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A reading of contemporary short stories dealing with food and humour

Christina Kalaitzi

PhDc, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki,
Faculty of Education, Department of Preschool Education
ckalaitzid@nured.auth.gr

Sofia Gavriilidis

Associate Professor in Comparative Children's Literature
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki,
Faculty of Education, Department of Preschool Education
sgavr@nured.auth.gr

Abstract

Playing with food could be funny! Reading about animated sandwiches could be hilarious. Writing about the adventures of vegetables, chocolate and toothpicks could be creative. Therefore, the unfolding of texts in children's literature, which depict humorous eating habits, is the objective of our presentation. A selection of children's texts joined under the topic of food has been gathered. The common framing of these cotemporary short stories is the multiple connections between food, humour and social behaviour, offering fertile grounds for linguistic and literacy approaches to the increasingly important field of humour studies. More specifically, we are exploring distinctive literacy contexts in which the act of playing with food is represented with humour, for the latter has been proved to be a significant key feature of contemporary children's literature. Issues of how different types of food inspired the generation of these short stories, the extent to which eating habits are framed with humorous implications and the level of connection between the social aspects of eating and humour occurring across literacy cultures, are discussed.

Introducing...

“[Children] intuitively look for books that will make them laugh”.

(Cart, cited in Cross, 2011)

*“Regardless of its popularity . . . humorous writing for children is consistently dismissed
by adults as pointless or not very literary”.*

(James, cited in Cross, 2011)

The “high“ and “low“ forms of humor in children’s literature

As Lewis puts it, humor itself is “neither virtuous nor vicious, neither liberating nor oppressive, neither rigid nor flexible. A particular experience of humor can serve any cause—good or evil, constructive or destructive, conservative or radical” (1989: 156), so the functions of humor are many and, of course, it can further function as more than one thing at a time (Cross, 2011).

As Cross (2011) puts it, the complex compounds of both ‘high’ and ‘low’ forms of humor that are now often found in individual junior texts, and even in the same humorous stimuli, can have serious repercussions for children’s learning beyond mere momentary amusement. By ‘high’ forms of humor, Cross basically means the cognitive, more sophisticated humor of, for instance, humorous parody, comic irony, satire, and humorous metafictional devices, as well as wordplay. In contrast, ‘low’ humor includes depictions of farce and physical slapstick, often extending to comically exaggerated characters and even comic grotesque and scatological humor. It seems as if high and low forms of humor do not have to play off one against the other, nor are they always simply used to defuse each other (as in, for instance, psychological release after a serious section of text). It could be implied that they can actually work together, often within the same humorous stimuli, whether that is a character, his/her humorous dialogue, an incident, a joke, or even the manner of narration.

The function of social control is a key common theoretical approach to humor, and such approaches as regards children's humor are often limited to discussions of Bakhtin (1984) and the carnivalesque. As far as potentially transgressive forms of humor are concerned, where implied child readers are presumed to find much humor in the 'naughty' antics of protagonists, usually set against adults and/or those in authority. The carnivalesque in children's literature, according to Stephens, incorporates a "playfulness which situates itself in positions of non-conformity" (1992: 121).

Stephens (1992) identifies three forms of interrogative texts with varying degrees of subversion, which offer a 'time out' or break from the habitual constraints of society but incorporate a safe return to normality. First he identifies time out texts, which he classes as playful, featuring a hero and closure (a satisfactory ending with final order and fixed meanings) and a return to normality. He then identifies texts featuring value inversion which he believes offer gentle mockery of adults and society and often privilege weakness over strength. These playful texts often include parodic elements, are ironic and self-reflexive, and may feature a non-hero but again, they may offer closure. His final category of texts feature transgression and are classed as playful, parodic, and satiric as well as often being self-reflexive. They frequently feature taboo subjects, include an anti-hero, and sometimes evade closure. He rates these texts as endemically subversive. According to this theory, it can be supported that these sorts of texts can provide psychological release for children's negative feelings against those in authority (the intra-personal dimension) and this allows for a normal functioning of society, by providing a safe outlet for such feelings, thus reducing the chance of any genuine rebellion.

In children's texts critically analyzed in the last section of this study, there has been an attempt of reading them as examples of the carnivalesque; as characteristic token of texts for this age of readership that feature complex compounds of humor which, as Alberghene (2013) puts it, offer the opportunity for child readers to become aware of alternative ways of thinking.

Gluttony & food-as-temptation stories for children

In Bakhtin's carnivalesque theory, food and the drinking and eating associated with it, is grouped with popular-festive forms, or themes and details taken from popular culture of the time, particularly culture related to the carnivalesque. Since food is a "part of every folk merriment", it often accompanies comic scenes, but the meanings of these scenes are not simply humorous (1984: 279). Bakhtin argues that scenes involving food represent not only the grotesque body (through the consumption of dismembered animals), but also the symbol of "man tast[ing] the world" and making "it a part of himself" (1984: 281). Humans literally ingest the world, its animals and plants, and experience victory, "devour[ing] without being devoured" (1984: 281). [Any characters'] fat belly, their appetite and thirst still convey a powerful carnivalesque spirit (1984: 46). Humanity's victory over the world is symbolically represented through renewal, the refreshment of the body, which means there is a possibility for new beginnings and optimism for the future. For Bakhtin, food equates to power—power over the world itself, even. Gluttony complicates the "victory" of humanity, however, by making food less about mankind and more about the individual. Public eating, in places such as banquets and parties, emphasizes the communal elements of food and mimics the struggle against the world. However, private eating expresses "the contentment and satiety of the selfish individual, his personal enjoyment, and not the triumph of the people as a whole" (1984: 301-302).

According to Stephens (2013) while there is no shortage of merry meals in children's literature, the gluttonous individual is often seduced by food, which is central to story patterns involving temptation. The glutton is the opposite of the ideal individual, one who eats publicly with his or her peers, symbolizing their united victory against the world. The greedy individual represents the loner, who selfishly prefers to dine in isolation. Those who are alone, and eat extravagantly, often end up in trouble, injured, or trapped. These gluttons also may be victims of a larger evil, a villain that aims to lure them into performing misdeeds. In children's texts, and especially fantasy texts, food can be representative of a particular culture or visually appealing for specific symbolic purposes. The desire to consume places children, and even more so tempted children, in the history of consumerism, both in reality and fantasy. As Daniel noted, in British literature, food fantasies typically depict "rich foods" in "vast quantities as well as foods that contemporary discourses on health condemn as fat-laden" (2006: 62). The same theorist argues that

because of Europe's history of famine (in England, France, and Ireland), food fantasies are likely the imaginary manifestation of very real hunger. Another influence on food fantasies is the "harsh regime" of the British nursery, which consisted of extremely bland food to be eaten in isolation, away from one's parents. American children experienced a more hands-off approach to food, with fewer restrictions than their British counterparts. What is underlined here, is that curiosity might be one motivation for food fantasies in British literature, as children were simply interested in seeing what their American contemporaries ate regularly.

Katz argues that "children's literature is filled with food-related images, notions, and values" because if one "understand[s] the relations between the child and food [one] understand[s] the workings of the world of the young". She discusses the place of food in the child's "adjustment to the social order"—their acclimation to society—or perhaps even the adult world (1980: 192- 193). Just as Barthes (1972) focuses on the presentation of food, as well as on the food itself, Katz (1980) notes that manners are an important feature of eating. Not only can the purpose of food be interpreted—how it may teach a lesson to a particularly gluttonous child, for example—but the type of food can be analyzed, too. The types of food consumed may signal some broader meaning in the text, or important insights about individual characters.

Keeling and Pollard argue that "if food is fundamental to life and a substance upon which civilizations and cultures have built themselves, then food is also fundamental to the imagination and the imaginary arts" (2009: 5). As Stephens (2013) puts it, food does fuel imagination, especially in children's literature, where picture and chapter books alike are likely to have food fantasy scenes, often with detailed illustrations. Many of these stories feature food as a temptation for the young protagonists, as a tool used to trick them into doing something wicked or mischievous, putting them in danger or dropping them into the clutches of an evil power. Sometimes, this tempting food is magical, offered by a witch or supernatural being. Food is often a weapon in fantasy literature, meant to lure children towards evil for civilizations and cultures are built upon food, both as art and nourishment (Keeling & Pollard 2009). This claim might also been supported for fantasy children's literature as well, where entire fantasy worlds might be built upon it, or even of it where

food could be interpreted as a feature playing a large role in complex relationships - such as the relationship between food, child, and provider – which can be illustrated through the types of food exchanged. According to Keeling and Pollard (2009), the food-child-giver relationship is at the heart of the food-as-temptation story for eating, although necessary for survival, doesn't always appear in literature and when it does, it is usually symbolic.

Temptation stories adapt to different time periods, retaining the same overall structure but changing their symbolism. Park explains that food is an essential component of children's literature for four reasons: identification, setting, character development, and relationships (2012: 233-234). Food is a cultural signifier—as Keeling and Pollard (2009) note and can be one of the last traditions immigrants let go of, but it can also hint at more subtle character development. By showing characters' eccentricities and weaknesses through the distinct action of eating, authors can build complex novels with well-rounded characters. Park also writes that mealtimes demonstrate relationships in stories: *“Want an easy way to put people together and get them to talk to each other? Sit them down to a meal”* (2012: 234). Many different types of relationships can be shown through both the giving and receiving of food. It could be implied that the temptation aspect of these stories is equally as important as the food that serves as a lure. Given that food works as the ultimate temptation for children, it can be viewed as a stand-in for many different desires, including sex. In a pre-adolescent world, where sex may be understood but not quite a reality yet, food (and especially more decadent food) could represent pleasure, but also the possibility of overindulgence. It can be argued then that the power to resist temptation and indulge moderately can make a hero/heroine truly great. As Stephens (2013) puts it, temptation stories blend the two extremes by showing readers characters that both give in to temptation and overcome it, or are forgiven for their transgressions. To some extent it can be implied that, children's literature celebrates the quirky individual.

Keeling and Pollard assert that food sparks the imagination because it is “seldom plain” and can be viewed as a creative form of expression (2009: 6). “Food experiences form part of the daily texture of every child's life from birth onwards, as any adult who cares for children is highly aware; thus it is hardly surprising that food is a constantly recurring motif in literature written for children” (2009: 10). Food is a daily concern for children, a part of

their lives that looms large in their memory, but that concern also reaches to adulthood, both as a part of everyday life and as part of nostalgia for childhood. This nostalgia, as well as the strong connection to daily life, makes food not only a common motif in children's literature, but also a transformative one, capable of communicating both didactic lessons and rallying cries of independence. Often, when food appears as a temptation to children in literature, an evil force is behind the sweet or snack, waiting to coerce the child into general mischievous behavior, or even something more sinister. Stephens (2013) argue that this story pattern—the theme of food-as-temptation, a tool to lure children towards evil—is typically associated with more canonical children's texts, and may be didactic in nature, resulting in the child learning a lesson about evil, gluttony or themselves. However, it is also possible for this pattern to be seen in more contemporary works as well, albeit in a transformed state. All of the texts selected to be critically read in our study constitute of children's works all use food-as-temptation, albeit in different ways, and demonstrate that tempting food can lead to general mischief, if not evil. Examining the ways these more established texts use food as a tool of seduction and also how the tempted characters are treated, allows for the reader to see the heroes relationship with food, their family, and themselves in terms of the tradition of food-as-temptation stories.

A reading of short stories dealing with food and humour

Roald Dahl's "Dirty Beasts"

"We Are what we Eat": The Pig

The hero of this short story consists of the meal itself. The 'wonderfully clever pig' is the one that's going to be devoured by the rest of the characters. And it is the one who reverses the plots' unfolding leading us to an unexpected end. For it is unacceptable to eat a massive brain pig after all. Don't you see? When it comes to a type of food who knew "what made an airplane fly", "how engines worked and why", and the only thing "he simply couldn't puzzled out" was "what life was really all about" it can be implied from the beginning that a distinctive connotation of food –the meal as an animated object- is ventured by the narration. The food is not the object anymore. The food -the Pig in this case- becomes the

subject. The comic figure of a thinking Pig who solves the mystery of the meaning of his life consists of a framing of the an animated nature of food which



In England once there lived a big
And wonderfully clever pig.

[...]

He knew what made an airplane fly,
He knew how engines worked and why.

[...]

He simply couldn't puzzle out
What LIFE was really all about.

[...]

Till suddenly one wondrous night,
All in a flash, he saw the light.
He jumped up like a ballet dancer
And yelled, "By gum, I've got the answer!

[...]

"They want my sausages in strings!
"They even want my chitterlings!
"The butcher's shop! The carving knife!
"That is the reason for my life!"

[...]

Next morning, in comes Farmer Bland,
A pail of pigswill in his hand,
And Piggy with a mighty roar,
Bashes the farmer to the floor...

Now comes the rather grisly bit
So let's not make too much of it,
Except that you *must* understand
That Piggy *did eat* Farmer Bland,

[...]

And when he'd finished, Pig, of course,

Felt absolutely no remorse.

[...]

“And so, because I feared the worst,

“I thought I’d better eat him first.”

knows staff, puzzles out itself with archetypal questions, finds the answers and seeks piece of mind. The notion of a “wonderfully clever” meal could carry humorous interpretations and lead us to a reverse reading of the common aspect of food in contemporary children’s literature. “Alas” the food is going to take revenge! It seems that the moral issue derives from this short story is the old saying “my life is your death”. What’s more, is that the narration itself conspires with the readers giving alibi to the Pig who ate “him first” for in this story the food is not the victim –it couldn’t be- but it is the hunter, the revenger. The perfectly happy expression of the Pig in the closing image implies the restoration of justice. The world shouldn’t be a place where farmers butcher Pigs for their bacon, juicy chops and chitterlings but a place where Pigs eat farmers because of “a fairly powerful hunch” and

feel “absolutely no remorse”. The cannibalistic figure here is the Pig. However this interpretation could be an irony for the Pig is an animal and what else animals can be than cannibals. As it a common practice in Roald Dahl’s narrations, the figure of a pathetic adult -the farmer in this case- suffers from a horrible ending, but especially in this story this very distinctive cannibalistic hero who represents the food itself reverses the order of the world in order to carry implications of how children should respect their food.

“We Are what we Eat“: The Tummy Beast

What happens when you stuff your mouth all kind of food? Your tummy swells and grows and sells and grows and becomes a “person”, a person who is “always asking to be fed”. That is exactly what happened to the gluttonous hero of this story. That sweet and innocent child depicted with a swollen tummy which seems ready to burst, with the buttons of his shirt ready to explode, with a body shape irregular and uneven, appears to be the victim of a tummy beast. He’s presented as being the servant of his hunger. But how can someone blame a child for eating? Are children supposed to know what’s best for them to eat or when they should stop eating? These are some of the implications



One afternoon I said to mummy,
“Who is this person in my tummy?
[...]
“He talks to me at night in bed,
“He’s always asking to be fed,
“Throughout the day, he screams at me,
“Demanding sugar buns for tea.
“He tells me it is not a sin
“To go and raid the biscuit tin.
“I know quite well it’s awfully wrong
“To guzzle food the whole day long,
“But really I can’t help it, mummy,
“Not with this person in my tummy.”
“You horrid child!” my mother cried.
“Admit it right away, you’ve lied!



“You’re simply trying to produce
“A silly asinine excuse!
[...]
Just then, a nicely timed event
Delivered me from punishment.
Deep in my tummy something stirred,
And then an awful noise was heard,
[...]
It shouted, “Hey there! Listen you!
“I’m getting hungry! I want eats!
[...]
“That’s him!” I cried. “He’s in my tummy!
“So now do you believe me, mummy?”
But mummy answered nothing more,
For she had fainted on the floor.

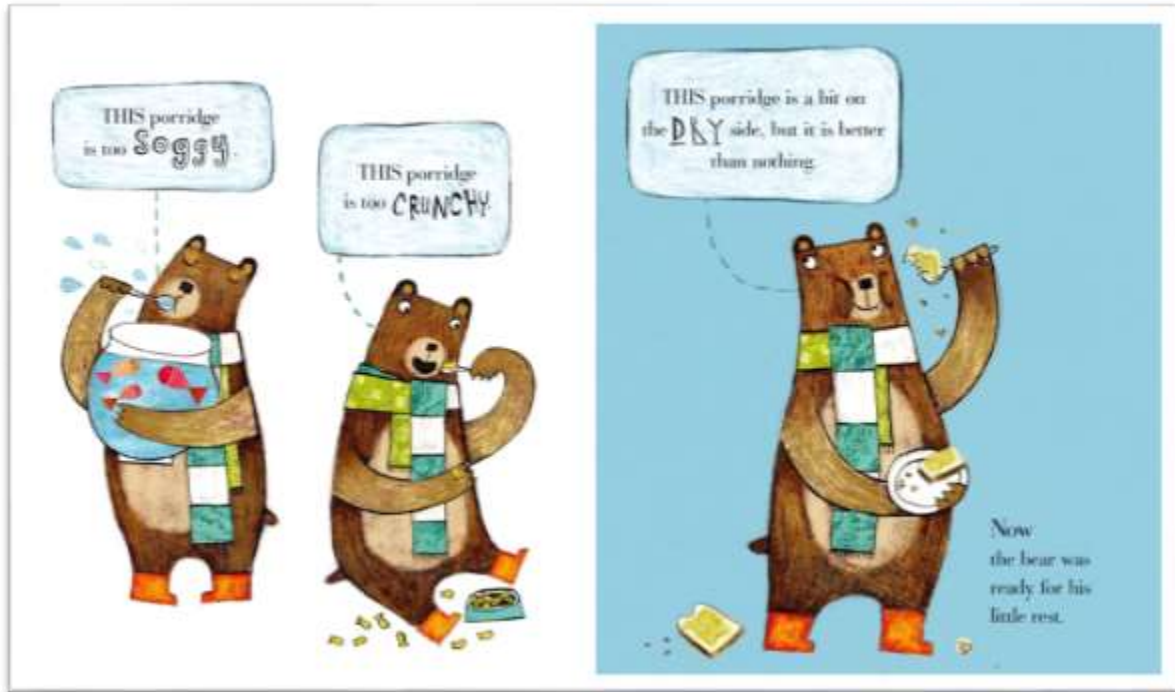
which could be raised from this narration in terms of gluttony. Once more the villain is the adult -the mother in this case- who’s doing what she knows best. She is blaming her son. Another common aspect of the notion of adult figure in Roald Dahl’s narrations is the adult’s incapability to believe the children. The mother of this story denies believing her son’s excuses for doing what seems natural to him: to obey the beast in his tummy; to be gluttonous. An implication of children’s unawareness of what’s nutritious for them to eat and, the most important, at what point they should stop eating -in other words- which is the proper amount of food for them is underlined. But in Dahl’s fictional universe a child is never alone. Children always find the strength to defend themselves against the mean parents and their unfair treatments. The defender for the weak here is the tummy beast itself. The implied hunger is what we can name as the accomplice of our hero. The natural instinct of hunger interpreted here as a “nicely timed event” which has the power to deliver the hero “from punishment”. The end of this story can be read as another moral issue in reverse, which violates regularity in a cannibalistic manner. It seems as if the obesity of the child means no harm at him since it derives from an uncontrolled source which has the power to rescue him from the consequences. The boy will not be punished because her

punisher has defeated. He is free now to consume as many “sugar buns for tea” he wants, to “raid the biscuit tin”, to have “lots of chocs and sweets”, to get “half a pound of nuts”, to “guzzle food the whole day long”. The only comic -would someone say- consequence is implied to be the fainting of his mother for she would be the only one unable to understand the extraneous enforcement of the aforementioned eating habits.

Leigh Hodgkinson's "Goldilocks and just one bear"

“We Are what we Eat“: The Little Bear

Robert Southey in 1837 wrote a tale for a girl with golden hair -Goldilocks- who sneaked into a house of three bears -the father bear, the mother bear and the little bear- and messed everything up -their food, their chairs, their beds- till she was caught by the bear family and rushed out the house. Leigh Hodgkinson in 2012 wrote an intertextual metafiction by reversing the order of things and characters' act. It is now the little bear –the hero- who's messing around Goldilocks luxurious apartment, trying to eat, to rest and have a sleep. The ritual of having dinner is depicted in a sarcastic way through a contradictive interplay between text and image. Interesting implications could be raised regarding the presentation of food, as well as the animal's perception of food.



The written text describes the act of eating and, in the same time, leaves connotations which are framed by the image in a humorous way. “This porridge is too soggy” for simply it is a fishbowl with goldfish. “This porridge is too crunchy” for it is the dish with the cat food. “This porridge is a bit on the dry side” for it is slices of toasted bread with honey, but at least it is honey and this is “better than nothing” for a bear. A line is drawn between the human world and the animal kingdom. For the latter, everything can be eaten. The animal instinct prevails in this narration and leads to a series of comic circumstances from the human’s -the reader’s- point of view. The eating manner is transformed into a play, where the hero eats everything up without being selective at all. The hero is an animal and, as an animal, it has the right to be a cannibalistic figure. The real fun is provoked by the fact that the child reader is aware of the mistaken eating habits of the hero. So the little hungry and naive bear is forgiven by its audience. But what about the other characters of the story? What happens when the human family -the daddy person, the mommy person and the little person- enters the apartment?

It seems that the adults here do not share the same perspective with a “child” animal. One again the written text describes just the act -the outcome- while the expression on the figures’ faces carries connotations of their frustration. The daddy person seems angry, the

mommy person seems shocked and the little person seems disappointed. The difference is that all the tree of them is aware of the proper eating manners. A fishbowl and a Friskies dish are not something you can eat. That “thing” that ate these non-eatable staff is implied to be a creature with no human eating habits. What’s worse is that the roasted bread which is something supposed to be eaten only by children is devoured and this reveals bad manners. Once again, the child reader, by being the omniscient audience, knows that this naughty creature is the little bear and enjoys the awareness of the human characters. Consequently, it can be said that the child reader’s perception of well eating manners is not disturbed, but just being a little bit gibed after all.

Shel Silverstein’s heroes from “Where the sidewalk ends”

“We Are what we Eat”: The Peanut-Butter Sandwich

The subject of this short story in rhymes is about a “silly young king who played with the world at the end of the string, but he only loved one single thing – and that was just a peanut-butter sandwich” who ate a peanut-butter sandwich. Or maybe the real subject is about gluttony; a king who was eaten by a peanut-butter sandwich. Who can tell with certainty? But of course the readers can! All you can see in the picture is a grotesque body; a fat belly depicting the hero’s appetite which conveys a powerful carnivalesque spirit. All you can read in these sarcastic rhymes is about an obese king with terrifyingly ugly jaw, according to the picture, who tries to take a bite from his huge peanut-butter sandwich. An when he does that, his bother pulls, his sister pries, the wizard pushes, his mother cries, the dentist comes, the royal doc as well, the royal plumber bangs and knocks, the carpenter tries with pliers, the telephone man with wires, the firemen with fire, each royal subject, each man and woman, girl and boy fight that “awful peanut-butter sandwich” to break right through it, cause here occurred an accident: the king



I'll sing you a poem of a silly young king
Who played with the world at the end of a string,
But he only loved one single thing –
And that was just a peanut-butter sandwich.

[...]

His subjects all were silly fools
For he had passed a royal rule
That all that they could learn in school
Was how to make a peanut-butter sandwich.

[...]

And then one day he took a bite
And started chewing with delight,
But found his mouth was stuck quite tight
From that last bite of peanut-butter sandwich.

His brother pulled, his sister pried,
The wizard pushed, his mother cried,
"My boy's committed suicide

The dentist came, and the royal doc.
The royal plumber banged and knocked,
But still those jaws stayed tightly locked.
Oh darn that sticky peanut-butter sandwich!

[...]

With ropes and pulleys, drills and coil,
With steam and lubricating oil –
For twenty years of tears and toil –
They fought that awful peanut-butter
sandwich.

[...]

A puff of dust, a screech, a squeak –
The king's jaw opened with a creak.
And then in voice so faint and weak –
The first words that they heard him speak
Were, "How about a peanut-butter sandwich?"

From eating his last peanut-butter sandwich!”

“committed suicide from eating his last peanut-butter sandwich”. Even the repetition of the last line which refers to the vicious peanut-butter sandwich can be read as sarcastic to the hero’s harmful eating habit. What can be implied in this story it’s not only the importance of a nutritious and balanced diet but also the dreadful consequences of the persistence in just one type of food.

It could be said that the child reader enjoys the suffering of a stubborn and totally impenitent king through his cannibalistic manner of eating which leads to an irrational effort on behalf of an entire kingdom for saving his life. The most comic aspect of this story, someone might say, could be the selection of tools, such as ropes, pulleys, drills, coil, steam, grapplin’ chains, lubricating oil, twenty years of tears and toil, that suits more to a rescue operation of a truck stuck in the ravine than of a king stuck in his peanut-butter sandwich. The story closes with a sarcastic ending as well: “that stubborn peanut-butter sandwich” was broken through and it released the king’s jaw in order to have a new peanut-butter sandwich - what else!

“We Are what we Eat“: Melinda Mae

“Have you heard of tiny Melinda Mae, who ate a monstrous whale?” From the very first line the narration addresses directly to the reader and gives away the special feature of the

hero. Melinda Mae is referred as the “good girl” who takes little bites, chews very slow and eats up all of her food.

The manners are an important feature of eating and, here, good eating manner is reversed by a sarcastic outcome here. And, what is more, the notion of the endless requirement for children to eat all their food is being deconstructed. It took her eighty-nine years to finish her food. But it seems as if it doesn't matter “because she said she would!” What's most funny in that story is the comparison between the picture which depicts the beginning of Melinda Mae's lunch and the one which depicts the end of it – just almost a hundred years later. Many comic aspects could be read concerning the notion of size in this story. The figure of Melinda Mae appears to be quite disproportionate in relation with both the chair and the meal, which in this case is an enormous whale. The figure of the biggest sea creature trying to fit in a common dish seems ironic as well. The attempt of fitting this



Have you heard of tiny Melinda Mae,
Who ate a monstrous whale?
[...]
And everyone said, “You're much too
small”,
But that didn't bother Melinda at all.
She took little bites and she chewed very
slow,
Just like a good girl should...
... And in eighty-nine years she ate that
whale
Because she said she would!

extraordinary meal in a tiny girl's stomach seems as if it has come out of fairy tales, where everything is possible and believable. And here she is Melinda Mae, after she had finished her lunch “just like a good girl should”. The expression of happiness in her face could be interpreted as an irony. The fulfillment of her mission seems to be the completion of her meal, no matter what. Unfortunately, it does matter, because the price the old granny

Melinda May has to pay is the loss of her life in exchange for a pile of huge bones trying to fit in the same common dish.

“We Are what we Eat“: The Me-Stew

There’s nothing more cannibalistic than cooking somebody alive! In this case the hero is the chef and the chef cooks himself because he has “nothing to put in his stew”. Is it out



I have nothing to put in my stew, you see,
Not a bone or a bean or a black-eyed pea,
So, I'll just climb in the pot to see
If I can make a stew out of me.

[...]

I'll stir me around with this big wooden
spoon

And serve myself up at a quarter to noon.

So bring out your stew bowls,

You gobblers and snackers.

Farewell – and I hope you enjoy me with
crackers!

of poverty, lack of ideas for new recipes, or just due to the hero's naïve nature? So many implications could be drawn in this last humorous poem. The child reads a first person narration of a chef cooking himself. The most ironic aspect of this action is the connotation of pleasure which lies with the hero's perspective. At some point, it could be implied that the contemporary art of cooking is being deconstructed. The cannibalistic act of cooking a human alive could be read as if the hero is being sarcastic against the new trend of blending all kind of materials together in order to create new recipes. So here is the ultimate alluring dish of the day proposed by the chef: the ME-stew!

Just a few conclusive comments

Food-as-temptation stories are still being written, and will continue to be written. Food in the contemporary world—although it may not resemble the food of the past—is still an essential part of life. By examining symbolic meals in food-as-temptation stories, readers can track the progression of children’s agency. While characters in older works might be limited in their independence, reliant on family or their surroundings for guidance, characters like Dahl’s *Dirty Beasts* or *Tummies*, Hodgkinson’s *Little Bear* and Silverstein’s *Gluttonous King* or *Melinda Mae* break this tradition by acting independently in regards to eating manners, by using food as a weapon for vanquishing villains on their own with little to no help from others, or even by being taught a valuable lesson of their own endless gluttony. We tend to argue in favor of Stephens (2013) that whether food tempts or excites, punishes or rewards, it will remain a fixture of literature, and especially of contemporary children’s literature.

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