia. It was a formidable task, but I could not resist the challenge of sharing the culinary traditions of Asia with people who live in western countries and cook in western kitchen (*The Complete Asian Cookbook* 14).

*The Complete Asian Cookbook* succeeded in meeting the challenge Solomon set herself. The book has never been out of print and has sold one million copies in five languages. The eminent American food writer, Craig Claiborne, wrote, "I cherish and refer to [it] often because it is so thoroughgoing and authoritative in its subject matter, and the recipes are uncommonly well written and authentic" (42).

In 500 pages, Solomon mapped an Asian culinary landscape with foundation recipes from South-East Asia, the Indian sub-continent, The Philippines, Japan, Indonesia and China. She carved out 15 cuisines and allocated them to 13 chapters (she combines India and Pakistan, and Cambodia and Laos). She explained, "Perhaps

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<sup>70</sup>Food editors and writers were always kept on their toes. My own experience as a magazine food writer and a newspaper food journalist in the 1990s and 2000s was of immediate and voluminous readers' feedback.

arbitrarily it [*The Complete Asian Cookbook*] draws a line on the Western side of the Indian Subcontinent, and leaves out the interesting cuisines of Afghanistan and Iran and Turkey, but the line had to be drawn somewhere" (5).<sup>71</sup>

Solomon knew to draw the line from an Australian point of view. She blocked out chapters so they resonated with an audience that recognised the region mainly from maps. Travel for Australians to Asia in the 1970s was limited to business, diplomacy and backpacking. Mass tourism had yet to arrive. Flights were expensive and boat trips lengthy. China was still a closed country; Vietnam and Cambodia were embroiled in war.

In 1970s' Australia, Asian food meant Chinese food. Australians had developed a taste for Chinese food after the major Chinese migration during the gold rush era of the 1850s and 60s. "There were Chinese restaurants in Australia from the 1840s and certainly by the 1960s there was one in every major country town of New South Wales" (Ripe 11). The local Chinese restaurant became an Australian suburban staple, too, patronised for a night out or a treat when mum needed a break from cooking, with menus based on Chinese perceptions of what non-Chinese locals liked to eat.

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<sup>71</sup>Solomon's solution echoes that of Claudia Roden who, eight years earlier, had grappled with audiences both wary and ignorant of the Middle East. For her 1968 book on Middle Eastern food, Roden divided the region into countries and cultures that represented the geographical and political map of her contemporary world. "Mum always used to talk about Claudia Roden" (Solomon 2014) and Solomon remembered that, "Funnily enough I didn't use Elizabeth David that much, but Claudia Roden I have great regard for" (Solomon2014). Solomon also admired Julia Child.

As our cooking habits started to parallel our eating-out habits, Solomon's boss, Margaret Fulton, began offering Chinese recipes in *Woman's Day*: "chow meins, chop suey and sweet and sour [were] the things that first caught on" (Ripe 7).<sup>72</sup> The regional diversity and long history of Chinese cuisine was still a closed book for Australians, the rich, deep culinary traditions of the Indian sub-continent were reduced to curries and chutneys, and the countries of South-East Asia, and Japan, Korea and The Philippines evoked theatres of war and not cooking performances.

Solomon, like many women food writers, offered access to worlds her readers couldn't afford to reach. Cooking could be "a mode of transport, a ticket to the exotic" and deliver a satisfying, if illusory, taste of other cultures (LeBesco and Naccarato 233-34). Americans, Britons and Australians might not be able to travel to France or Syria or Burma but they could cook French, Syrian or Burmese food via a mediated experience, thanks to Julia Child or Claudia Roden or Charmaine Solomon or the famous *Time-Life* cookbook series (Mason and Meyers qtd. in LeBesco and Naccarato 224).

Then the war in Vietnam ended and an influx of refugees hit Australia's shores in the 1970s. Asian refugees started growing and selling the spices, herbs, fruits and vegetables they used in cooking - and Caucasian chefs jumped on these "new ingredients". At the same time, air travel became cheaper, and Australians started treating Asia as a destination and not a stop-off to Europe. Asian food became the

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<sup>72</sup>Fulton was "the acknowledged leader/style-setter" in her introduction of the [then] "exotic cuisines of India, Italy, France, Scandinavia, South-East Asia and the Middle East" to Australian readers (Santich, 2007, qtd. in Brien 76).



returned travellers' and students' cheap feed of choice. "The Asianisation of the Australian palate" (Ripe 7-21) had begun. Solomon's culinary cartography helped Australians grasp the sophisticated flavours of Asia's food cultures

When Solomon's Asian cookbooks appeared, Solomon's daughter, Deborah, recalled that, "The Asian cookbook scene was non-existent" (2014). During the next three decades, Solomon wrote 31 books, most of them on Asian cooking, and continued to work for mass media publications. After 11 years at *Woman's Day*, she became the food editor of *Family Circle* magazine for three years and then cookery editor of *Belle* magazine. She was also a regular columnist for the *Sun-Herald*, *The Sydney Morning Herald* and the *National Times* newspapers until 1986. Much of her recipe writing for newspapers and magazines was family-friendly food, from fried chicken and salmon trout terrine to Christmas wreath cookies and braised pork calypso (*Best Loved Recipes*), with an international flavour that reflected the globe-trotting culinary aspirations of the 1970s and 80s.

Despite her prolific and influential output, Solomon has received little attention from food scholars. Jean Duruz is an exception. Duruz argued that Solomon played a crucial role in the "culinary imaginary of an intersection society like Australia". I argue that Solomon helped Australians negotiate Asia's complex culinary customs in "a nation that sees itself both as part of Asia and apart from Asia - a multicultural, multiracial society that is located in the Asia-Pacific region but has a Western colonial settler heritage" (Duruz 37). Duruz also drew attention to the fact that Solomon brought Asian cooking into Australian kitchens. Focusing on Solomon's

*Family Recipes* cookbook, Duruz wrote about its “nostalgic narratives of pleasurable eating together and culinary exchange, among and between affective communities” (53). She argued for it as an intimate album of “everyday practice” (39).

### **An Apprenticeship in Everyday Culinary Practice**

It was thanks to Solomon that I learnt how to cook. At twenty-something about to leave home, I bought her *Chinese Diet Cookbook* in 1979, the year it was published. Solomon’s recipes looked healthy and easy, just right for a debutante in the kitchen. My apprenticeship with Solomon involved ingredients, techniques and first principles such as how a wok heats differently to a frypan. She schooled me in soy sauce, sesame oil, rice wine and bamboo shoots. She urged me to stir-fry vegetables, to velvet chicken in cornflour and to braise beef in black bean sauce. I developed knife skills (keep them sharp and your movements precise) and cooking techniques (cut vegetables on the diagonal and they will cook more quickly). I began a life-long love-affair with ginger and chilli. I conquered the wok.

However, I was going through my culinary rite of passage in the wake of my feminist consciousness-raising. My female cohort regarded the kitchen as the place of enslavement for women. In the 1970s this private, domestic and all-female space was the last place on earth where young women wanted to be or should be. The kitchen was also an ideological battleground in the attempt to save the planet from human destruction. My generation spouted aphorisms from *Diet for a Small Planet* by Frances Moore Lappé and made the *Moosewood Cookbook* the bible.<sup>73</sup> *Vegetarian hunza*

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<sup>73</sup>Of course, I had a copy.

pie and hairy underarms symbolised 1970s' women's attitudes to their bodies and their bodies' place in society. We quoted Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*, and viewed the bourgeois embrace of the household as a spectacle and space of female imprisonment, and fled.<sup>74</sup>

To me, learning to cook was a utilitarian exercise, a required skill for independent living, like learning to pay a bill or getting a job. I wanted to be liberated: from fast food, supermarkets, meals out or dinner dates with men. I had no intention of being one of the "Kitchen Women Nation" (*le peuple féminin des cuisines*),<sup>75</sup> the "innumerable anonymous women" (Giard 154) whom Giard studied in *The Practice of Everyday Life* and whose "... anonymous voices speak ... the gestures of every day (xlv)." Once I felt I had acquired the skills I needed, Charmaine Solomon and I parted ways; I had bigger fish to fry, and frying fish wasn't part of the plan.

### **Culinary Practice or Doing-Cooking**

By contrast, Giard and her male co-researchers, Michel de Certeau and Pierre Mayol, were interested in the minutia of frying fish. They wanted to be "voyagers in the ordinary" (de Certeau et al. xxxix): unearthing the importance and the power from everyday gestures, objects and words. Their method was to delve into micro-

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<sup>74</sup>For me, the public, male sphere of restaurants beckoned. So there I was, suburban and middle-class, in inner-city, working-class Melbourne in a restaurant fancifully called, Les Halles. I learnt how to decode a wine list and paid for myself. I ordered my steaks bloody and gulped tannic shiraz, then two 'Aussie' masculinity signifiers. I smoked cigars and warmed to the burn of whisky. For me and my generation, staking a claim in the male domain and acquiring skills then deemed masculine was a challenge, a political act – satisfying and subversive. It led to my becoming the first woman restaurant reviewer for *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

<sup>75</sup>Giard's poetic point of view and limpid writing was not available to me, unfortunately, when I was that 20-year old undergraduate university student. (Has Giard been under-rated and neglected in her feminine feminism under the shadow of Michel de Certeau?)

histories and ordinary practices in the private sphere of the home and the public sphere of the neighbourhood. Giard recognised “the necessity of returning to triviality in order to break through entrapment”<sup>76</sup> and alighted on cooking as a rich field of the seemingly invisible and seemingly insignificant female tasks performed every day. Culinary practices, she wrote, situate themselves at the most rudimentary level, “the most necessary and the most unrespected level” (155-6). This perspective, noted Isaac West, “transformed seemingly confining subject positions into subjectivities imbued with agency” (360).

In her 1998 study, Giard coined the term *faire-la-cuisine*, translated as doing-cooking, to describe the culinary practices she examined.<sup>77</sup> Doing-cooking has bitter-sweet elements in what is fundamentally women’s work. The phrase conjures up the actions and agency and attendant pleasures of daily rituals. At the same time, doing-cooking has onerous connotations of the never-ending, the thankless and the unpaid. Giard defined doing-cooking as the “medium for a basic, humble, and persistent practice that is repeated in time and space, rooted in the fabric of relationships to others and to one’s self, marked by the ‘family saga’ and the history of each, bound to childhood memory just like rhythms and seasons” (157).<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>And because, like all human action, these female tasks are a product of a cultural order: from one society to another, from one generation to the next, from one social class to another (156).

<sup>77</sup>*Faire-la-cuisine* echoes the theme of *arts de faire*, the ‘art of doing’, which de Certeau provided (de Certeau et al 275).

<sup>78</sup>Solomon would agree. She wrote, “With marriage and a family came the most satisfying of my many life stages: wife and mother and enthusiastic home cook. An unfashionable admission in this age of feminism, but I nevertheless consider myself liberated, since I choose what I want to do” (*Family Stories* 5). Her sense of liberation is after the event – check her shifting of tenses – and seems to be predicated on what cooking has brought to her life through her writing.

Giard was lyrical about culinary practice in the everyday. A nostalgic glow surrounded her prose on which scholars such as Joanne Hollows have remarked (189). Giard celebrated women's work and imagined women proliferating into "gesture trees' (Rilke)" (157). She conjured images of me or my mother or Charmaine Solomon as a Shiva goddess with her arms moving in all directions as she shops, carries, unpacks, stores and retrieves. The culinary Shiva gleans recipes, remembers instructions, selects knives, stands at the stove, opens the oven, and handles pots and pans – she is the goddess of the stuff of stuff.<sup>79</sup>

Yet, Giard resisted the temptation to rewind the clock. Instead, pragmatically, she wrote about the skills required in the process of culinary production: the multiple memory that has to store gestures and moments witnessed; the programming mind that has to calculate cooking times and sequences of actions; the sensory perception that folds into the theory of the recipe, the cleverness of putting in place the strategies to deal with left-overs and unexpected demands; and the cunning of making do and making the most (157).

Giard called it "*a very ordinary intelligence*" (her emphasis), subtle and full of nuances and strokes of genius (158). With her tender-tough thoughts, Giard redefined women's culinary work as a sensory and conceptual place of gestures, rituals, pleasures and even oppression, which defines and decides the practical place of cooking, and transforms it into a site of knowledge, a place that exists through and because of practice and intelligence.

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<sup>79</sup>With thanks to Professor Elspeth Probyn for this pithy phrase.

## Culinary Intelligence

Culinary intelligence is as real as emotional intelligence, political intelligence, computational intelligence or artistic intelligence. Giard argued that in cooking one has to organise, decide and anticipate; one must memorise, adapt, modify, invent, combine and take into consideration; one has to calculate time and money, evaluate cost-effectiveness, improvise with panache, remember a hundred minutiae (200).

Cooking encompasses a myriad human practices and thoughts and memories which are encoded and expressed.

Solomon, like many women food writers, practised culinary intelligence every day in the practice of the everyday. Take for instance, my copy of *The Complete Asian Cookbook*.<sup>80</sup> With its big format and large, bold type and loads of white space, this is a book designed to be read across the kitchen and while you are at the stove. Each chapter opens with notes on the history of each cuisine, and on practical matters such as serving, utensils for cooking and specific ingredients. A glossary supplies descriptions of unfamiliar names. Reassurance often precedes the recipes: “This dish, flavoured only with sweet spices and using no chilli at all, will be popular with everyone, including children. A good introduction to spicy food” (61).

In her books and in her journalism, Solomon marshalled her culinary intelligence – and her understanding of her Australian audience’s culinary intelligence – and systematically pared back the complicated to the recognisable, and organised the complex into the comprehensible. She produced a book that was to the point and

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<sup>80</sup>First published in 1976, *The Complete Asian Cookbook* was published in 1992, as a revised edition – after 12 reprints.

precise. Her voice reminds you she had been taught the fundamentals of journalism and her news editor's motto was "tell it like it is" (2013). Solomon wrote:

This helped me develop an easy-to-follow style of writing when it came to explaining recipes. I imagined that the recipe had to be straightforward enough for even my self-confessed non-cooking friend, Sylvia, to follow. As a result, the style spoke to many other novice cooks (2013).

For Solomon, words were paramount. Solomon, said her daughter, Deborah, "always talked about 'cookery fiction', cookbooks that look beautiful and have gorgeous photographs but none of the recipes work" (2014). Recipes are textual tools; like a whisk or an egg white, they are objects linked via technique to the material practices of cooking and food writing. In Solomon's books, a recipe can be used at its most basic to produce a dish, or elevated into an initiation into the secrets of cooking. Her short essay on "Burmese curries" turns recipes into a master class, bringing to their cooking a relationship that transcends the usual following of a culinary method:<sup>81</sup>

Heat 3 tablespoons of oil in a saucepan until smoking hot. Be careful putting in the ground ingredients, for the hot oil splutters violently. Reduce heat and stir well to mix ingredients with the oil. Cover pan and simmer the mixture, lifting the lid frequently to stir and scrape the base of pan with a wooden spoon. This initial frying takes at least 15 minutes. If mixture fries too rapidly

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<sup>81</sup>Solomon had a relationship with Burma (now Myanmar) thanks to her husband Reuben who was born in Rangoon (now Yangon) and was instrumental in helping her to develop as a food writer.

and begins to stick before the smell has mellowed and the onions become transparent, add a small quantity of water from time to time and stir well. When the water content of the onions has evaporated and the ingredients turn a rich red-brown colour with oil showing around the edge of the mass, the first stage of cooking, and the most important one is complete.

There is a Burmese term to describe this – ‘*see byan*’, meaning ‘oil returned’, that is with the water completely evaporated and the oil returned to just oil. ... The meat, fish or vegetables added will release their own juices while cooking slowly in the pan with the lid on. A roasting chicken will be sufficiently cooked by the time its own juices have evaporated. Boiling fowls, duck, some cuts of beef and pork may need a little water added from time to time as cooking continues until they are tender. Fish and prawns cook very quickly but some types may need a little more liquid added – fish stock water or coconut milk. Vegetables seldom require any added liquid, but if a wetter result is preferred add water or coconut milk (273).

The words she uses, such as “smoking hot”, “splutters violently”, “lifting”, “mellowed smell”, “from time to time” speak to a culinary intelligence, not just of mental agility but also sensorial acuity – of sight, smell, sound, touch and taste – and a sense of time. These gesture sequences are “movements of the body as well as those of the mind” (Giard 200), seemingly simple but in fact multiple complex actions in the context of the quotidian. Solomon engages the body and mind, urging



the cook to sniff, listen, look, watch, assess as she lifts, stirs, scrapes and pours – the Shiva goddess, again, in motion.

If you have cooked one of Solomon's Burmese curries (*Complete Asian Cookbook* 273-8) and watched with dismay your fish or prawns (over)cook, or heard the dry hiss when adding more liquid, or felt your heart sink on realising you had neither coconut milk nor fish stock and blessed Solomon's suggestion of water, you will recognise the interplay of the psychic, physical and physiological. Cooking is a whirlwind of everyday practice and manipulating ordinary things that makes one use a light and lively intelligence (Giard 158). In the everyday, cooking is "an understanding of embodied intelligence, a conceptualization of cooking/making as thinking and of the inventive concept as a kind of making" (Szott blog, *Leisure Arts*).

### **Cooking as Embodied Knowledge**

Giard was not always inclined to view culinary activities as demanding "intelligence, imagination and memory". As a young girl she had turned her back on doing-cooking, resisting "this women's work because no one ever offered it to my brother" (151-2). Like Giard, I had viewed cooking with equal disdain. My mother, a proto-feminist, had no patience for me in the kitchen. She was in partnership with my father in their building business, and was too busy and too exacting to teach me to make meals. Her constant refrain was "you'll have plenty of time to learn how to cook". My mother engendered in me the notion that cooking and not-cooking were not essential to my gender.

Yet, when my culinary initiation began, courtesy of Solomon, I realised like Giard, “... surreptitiously and without suspecting it, I had been invested with the secret, tenacious pleasure of *doing-cooking* [Giard’s italics]” (153). Giard had thought that, by refusing to work with her mother in her kitchen, she had never learned or observed anything about culinary practices. Yet, when she was 20 and set up her own apartment and began to cook, she realised:

... my childhood gaze had seen and memorized certain gestures and my sense memory had kept track of certain tastes, smells and colors. I already knew all the sounds: the gentle hiss of simmering water, the sputtering of melting meat drippings, and the dull thud of the kneading hand... I had to admit that I too had been provided with a woman’s knowledge and that it had crept into me, slipping past my mind’s surveillance (153).

Giard’s words prompted my memories. I remembered I too, when I left home was able to hear water boiling and feel heat rising out of a wok and smell onions burning. I realised I had absorbed my mother’s gestures and habits, and unconsciously reproduced them. I drew back a pot-lid so the pot didn’t boil over, peeled carrots, laid out my cutlery drawer and hoarded tinned tomatoes as she did. Even refusing to wear an apron, unlike her, was rebellion from a place of knowledge. Like Giard, my body’s memory and my mind’s memory had absorbed and stored culinary knowledge and practices. Our bodies know what to do because we hold knowledge in our bodies.

Giard's concept of embodied culinary knowledge was echoed by other scholars such as Jennifer Brady and Lisa Heldke who argued that our bodies know what to do. Heldke wrote, "I know things literally with my body, that I, 'as' my hands, know when the bread dough is sufficiently kneaded, and I 'as' my nose know when the pie is done" (218). Brady said, "Foodmaking [sic] requires us to attend with our eyes, ears, noses, mouths, and hands and draws on the knowledge we hold in our bodies" (326). Any practitioner – whether a violinist, a mathematician, a cabinet-maker or a dentist or surgeon or gardener or architect or chef – will attest to an instinct or second nature or habit or simply a feeling which guide them through practice and is stored not just in heads but also in hands and fingers and skin and nerve-endings and nose and ears. Doing-cooking is no different.

Brady argued cooking and food and bodies had been overlooked as sites of knowledge, in part because they were produced by women's work and women's bodies and "excluded from the purportedly more sophisticated, abstract activities of knowledge production" (322). Instead, Brady argued, "Cooking sheds light on identity, bodies, and knowledge" (323) and she proposed food-making as "an entrée" to the processes by which "identity is storied through the body and in relation to others" (331). She offered a method of research she called "cooking as inquiry" which "serves to centre foodmaking [sic] and the body as sites of knowledge" (331). Brady invited us "to move beyond *thinking* about food, and to take up Heldke's (1992) insistence that we *actually make food* as a means of garnering knowledge" (331); as Heldke stated, "Bodily knowledge is acquired through embodied experience" (219).

Solomon's embodied experiences were those of a mother and wife, a cooking autodidact and a professional recipe writer, a food journalist and a cookbook author. They were also those of a daughter of divorced parents, descended from mixed ethnic and race heritage, who became a migrant, in voluntary exile from her homeland and her culinary roots. With her "history of hybridity and transnational border crossings" (Duruz 38), Solomon was a cosmopolitan Eurasian<sup>82</sup> body imbued with the colonial experience<sup>83</sup> at a cultural crossroads: cooking Asian food and Australian food in a Western kitchen and writing about it. Solomon contributed to Australia as a "culinary contact zone, a space of culinary politics and transnational culinary flows, both within and outside of Asia" (Duruz 38). Solomon said simply that her aim was to "prove that *real* Eastern meals can be produced in a Western kitchen" (*The Complete Asian Cookbook* 5).<sup>84</sup>

### **Writing Practice, Cooking Practice**

In the early 1990s, more than a decade after Solomon and I parted company, I had turned to writing about food, this essential, everyday subject. I picked up Solomon's books again, and could see she summoned her writing skills to convey her stored

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<sup>82</sup>Solomon's books led her readers to assume that she was 'Asian' or 'Indian' or 'Pan-Asian'. On her father's side was Dutch Burgher heritage – a Sri Lankan ethnic group descended from mainly Portuguese, Dutch and British men and local women – and her mother "born in Burma, had Irish, Anglo-Indian, French and Indonesian forbears, [was] more Irish than anything else" (*Family Recipes* 4).

<sup>83</sup>Solomon's cosmopolitanism and experience of colonialism were not a million miles removed from Roden.

<sup>84</sup>As more and more Asian ingredients started to appear in Australian supermarkets and greengrocers – from fresh coriander and galangal to imported tamarind and tinned coconut milk – Solomon revelled in writing that "Recipes taste even better now because it is possible to buy fresh ingredients which were not available [before]" (*The Complete Asian Cookbook* 14).

experiences and bodily knowledge. I could see a relationship between Solomon's culinary and literary production. Solomon wanted her words to educate and impart skills. As she wrote, "The best friend a novice cook can have is an author who takes the trouble to tell you not only how but also why you should do this, that or the other ... In a career devoted to food journalism, it has been my aim to do the same" (*Family Recipes* 1).

Solomon took the trouble to find people who had cooked Asian cuisines with which she was unfamiliar, or travelled to Asian countries she had not visited before. She watched people in their kitchens and wrote down their recipes (Britain 74). She returned to her generous, domestic space with wood trim, and tasted and adjusted recipes' flavours and ingredients. She took the same trouble in her writing, with research and interviews, observation and copious notes, and rewriting up to six times to make recipes clearer (Britain 74). Her doing-cooking and her doing-writing were alike.

According to Giard, kinship lay in the "writing of gestures and that of words" and "a kind of reciprocity between their respective productions". Whether we composed a tune or drew a picture or prepared a meal, the body was inhabited with the rhythm of working while the mind was freed from its ponderousness, and flitted from idea to memory, and finally seized on a chain of thought (153). She wondered why the pleasure of doing-cooking mirrored the pleasure of writing-text. She tried to understand why "I twine such tight kinship ties between the writing of gestures and that of words". She concluded she was expressing the impossibility of paying the

debt she owed to “women bereft of writing who came before me” and their “nourishing knowledge” (154). Women food writers of any century would have identified with Giard’s homage to “women ceaselessly doomed to both housework and the creation of life, women excluded from public life and the communication of knowledge” (153):

I would like the slow remembrance of your gestures in the kitchen to prompt me with words that will remain faithful to you; I would like the poetry of words to translate that of gestures; I would like a writing of words and letters to correspond to your writing of recipes and tastes (154).

Virginia Woolf’s voice echoed in my head when I read Giard’s words. It was a surprise, and yet not, that Giard later quoted from Woolf’s diary. Twenty days before she committed suicide by drowning herself, Woolf wrote: “Occupation is essential. And now with some pleasure I find that its [sic] seven; & must cook dinner. Haddock & sausage meat. I think it is true that one gains a certain hold on sausage & haddock by writing them down” (Giard 222). Though it is hard today to imagine sausage and haddock as dinner, let alone as a way of keeping a grip on reality, women who write about food would, I believe, understand Woolf’s metaphor of diarising the everyday as a means to exist, a way to survive, a hope to surmount the hurdles and barbs of the quotidian.

## Conclusion: Well-Stirred Sentences



credit: reneefinberg.blogspot.com

Whatever ingredients I use, the aim is always simple: to give pleasure, both to the cook and the eater, without which, life and the sum of human happiness, in this small but essential way, would be much diminished.

Nigella Lawson (*Simply Nigella* 273)

Like many women food writers, I did not set out to be one. A struggling freelance journalist, I dreamt of being a film reviewer. The reality was I needed a job. An opportunity presented itself – would I like to edit a serious food supplement to a glossy fashion magazine? I grabbed the offer and found I was in good company. Before most women became food writers, they had other jobs and aspirations. M.F.K. Fisher wanted to be a novelist; Elizabeth David tried her hand as a theatre actress; Claudia Roden studied art to be a mural painter; Charmaine Solomon earned

her living as a journalist and secretary. Other women food writers who began their careers in other fields include Stephanie Alexander (librarian), Ruth Reichl (cook and restaurateur), Nigella Lawson (literary editor), Kylie Kwong (graphic designer) and Fuchsia Dunlop (journalist).

Women write about food for any number of reasons: from desire, by chance, out of ambition and through necessity. Many women, single and married, like those in the 19th century, embark on food writing as genteel breadwinners. A frequent corollary is financial independence through a respectable occupation. A need to be socially useful and intellectually occupied is a powerful driver of women into food-writing, too. As Donna Lee Brien points out (2008), women use food writing to explore societal or personal issues, mainly to entertain but often to provide social commentary. In writing about social issues, women tackle nutrition, food politics, gender inequality, poverty, aging and feeding children. They pursue their interest in gastronomy, aesthetics and criticism.

Personal issues for women writing about food run the gamut from taking responsibility for a sustainable way of life to eating anxieties. Women write about growing and producing food, the dilemmas of choosing ethically grown produce, giving up sugar and advice on diets for losing weight and battling disease. They write about their children's eating habits, compare notes on short-cuts in the kitchen and other domestic experiences. Emotional drivers also steer women into writing about food. For some women, writing about food is necessary to grieving and overcoming the loss of home and heritage. Some women find it necessary to write



about food so they belong, either to a place or a culture. Others, like me, find food writing necessary in grappling with the machinations of the world at large. Then there are those, such as Nigella Lawson and Ruth Reichl, who grapple with personal matters through food-writing, in Lawson's case, a nasty divorce<sup>85</sup>, and in Reichl's, a forced job redundancy (Reichl xv).

My research highlights how women find their voices in the medium of food writing and its places of publication. I go back 200 years when women emerge as professional food writers, cross-pollinating traditional forms such as recipes, memoir, menus, shopping lists and household management tips to create a hybridised genre. Recalling Amy J. Devitt's shift of focus from the effects of genre to the sources of those effects, I have argued it is time to relinquish old notions of genre as forms and texts, and embrace new notions of genre as reflecting human experience and social relationships (573). Accordingly, I explore 19th century discursive and economic conditions of innovation in print technology, mass-marketing of books and periodicals, and at an expanding middle class.

Moving into the 20th century, I argue that gastronomic literature, previously exclusively in the male domain, is now also in the female domain. Books about food appear which no woman could have previously written – a dictionary written with gastronomic gusto, scholarly essays that blaze with sensual imagery, and a recipe book with a surreal blend of public and private pleasure. Fisher and David exemplify this Epicurean turn of women food writers. They illuminate Mennell's 'ill-

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<sup>85</sup>See Lipworth 2015.

defined margin' between gastronomic essay and cookery book (271) by placing everyday cooking practice in a framework of literature, history and culture. With a blend of scholarship, aesthetics, autobiography and travel writing, Fisher and David energise the genre. They also inject it with a language of leisure and pleasure, place and belonging.

Like their Victorian predecessors and millennial descendents, Fisher and David are middle-class. Their carefully-crafted, seemingly-effortless and wonderfully-erudite female voices speak from a privileged position. I argue Fisher and David are not just the authors of their own works – they produce the possibilities and the rules for the formation of other texts, what Michel Foucault conceives of as transdiscursivity (217). In other words, they are springboards for the next generation of 20th century women, whom I dub 'the second wave'. This second wave of women food writer extends the genre's possibilities and rules, and to illustrate this, I focus on Claudia Roden and Charmaine Solomon from among the many influential figures in this cohort (see Appendix).

Roden, I argue, lays down a template for women food writers to be ethnographers of food practices. In James Clifford's terms, she reflects, "... the ethnographic humanism [that] begins with the different and renders it (through naming, classifying, describing, interpreting) comprehensible. It familiarizes" (Clifford 562). She is also a participant observer and a detached interrogator of places and practices (Giard xxxix). Roden's narratives of cosmopolitanism, exile, displacement and transnationalism mirror 20th century concerns and conditions. I argue that Roden's

speaking position as 'the other' and her experience of 'otherness' enable her to reverse her analytic glance (Giard xxxvii-ix). She informs all of her food writing with an understanding of colliding cultures as this passage from her book, *Arabesque*, illustrates:

Three great cuisines – of Morocco, Turkey and Lebanon – developed around the Mediterranean where the Occident meets the Orient and where long ago, medieval *jihadis* and crusaders clashed. The three ... share legacies from the Islamic world with echoes from ancient Persia and medieval Baghdad, Moorish Spain and the Ottoman Empire (6).

Solomon contributes to food writing as a cosmopolitan Eurasian body imbued with the colonial experience (Duruz 38). In this space of culinary politics, I examine Solomon's history of hybridity and transnational border crossings (Duruz 38). By helping Australians negotiate the complexity of Asia's different food cultures, Solomon's culinary cartography illustrates the value of border crossings and their practice in everyday life (Duruz 53). Informed by Giard's study of everyday practice, I maintain Solomon exemplifies culinary intelligence and embodied culinary knowledge. Solomon acknowledges this when she writes that the research for *Family Recipes* was done by "absorbing knowledge from the generation of cooks who preceded us" and whose notes she discovers in their "old, handwritten collections of recipes" (*Family Recipes* Acknowledgments page).

Whether they echo Victorian voices, Fisher and David's Epicureanism, Roden's ethnographic food practices or Solomon's embodied culinary knowledge, women

determine food-writing as a genre. Twenty-first century women continue to extend the genre as a female form and configure food writing in a female language of desire. A prime exponent and a gifted writer is Nigella Lawson:

This [Rhubarb and Muscat Jelly] is spectacular: it's beautiful when the poached rhubarb, fresh out of the oven, sits in its orange-flecked juices; and just so pretty, when it's set and shining and the sweetest dusky rose pink. But because of that colour, don't set it in a ring mould: it makes it look slightly gynaecological. I use an old-fashioned, bulbously curving castle mould (*How to Eat* 345).

Her unabashed, voluptuous voice celebrates female intellectual pleasure and sensual *frissons*. In 2018, at Gourmet Escapes, a food festival in Western Australia, Lawson told her audience, "When I read a book and love the words, in a sense I experience that as a taste ... words taste delicious when one leans into the synesthesia [sic] of syllables, synonyms and well-stirred sentences" (Zavlasky).

Lawson's well-stirred words have shaped the tastes of a generation. She writes sell-out books, has millions of Instagram followers and packs venues for her on-stage talks. She is also responsible for a thousand imitations since successfully shifting her chatty, confiding, charming and funny print persona to television. "I can't decide what I'm going to say before it happens. I might know why I like it, I might have an in to the recipe that I've worked out in my head – and I've always written a book first – but when I talk about it, it's painting the scene, even though there are pictures" (Nourse 2018). She explains to a feminist food podcast that the language

she uses in her television shows is important to her; she tries to evoke tastes and textures and what she feels, and acknowledges, “My language is perhaps not the language normally associated with food programs” (Diamond and Wu, *Radio Cherry* 2015).

She is right – and her food writing is regarded as “revolutionary” by Bee Wilson in the popular press (*Kitchen Revolution* 2018) and as a form of feminine identity between “the feminist” and “the housewife” by Joanne Hollows in the academic press (2003). Yet, history repeats itself. Scholarly appreciation of women’s contribution to the genre and the field is limited to a few individuals in the 20th century – and fewer still in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. More research is required. It could begin with the women food writers extending the cultural field and food-writing genre onto new media platforms and forms of publication as Brien has noted (*Writing about Food* 6-7).

Opportunity and necessity came knocking when the World Wide Web exploded in 1994. The audience, the money and the work quickly emigrated to online. Women food writers could not afford – in every meaning of the word – not to be part of the internet. They parlayed their fascination with food culture into lively forms of personal writing on personal and commercial websites. The same year, the Food Network was launched in the US and suddenly cooking and eating was on cable television 24-hours a day. Food-making programs and cooking competitions became

prime-time television viewing, featuring chefs and food writers, and reaching millions of people.<sup>86</sup>

A decade later, the first social networking websites appear, such as Facebook, followed by social media platforms, such as Twitter and Instagram. Food writers flock to Twitter and Instagram, out of necessity. It is a question of publish, tweet and Instagram or perish. Kylie Kwong, a chef and practising Buddhist, posts daily on Instagram. She writes lengthy captions for photos and videos whose subjects range from sourcing ethically- and sustainably-grown produce to her dinner menu offerings – and often include a little of everything:

Always love our weekly visit from this sweet person, local community gardener @jongardens @thewaysidechapel Here he is today with head chef Antonio @antoni0o0o0o7 of the Heart Café, Wayside's new social enterprise café opening in Bondi Beach in November. Thank you for always thinking of us @jongardens we very much love being a part of the life enhancing work and community that is @thewaysidechapel (Instagram @kylie\_kwong 2018).

In keeping with her Buddhist principles of community and compassion, Kwong frequently showcases her support of Sydney's Wayside Chapel, a drop-in centre for street people, and her Carriageworks Farmers' market stall. Her posts offer a window on her unique cooking-style, a combination of Chinese techniques and

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<sup>86</sup>In 2009, the first MasterChef cooking competition attracted 3.745 million Australians viewers to its finale, and two women won first and second place. Bloggers cooking and writing their dreams are catapulted into fame when they sign book contracts and are rocketed into global stardom when television producers come calling.

ingredients, and Australian indigenous ingredients. There is usually a reference to her Billy Kwong restaurant. Kwong's use of social media is a complex manifestation of core values, human connections and brand management. Her Instagram food writing encompasses public interest and self-interest, personal concerns and social problems.

This type of food-writing mash-up on social media is an area for future research. With its emphasis on instantaneity and spontaneity, social media forgives lapses in language, logic or even accuracy. For instance, Instagram's photogenic images are captioned with a mess of words, symbols and emojis. An argument could be made that a new food discourse is in play in the field of food writing. Then there is the genre's splicing into strands, hybridising and evolving as it has always done, and the effect of the internet as a delivery and distribution system on the genre. How much of food-writing's DNA is encoded and how much has it mutated? The interaction of technology and women food writers is a rich vein of research.

Beyond the internet, research is begging to be done on women writing about the 21<sup>st</sup> century issues gripping people's imagination and fears. Women who write about food security, climate change, food sovereignty and immigration, for instance, offer an opportunity to research activism, motivation and impact. Drilling down into the necessities that steer women into food-writing today - the emotional drivers mentioned above, the embodied intelligence and everyday practice discussed in Chapter four - brings up research possibilities, too. Ethnographic humanism, cosmopolitanism and post-colonialism, identified in Chapter three, are prime lenses

to focus on further investigation in food writing. Kwong's hybrid cooking and her reconnection with her heritage and her place, for instance, could figure in a re-evaluation of Chinese culture in Australia.

Other research lodes are waiting to be mined. To paraphrase Sybille Bedford, what we write about food is as revealing as what we write about money and sex (74).

Years ago, my food writing turned quietly political in the wake of the 'children overboard' scandal in Australia 2001, when the John Howard-led Liberal government lied about refugees tossing their children out of boats. After news of the untruth broke, I pointedly featured a migrant story in each of my weekly columns on interesting food shops in *The Sydney Morning Herald*. At the same time, I stopped reviewing fine dining restaurants and wrote about suburban, family and ethnic eateries, many of them fine in their own right. This was another quiet protest about how we eat and write about food.

I also committed to feature stories about the politics of food and not about food as life-style. This meant jettisoning the endless writing diet of the hippest restaurants, hyped-up ingredients, best-of lists and eating trends. Instead I fixed my sights on teasing out complicated arguments around sustainable fishing and ethical protein production, the quality of our food and the equality of our food distribution. If I were a food journalist today, I would want to write about food culture in light of the #metoo movement, the immigration debate and the street-food takeover of fine dining.



Twenty-first century women food writers are unafraid to tackle tough topics: Joanna Blythman investigating British supermarkets, Bee Wilson on the dark history of food fraud, Stephanie Alexander teaching children how to cook and eat well, Fuchsia Dunlop demystifying Chinese culinary culture, Toni Tipton-Martin surveying the history of black cookbooks and their role in black cultural preservation (Brown 2015). They may be the transdiscursive women food writers of their time; they may be the food ethnographers of our time; they may be heiresses of the women about whom I write. Only research and time will tell.

To those women about whom I write, I am grateful for their ability to see food not as an end in itself but as a way of opening up the world, as Angela Carter says (126). I pay homage, too, to these women's generosity to each other. Jane Grigson was personally and professionally mentored by Elizabeth David; David encouraged Claudia Roden privately and in print. M.F. K. Fisher was a close friend of Julia Child and gave her time to younger food writers such as Ruth Reichl. Stephanie Alexander has mentored Kylie Kwong. Roden, Alexander, Solomon, Margaret Fulton and Jill Norman willingly give their time and knowledge whenever I ask. Women food writers are intellectually generous in sharing ideas and information. Their willingness to credit authors, the origins of recipes and historical sources is evident in their books, essays, journalism and letters. All these women share a desire to write and think about others, not just themselves.



## Appendix

### Second-Wave Women Food Writers (Publication of First Book)

Patience Gray – *Plats du Jour*, 1957.

Jane Grigson – *Charcuterie and French Pork Cookery*. 1967.

Margaret Fulton – *The Margaret Fulton Cookbook*. 1968.

Claudia Roden – *A Book of Middle Eastern Food*. 1968.

Diana Kennedy – *The Cuisines of Mexico*. 1972.

Charmaine Solomon – *South East Asian Cookbook*. 1972.

Marcella Hazan – *The Classic Italian Cookbook: The Art of Italian Cooking and the Italian Art of Eating*. 1973.

Madhur Jaffrey – *An Invitation to Indian Cookery*. 1973.

Paula Wolfert – *Couscous and Other Good Food From Morocco*. 1973.

Penelope Casas – *The Food and Wines of Spain*. 1982.

Elisabeth Luard – *The Rich Tradition of Peasant Cooking*. 1984.

Stephanie Alexander – *Menu for Food Lovers*. 1985.

The talents, strategies and ambitions of the second-wave women food writers brought richness and diversity to their cultural field. Jane Grigson (born 1928) led the way, continuing in the tradition of her friend and mentor, Elizabeth David, as a clever, opinionated writer who dextrously wove scholarship, personal recollections and succinct recipes. Madhur Jaffrey (born 1933), dubbed the “queen of curries”, earned her authority from years of exploring Indian food. Paula Wolfert (born 1938) spent time with the Berbers in the Atlas Mountains and distilled her 50-year love affair with Morocco and the Mediterranean into cookbooks. Stephanie Alexander

(born 1940) is the quintessential food educator and wrote the essential book on modern Australian food. Elisabeth Luard (born 1942) spent many years gathering recipes from rural populations in remote regions of Europe. Penelope Casas (born 1943) evolved into an expert on Spanish food and wines, travelling through the Iberian Peninsula to find regional recipes.

Other women food writers, although born earlier, also occupy positions in the gastronomic and food writing field because they published their works in the same period as the second wave of women food writers. Elisabeth Lambert Ortiz (born 1915) inveigled English-speakers into trying Latin America and the Caribbean cooking; Diana Kennedy (born 1923) documented Mexican food, expanding it beyond Americans' understanding in particular; and Marcella Hazan (born 1924) redefined Italian food as a classic cuisine in the US. Margaret Fulton (born 1924) encouraged Australians to incorporate the diversity of migrant food culture into their everyday life. Patience Gray (born 1917) wrote one of the best-selling British cookbooks of the 1950s, but is best known for *Honey from a Weed* (1986)<sup>87</sup>, about Apulian rural life, folk lore and peasant food recipes.

Mobility, immigration and disintegrating colonialism dominated this post-World War II food-writing generation. Roden was forced into exile; Jaffrey, Solomon and Hazan migrated to the UK, Australia and the US as voluntary exiles; Gray, Kennedy and Wolfert lived abroad for long periods; and Lambert Ortiz, Casas and Luard

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<sup>87</sup>Although this book – her second and last – is much admired today, she is not as influential as the cohort of second wave food writers discussed in this thesis. As Adam Federman writes “... its author remains little known beyond a small circle of food writers and critics” (1).

were peripatetic. Even 'at home', women food writers went on culinary expeditions. David and Grigson charted old English style cookery in their books, Fulton accepted sponsored trips to south-east Asia to collect recipes, and Alexander cooked Jamaican-style food in her restaurant.

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