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Literary Meals in Canada :
The Food/books of Austin Clarke, Hiromi Goto, Tessa McWatt
and Fred Wah

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Cette thèse intitulée :

Literary Meals in Canada :
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Présentée par :
Alexia Moyer

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RÉSUMÉ

Literary Meals in Canada étudie *Pig Tails 'n Breadfruit* d'Austin Clarke, *Chorus of Mushrooms* et *The Kappa Child* de Hiromi Goto, *This Body* de Tessa McWatt, ainsi que *Diamond Grill* de Fred Wah. Cette thèse entreprend d'établir la signification de la nourriture dans ces récits, ce qu'elle permet aux auteur(e)s d'exprimer par rapport à divers thématiques—les structures sociales, la culture, le langage, ou encore la subjectivité—et comment ils/elles établissent des connexions entre elles, et quelles conclusions ils/elles en tirent. En d'autres termes, cette thèse s'interroge sur les stratégies utilisées par ces auteur(e)s lorsqu'ils écrivent de la “nourri-téra-ture.” Ma lecture de ces œuvres est aussi ancrée au sein d'une conversation sur la nourriture au sens large: que ce soit dans les cercles académiques, dans les supermarchés, par l'intermédiaire des étiquettes, ou dans les médias. J'examine comment mon corpus littéraire répond, infirme, ou confirme les discours actuels sur la nourriture.

Divisé en quatre chapitres—Production, Approvisionnement, Préparation, et Consommation—ce mémoire précise la signification du “literary supermarket” de Rachel Bowlby, en s'appuyant sur les travaux de Michael Pollan et Hiromi Goto; compare la *haute cuisine* d'Escoffier à la “hot-cuisine” d'Austin Clarke; recherche les connections entre l'acte de faire la cuisine et celui de l'écrire chez Luce Giard, Austin Clarke, et Fred Wah; confronte les préceptes d'Emily Post concernant les bonnes manières de la table à la cacophonie et aux bruits de mastication chez Hiromi Goto; et relie Tessa McWatt et Elspeth Probyn qui partagent, toutes deux, un intérêt et une approche à la sustentation des corps.

Les textes qui composent ce corpus sont des “foodbooks” (“aliment-textes”). La nourriture, et les différentes activités qui y sont associées, y est transcrite. C’est pourquoi cette thèse accorde une grande importance aux particularités de ce moyen d'expression.

Mots-clés : repas littéraires au Canada, aliment-textes, Austin Clarke, Hiromi Goto, Tessa McWatt, Fred Wah.

ABSTRACT

Literary Meals in Canada examines Austin Clarke's *Pig Tails 'n Breadfruit*, Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *The Kappa Child*, Tessa McWatt's *This Body*, and Fred Wah's *Diamond Grill*. It asks, what does food mean to these stories, what does it allow the writers in question to say—about social structures, culture, language, and subjectivity—and how do they go about making these connections or drawing these conclusions? In other words, what are their food-writing strategies? I also read these texts as part of a larger conversation about food, a conversation taking place in academic circles as well as at the supermarket, on food labels, on television, and other media outlets. I look for moments in which my literary corpus responds to and challenges food-centred discourse.

Comprised of four chapters—Production, Procurement, Preparation, and Consumption—this dissertation explicates Rachel Bowlby's term, "literary supermarket," through Michael Pollan and Hiromi Goto; it compares Escoffier's *haute cuisine* with Austin Clarke's "hot-cuisine"; it tracks the kinship between "doing-cooking" and writing cooking, as articulated by Luce Giard, Austin Clarke, and Fred Wah; it reads Emily Post's advice on table manners against Hiromi Goto's cacophony of gnashing and nibbling; and it pairs Tessa McWatt with Elspeth Probyn, both of whom share a similar approach to, and interest in, bodies that eat.

The texts that make up this corpus are foodbooks. Food and the activities and processes associated with it are therefore mediated by language. For this reason the dissertation attends to the particularities and the potential effects of writing food.

Keywords : literary meals in Canada, foodbooks, Austin Clarke, Hiromi Goto, Tessa McWatt, Fred Wah

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À Madame de Scélo et ses goûters.

À Franck et son potager.

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Introduction

People ask me: Why do you write about food, and eating, and drinking? Why don't you write about the struggle for power and security, and about love, the way others do? They ask it accusingly, as if I were somehow gross, unfaithful to the honor of my craft.

The easiest answer is to say that, like most other humans, I am hungry. But there is more than that. It seems to me that our basic needs, for food and security and love are so mixed and mingled and entwined that we cannot straightly think of one without the others. So it happens that when I write of hunger, I am really writing about love and the hunger for it, and warmth and the love of it and the hunger for it . . . and then the warmth and richness and fine reality of hunger satisfied . . . and it is all one.

—M.F.K. Fisher, *The Gastronomical Me*, (vii)

If there is one sure thing about food, it is that it is never just about food.

Terry Eagleton, “Edible écriture” (204)

What is a foodbook? A search engine responds to my initial inquiry with a question of its own; do you mean food book? No, I mean foodbook. It is a combined word, a neologism if you will, like *gastrotext*,¹ *gastropoetics*,² *food fictions*,³ *gastro-graphy*.⁴ The terms are very similar. Each prefix (or similar) references all things alimentary: food, ingestion, and digestion. Each suffix is about writing, narration, poetry, representation.

A foodbook, as I shall attempt to articulate in the next few paragraphs, is many things. It is the title (in part) of this thesis. It is the neologism I have chosen to describe this project of mine about food and written representations of food.⁵ It is a pithy term which,

¹David Bevan's Introduction to *Literary Gastronomy*.

²Parama Roy, *Alimentary Tracts: Appetites, Aversions, and the Postcolonial*.

³Tobias Döring, Markus Heide, and Susanne Mühleisen. *Food and Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Food*.

⁴Rosalía Baena, “Gastro-graphy: food as metaphor in Fred Wah's *Diamond Grill* and Austin Clarke's *Pig Tails 'n Breadfruit*,” in *Canadian Ethnic Studies*.

⁵I prefer foodbook over the other options: *gastrotext*, *gastropoetics*, *food fictions*, *gastro-graphy*, for its inclusivity. “gastro” invokes consumption, the chewing and swallowing kind, but does not allude to the other activities, production, procurement, preparation that are also the focus of this project. “Fictions”

most notably, appears on the cover of a cookbook / “literary symposium” / fundraiser compiled and edited by Margaret Atwood, published by Totem Books, and produced for P.E.N. International (1987). I refer here to *The CanLit Foodbook: From Pen to Palate – a Collection of Literary Fare*.

As a whole, Atwood's oeuvre is brimming with references to food. There is a substantial (and still growing) body of critical work that acknowledges and analyzes Atwood's professional preoccupation with, and personal enthusiasm for, food. Atwood is a noted cake maker and baker of monsters.⁶ *The CanLit Foodbook* is mentioned in these critical readings,⁷ of primarily novels, but almost always in the form of a footnote, or for illustrative purposes only. “She has even edited a cook book” (Parker 349), we are informed in passing. This thesis is more than a mere nod to the *Foodbook*.

I begin with a brief description of what one should expect to find while leafing through, or scouring, *The CanLit Foodbook's* pages. Atwood's foodbook is “a compendium of items, / from the banal to the passing strange, / from boiled eggs to lizard tongues and / human toes, from the serious to the frivolous” (Atwood). It contains excerpts from Canadian poetry and prose.⁸ It contains recipes donated by Canadian novelists, poets, cookbook writers (Elizabeth Baird, Edna Staebler), and even lawyers (Clayton C. Ruby).

does not adequately describe the varied collection of texts under consideration here.

⁶ See page 201 of *The CanLit Foodbook* for Atwood's recipe for Bourbon Pecan Christmas Cake. See page 172 of *The CanLit Foodbook* for Atwood's recipe for “Quick Baked Monster à la Dennis Lee.”

⁷ See Emma Parker's “You Are What you Eat: The Politics of Eating in the Novels of Margaret Atwood,” Sharon Rose Wilson's *Margaret Atwood's Fairy-Tale Sexual Politics*, as well as Sarah Sceats “Sharp Appetites: Margaret Atwood's consuming politics” in *Food, Consumption and the Body in Contemporary Women's Fiction*.

⁸ *The CanLit Foodbook* does not include Francophone authors for “the simple reason,” as Atwood explains, “that P.E.N. has a separate Francophone chapter in Canada, and it may very well want to use a similar idea to raise its own Writers In Prison funds” (2).

One can read about, and learn to make, anything from alligator pie (Dennis Lee) to human pie (Jeni Couzin), to open-faced apple pie (Claire and Farley Mowat), to my personal favourite (one that I have just about mastered), grapefruit (Michael Ondaatje):

1 grapefruit, chilled.

1 Cut a chilled grapefruit in half. This is more difficult than you think, as grapefruits are not symmetrical.

2 Run a grapefruit knife around the inside of the skin.

3 Cut individual segments out from the centre.

4 Eat with spoon. (29)

I feel compelled to add that by using a grapefruit spoon (with serrated edges) one can eliminate steps 2 and 3.

The *CanLit Foodbook* also contains a number of Atwood's illustrations. This is not the first,⁹ nor is it the latest¹⁰ work of Atwood's to have been personally illustrated.

Sketches ornament the first page of each chapter of the *Foodbook*; a rat, spreadeagled and imprisoned in a jelly mould (Ondaatje), presented on a cake pedestal, and garnished with creamed mice (Mowat), gives the reader a hint as to what kinds of foods and modes of preparation s/he will find amongst chapter 8's "Quaint and Curious Dishes."

Foodbook, for Atwood, is more than just the title of this compilation. It is an organizing principle. Atwood brings together a vast and varied assortment of writings about food. These writings are arranged thematically, by the dishes described therein and the times at which such dishes are eaten. F.R. Scott's "The Canadian Authors Meet," an excerpt

⁹ *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970).

¹⁰ *The Tent* (2006).

from L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* in which “Diana is invited to Tea with Tragic Results” (Atwood 60), and Elizabeth Baird's recipe for hot cream scones represent different categories of writing: poetry, prose, recipe, respectively. They were produced and received in different historical and cultural contexts/climates. Yet they are, as Atwood reminds us, tied together. Each expresses and explores the taking of tea (and cakes, scones, and sandwiches as the case may be). Anthologists order texts in thoughtful, thought-provoking ways. Pairings or groupings such as this one open up new or perhaps unforeseen avenues of investigation. How and why do Canadians serve and partake of afternoon tea, one might feel compelled to ask. How and why (in such great numbers Atwood tells us) do Canadians write about teatime (Atwood 3)? How does the taking of tea become, for the writer, an opportunity to reveal character, or relationships between individuals, or even a means of structuring a work?

A number of other foodbooks of this kind, though they may not be referred to as such, have been produced since the *CanLit Foodbook* was launched, with a certain degree of fanfare I must add, with CBC News documenting and promoting its release.¹¹ These texts include, but are not limited to, *Food for Thought* (Digby & Digby, 1987), *Cooking By the Book* (Mary Anne Schofield, 1989), *Kitchen Talk* (Edna Alford and Claire Harris, 1992), *A Literary Feast: An Anthology* (Lilly Golden, 1993), *The Great Canadian Literary Cookbook* (Gwendolyn Southin and Betty Keller, 1994), *Food: The Oxford Anthology* (Brigid Allen, 1995), *A Feast of Words: for lovers of food and fiction* (Anna Shapiro, 1996), *In the Land of Magic Pudding: A Gastronomic Miscellany* (Barbara Santich, 2000).

¹¹ See CBC Digital Archives.

The Book Lover's Cookbook: Recipes Inspired by Celebrated Works of Literature, and the Passages that Feature Them (Shauna Kennedy Wenger and Janet Jensen, 2005), *Hunger and Thirst: Food Literature* (Nancy Cary, June Cressy, Ella deCastro Baron, 2008), *The Table is Laid: The Oxford Anthology of South Asian Food Writing* (John Thieme and Ira Raja, 2009). What these anthologies have in common is their acknowledgement that some writers write about food and others do not, and that this distinction matters.

Thus far, I have defined a foodbook as a neologism, as *a* book in particular (*The CanLit Foodbook*) and as a kind of anthology that compiles foodwriting—fiction, nonfiction—of all kinds. I would like to suggest that foodbook also describes individual works that celebrate food for its own sake, and privilege food as a motif, as a trope. Margaret Atwood claims to have “found out fairly quickly that authors could be divided into two groups: those that mention food, indeed revel in it, and those that never give it a second thought” (Atwood 1). This revelry, she proposes, occurs in the form of word (writing about cookery, feeding ones characters), and/or deed (cooking for oneself and others). “Some” says Atwood, “write about it but don’t do it, others do it but don’t write about it, some do both, and others do neither” (Atwood 2). Atwood herself does both. The literary texts upon which I have chosen to focus may be unhesitatingly placed in Atwood's group of revellers. Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*, and *The Kappa Child*, Fred Wah's *Diamond Grill*, Austin Clarke's *Pig Tails 'n Breadfruit*, and Tessa McWatt's *This Body* are filled, indeed one might even suggest saturated, with references to, and descriptions of, food. Readers of this collection of texts, published after and therefore not included in Atwood's *Foodbook*, will find instructions on how to cook privilege, white rice, lily buds,

pepperpot, red pesto potatoes *aux épinards*, and *tonkatsu*, where to find *lo bok*, plantains, pigs' feet, and Japanese cucumbers, and how to—should such an occasion present itself—filet a sea bass, deep fry pork cutlets, and butcher a pig. These texts abound with menus, recipes, descriptions of shopping excursions, feasts, and cooking experiments, whether they are real, imagined, or recollected in tranquility.

Why so much food? Perhaps because the authors themselves like to eat and cook, and write about their passion for both. “Food is dear to me both physically, literally, and symbolically” (qtd. in Harris), writes Goto. The succinct but telling opening line of Clarke's memoir, *Pig Tails*, is, “Food.” (Clarke 1). The author's interest in the topic, the activities that surround it, is all-consuming. It is a “word that defines [his] life” (Clarke 1). Fred Wah's *Diamond Grill*, a gastro-graphical account of growing up in a Chinese-Canadian Café in Nelson B.C., includes numerous descriptions of the foods he remembers and now craves, his “mouth water[ing] at the sight of the dried sausages marbled with fat” (Wah 9) during a visit to Chinatown. Wah seeks to recuperate these past moments of indulgence (an extra sausage from Granny Wah under his rice) in his present-day life by writing about them and recreating them in his own kitchen.

While they openly admit their hedonistic proclivities, these authors are interested in more than just food for food's sake. Food has function. Food is used to describe and define “characters, their world and their relationship to that world” (McGee 1), writes Diane McGee. This corpus certainly upholds McGee's argument. First, Goto, Wah, Clarke, and McWatt use food to describe their characters. The unnamed narrator of Goto's *The Kappa Child*, for example, is a walking meal, with her daikon legs, bratwurst fingers, pumpkin

head and pomegranate-like beauty, “because it lies beneath a tough surface” (Goto 51).

McWatt initially describes her heroine, Victoria, as a lean rump roast and alerts us to Derek’s strawberry-stained face. Physical attributes aside, food—what and how it’s eaten, how it’s procured and prepared—also reveals character : habits, qualities, flaws, motivations.

Second, the writers in question use food to represent the world in which such characters live. It is part of the scenery. It alerts readers to the kinds of spaces the characters frequent and/or inhabit, like kitchens, restaurants, markets, supermarkets, bedrooms, basements, barns, yards. It punctuates the mundane, the everyday—breakfast, lunch, teatime, dinner, supper—and is a means of marking more exceptional events. It is invited to, or required to put in an appearance at, “Cocktail Parties, Weddings, Christmases, Funerals, and Other Social Disasters” (Atwood 173).

Finally, my corpus of writers uses food to explore the relationships between the characters and their world. For Clarke, Goto, McWatt, and Wah, eating (or any of the other activities that surround food) is not a solitary, isolated, incidental, nor neutral act. Food is a matter of politics, or, as Arjun Appadurai writes, *gastro*-politics: the “social transactions around food” (Appadurai, “Gastro-politics,” 495). Reading this corpus via McGee and via Appadurai means being attentive to the many hands, the many geographical and political borders through which second-rate, “Thin, hard, bony, smelly codfish from Newfoundland” (Clarke 15), for example, must pass in order to reach an eater (a young Austin Clarke) in Barbados. What we learn from this passage of Clarke's, apart from the fact that he does not like codfish, is a “fascinating kind of geography” of foodways and trade routes “and

sociology” (Clarke 15), of purveyors and eaters of cod who do not share the same social standing.

That Clarke, Goto, McWatt, and Wah write *about* food is fairly evident. Food is everywhere in their texts, from the artwork on the covers, to the titles, to the recipes, meals, and shopping lists found within. *Why* they write about food was my initial point of entry into this project. I have found that the writers of this corpus share a personal preoccupation with food. More than just food for food's sake, they are interested in its communicative possibilities. Food for these writers is about power, politics, subjectivity, community, commensality. It—the production, procurement, preparation, and consumption of food—is a means of communicating social positionings, relationships, and states of being. Out of this process of identifying (when and where they write about food) and of inquiring into (why) has come a third point of interest: how do these writers *write* food, or use food to write with? They use it as a structuring device; recipes and food-related job adverts punctuate Tessa McWatt's *This Body*; The *Diamond Grill*, the name of Wah's collection and the restaurant at the centre of its action, is the site in which food is prepared, consumed, and through which Wah revisits his family history. Structure aside, I am also attentive to the techniques these writers use to convey what food looks, tastes, and sounds like. In Chapter 3 for example, I discuss Fred Wah's use of jazz rhythms and onomatopoeia to capture the sounds of food preparation. Finally, I am interested in the kinds of food-writing categories these writers engage in, adopt, and/or play with.

Representations of food in print are often divided into, or are identified as belonging to, seemingly distinct writing categories: cookbook/non cookbook,¹² practical/expressive,¹³ cookery books and gastronomic literature.¹⁴ The texts in this literary corpus are not so easily categorized. On the one hand, they are cookbooks. Fred Wah's prose poetry contains recipes. Though Wah's recipes do not look like recipes—clearly demarcated ingredient lists and instructions like Ondaatje's recipe for grapefruit—as they are not visually separated from Wah's other narrative threads. *Pig Tails 'n Breadfruit's* chapters are organized around a dozen or so Barbadian dishes. Though, to call what Clarke writes a recipe, I argue, would be inaccurate. How does one categorize these personal, historical, oral, writerly, humorous, serious, accounts of preparing King-Fish, Cou-Cou, and Privilege? Similarly, Tessa McWatt's novel is peppered with recipes—and yet one learns more from this text than how to prepare dry-braised yi noodles. To paraphrase Margaret Atwood, these books are not exactly cookbooks. They are culinary memoirs,¹⁵ prose-poems¹⁶, gastro-graphies,¹⁷ biotexts,¹⁸ fiction, non-fiction. On the other hand, they aren't exactly not cookbooks, either (Atwood 1).

¹² Diane Jacob, *Will Write for Food: The Complete Guide to Writing Cookbooks, Restaurant Reviews, Articles, Memoir, Fiction, and More . . .*

¹³ Mark Knoblauch, Rev. of *Best Food Writing 2006*, by Holly Hughes.

¹⁴ Stephen Mennell, *All Manners of Food: eating and taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present*.

¹⁵ According to the subtitle of *Pig Tails 'n Breadfruit*.

¹⁶ Fred Wah, *Diamond Grill*.

¹⁷ Rosalia Baena's term for Clarke's *Pig Tails 'n Breadfruit* and Wah's *Diamond Grill*.

¹⁸ The term "biotext" was coined by George Bowering in *Errata* (1988). It was subsequently borrowed by Fred Wah to describe *Diamond Grill*. The biotext "foregrounds the writer's efforts to articulate his or her self through the writing process" (Saul 4). See Joanne Saul's *Writing the Roaming Subject* for an extensive discussion/analysis of this topic.

Texts that straddle the barrier between the two food-writing categories identified above¹⁹ occupy, according to Stephen Mennell, an “ill-defined margin” (Mennell 271). The literary texts in question are not alone in occupying this apparently peripheral space. Nathalie Cooke suggests that cookbooks are not just “practical prescriptions for culinary practice” (Cooke 6). They too are written, or may be read as, culinary memoirs, histories, biographies, as “signifiers for societal change” (Cooke 6). In *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Michael Pollan declares shopping at Whole Foods a literary experience. The food labels within, he argues, contain more than just the facts about food production. They are examples of “storied food,” “grocery lit,” or “supermarket pastoral” and require the skills of a literary critic or journalist to interpret them.

Should such ill-defined, marginal writings be given a proper name, given that they are, as we have seen, not so marginal? Atwood's term, foodbook, might do very well here. And yet, this project is not so much about creating or naming a “new” food-writing category. It is, rather, about recognizing and beginning to articulate some of the productive discussions about food that emerge from this space of overlap, where different representations of food collide, compete for space, come together. I set out to achieve this overlap by reading Austin Clarke's *Pig Tails 'n Breadfruit*, Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *The Kappa Child*, Fred Wah's *Diamond Grill*, and Tessa McWatt's *This Body* individually, together, and alongside other cultural materials: cookbooks, food labels, as well as a number of sociological, anthropological, cultural writings on food. Foodbook, I wish to emphasize, is not so much a category as a reading practice.

¹⁹ Cookery books and gastronomic literature.

This project on foodbooks is a timely one. Food has received an almost overwhelming degree of media attention of late: from food stylists, to food bloggers, magazine publishers, food critics, filmmakers, and television networks. Food is on people's minds. It is a highly politicized topic. It is a lifestyle choice. It is a moral stance. It is entertainment. It is ideology. It is about bodies (body image, eating disorders, gluttony, pleasure). It is an expression of race, class, gender, and nation. It is a commodity. It is something to be made, enjoyed, discussed, debated, and in many cases, represented on film, online, or on paper. For many of the reasons cited above, food has become a matter of sustained and institutionalized culinary scholarship. The University of Gastronomic Sciences (founded in 2004 in Italy by the Slow Food movement) offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in food science, gastronomy, and food communication. Also worth mentioning are the numerous food studies programs available in Canada.²⁰ Peer reviewed Journals,²¹ professional and lay associations,²² as well as regular academic conferences connect food scholars and offer a forum for the study of food.

To situate my own project within a more localized framework, I draw from Nathalie Cooke's assessment of Canadian food scholarship. Her introduction to the recently

²⁰ Food Studies, **Concordia University**; School of Nutrition & Centre for Studies in Food Security, **Ryerson University**; Certificat en gestion et pratiques socioculturelles de la gastronomie, **Université du Québec à Montréal**; Land and Food Systems, Food Science, Human Nutrition, Agroecology, Food, Nutrition and Health, Global Resource Systems, **University of British Columbia**; Food Science, **University of Guelph**.

²¹ *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture*; *Cuizine: The Journal of Canadian Food Cultures*; *Food, Culture, and Society*; *Agriculture and Human Values*; *Appetite*; *Culture and Agriculture*; *The Digest*; *Food and Foodways*; *Gastronomic Sciences/Scienze Gastronomiche*; *Nutritional Anthropology*; *Slow*; *Food and Foodways*, *Alimentum* (to name a few).

²² *Canadian Association for Food Studies*, *Association for the Study of Food and Society*, *Culinary Historians of Canada*, *Slow Food*.

published, *What's to Eat: Entrées into Canadian Food History* (2009), gives us a very thought-provoking guide to the study of food and foodways in Canada. Cooke suggests that we have entered into a period of culinary scholarship launched, she proposes, at the time of Expo 67: “Canadians began to review and revise their culinary practices past and present,” she writes “to reconceive food (sometimes retrospectively) as symbol of self, community, and nation” (Cooke 6). What follows in this introduction is an enumeration and exploration of the kind of scholarship underway in critical/creative Canadian circles. What is most striking about Cooke's summary, I wish to point out, are the spaces between the studies. Cooke's introduction is not so much a tidy, comprehensive summary, as it is a call for contributions to the field. Hers is a cultural study of domestic foodways in Canada, one she hopes will “open avenues of discussion rather than provide definitive closure” (Cooke 16). Out of the many calls for future work, there is one in particular that may be used to locate and articulate my project. Cooke writes: “there is certainly an interesting book yet to be written on the subject of Canadian literary meals” (Cooke 13).

This is indeed an important topic, and one that requires some unpacking. First, there *is* an existing body of scholarly work on the literary meal in Canada. I prefer this latter turn of phrase, *literary meals in Canada*, to Nathalie Cooke's *Canadian literary meals*. It better describes the kind of work listed below, work that does not, taken as a whole, focus exclusively on Canadian literature, or just literature for that matter. This semantic shuffle is more inclusive, taking into account the range of work in, or about, Canadian contexts. There are the journals to consider: *Dalhousie French Studies* produced a special issue,

“Littérature et Nourriture”(1986).²³ *Mosaic* devoted an issue to “Diet and Discourse: Eating, Drinking, and Literature” (1991).²⁴ *Descant* produced a special food issue for its 20th anniversary. The recently launched, *Cuizine*, is a journal of Canadian food cultures (2008).²⁵ Also of note, as previously mentioned, are the anthologies of food writing: Canadian examples include Atwood's *CanLit Foodbook* (1987), Edna Alford and Claire Harris' *Kitchen Talk*, and Gwendolyn Southin's *The Great Canadian Literary Cookbook* (1994).

When it comes to studying food in/and Canadian literature, Nathalie Cooke outlines two distinct, critical approaches. First, there is literary analysis, in which one calls attention to the presence of food, and examines its function, within a given work (Cooke 13). Diane McGee's *Writing The Meal: dinner in the fiction of early twentieth-century women writers*, is one example of a such a study. Second, there is the cultural analysis of literary texts, an approach undertaken by Cooke and many of her fellow contributors in *What's to Eat*, Canada's first edited volume of food studies. Cooke, along with Rhona Richman Kenneally, Elizabeth Driver, Sneja Gunew et al., are keenly interested in that which surrounds these food-filled texts. They want to know what these texts have to say about the world in which they were created and the world in which they are read (Cooke 13-14).

If, as Nathalie Cooke suggests, there are two distinct critical approaches to the study of food and narrative, I must stipulate that my project is an amalgamation of both literary analysis and cultural analysis of literary texts. At the centre of this thesis are the writings of

²³ Edited by James W. Brown.

²⁴ Edited by Evelyn J. Hinz.

²⁵ Edited by Nathalie Cooke.

Clarke, Goto, McWatt, and Wah. I explore and explicate the various ways in which food serves the literature. I pay close attention to the internal characteristics of the texts in question: form, language, rhythm, and content. I set out to determine how and why food matters in these stories. I explore the world in which the writings of Clarke, Goto, McWatt, and Wah were conceived. It is here that this study takes a cultural turn. I am keen, in other words, to articulate the ways in which the corpus in question serves food (or food studies). I read these texts as part of a larger conversation about food: alongside other food-filled texts, be they of the literary, cultural, sociological or anthropological variety. I look for moments in which my literary corpus responds to and challenges current food studies discourse. I want to see what happens when one puts Hiromi Goto next to Michael Pollan, for instance, and examines their take on the supermarket. I am looking for similarities, tensions, and new reading possibilities.

I situate my work within this critical vein: literary meals in Canada. Having outlined my approach to the literary, I specify here what *Canada* means within the context of this project. Clarke, Goto, McWatt, and Wah may be collected under the banner of Canadian literature, for there is no denying the nation's presence within, and its effect upon, their work. And yet, I am also attentive to the many nations and cultures that circulate in, and influence, this body of writing (including, but not limited to, Canada). For these authors, the national and cultural “boundaries are stretchy” (Atwood, “The Beetle and the Teacup”). Tessa McWatt describes herself as a Canadian writer, but accepts the label of Caribbean writer or UK writer. Home, McWatt says, is writing at her computer: something she has to make in the moment (Literature Alive Interview). If, as Kelly Hewson writes, the West

Indies has been responsible for Austin Clarke's "stamina, vibrancy, and lust for living," Toronto, Canada, Clarke adds, provides him with the means and the space to write (Hewson). Fred Wah lives, theorizes, and writes in the in-between and relishes the ambivalences of the hyphen. "The only people who call themselves Canadian live in Ontario" he writes in *Diamond Grill* "and have national sea-to-shining-sea twenty-twenty CPR vision" (Diamond Grill 53). Explicitly stated in *Translating the Self*, and everywhere implied in her novels, Hiromi Goto insists on the difficulty, the necessity, of moving and writing between cultures.

The methodology outlined above is not without its potential pitfalls, some of which I acknowledge and articulate below. It is very tempting to read/commodify the texts in this literary corpus as objective sociological transcripts. What does such a reading entail? It regards the texts as valuable, though transparent and objective, sources of information about food, foodways, and the people who produce, procure, prepare and consume food. The result? *Pig Tails 'n Breadfruit* becomes a collection of recipes, a kind of static exhibition of Barbadian culinary culture put on for the food tourist. Victoria's numerous food fears in *This Body* are read literally, but not for their metaphorical import. These texts require a more nuanced reading, one which takes into account their formal techniques, complexities and analytical insights. The more I read this corpus, the more attentive I become, not just to the food, but to the representation of food, as mediated by language.

That food is often employed as a transparent stand-in for culture, that it is widely regarded as "the most benign version of accommodating cultural difference" (Gunew 227), is a concern for each of these writers. They use food as a way to address the packaging

and/or marketing of ethnicity for consumption. This concern is expressed in form, as well as content. We can, for example, talk about Hiromi Goto's writing strategies in food terms. Concerned that in the act of writing, culture is overly “simplified, commodified, as readily consumed as yoghurt” (Goto, “Translating the Self,” 112), Goto's writing, Lisa Harris argues, resists a “fast-food' reading” (Harris). Her prose is laced with “delicate narrative bones” (Harris); a reader may stumble over, or choke on, *Chorus of Mushrooms*' nonlinear narrative, its two narrators, its multiple languages, forms of writing (i.e. Japanese ideographs), and fonts, as well as the newspaper articles, blank pages, hand-drawn food labels and hand-written shopping lists that punctuate the text and page layout. Goto's writing, in other words, renders difficult the commodification and consumption of culture.

A second methodological pitfall worth mentioning has to do with gathering together such a diverse body of writings as this under the thematic umbrella of food. This critical move has consequences. It risks glossing over differences within the literary corpus, and between the literary corpus and the other writings I include in this project. When looking for common ground, it is easy to forget that the writings under consideration, though they may all be talking about food, are not saying the same thing in quite the same way. Both Clarke and Goto write about cooking apprenticeships: how food information is exchanged between generations, how these relationships, this body of knowledge, are affected by migration. That they approach the topic from different angles, are writing in different social, cultural, geographical, historical contexts, with markedly different styles, must also be acknowledged and explored. The differences, difficulties, and tensions between the various texts under examination can be most productive.

The following examples may clarify this point. *Terroir*, (or place-based labelling), as described by food columnist Sarah Musgrave, is a decidedly anti-global food movement, one which seeks to defend, promote, and maintain the idea of an *origine contrôlée*. For my own work, the term functions as a point of entry through which to situate Goto's understandings of people, place, food, and labels, and to map out the relationships between them. Goto's characters are on the move (from country to country, city to countryside), but are not unmoved by the places, the land they occupy. Tessa McWatt's numerous food-foraging scenes in *This Body* both respond to and challenge current food studies debates about supermarkets as simulacra, or as bastions of authenticity. It is these commonalities and, simultaneously, these tensions and contradictions between very different source materials that make for a more mobile and evolving *aperçu* of the literary meal in Canada.

A third possible point of contention in this project has to do with the limitations of food writing, as articulated by B.R. Myers in "The Moral Crusade Against Foodies: Gluttony dressed up as foodie-ism is still gluttony." Myers' complaint is directed at the foodie, or more precisely, the food aficionado who **writes** about his/her gastronomic experiences, philosophies, tastes. Myers does not hold back. The following is a brief summary of his grievances: Foodies are single-minded gluttons, and single-mindedness is "always a littleness of soul" (Myers). Their obsession is a sure sign of a culture in decline. They alone articulate a national food discourse (though their tastes remain on the fringe). Food writers, he suggests, have "long specialized in the barefaced inversion of common sense, common language" (Myers). In doublespeak, they feign concern for animals, take on

sanctimonious poses, and affect piety. They “quickly lose interest in any kind of abstract discussion” (Myers).

This polemical publication (March 2011, *The Atlantic*) unleashed a flurry of responses from food enthusiasts defending their passion, and/or food writers their livelihood. Here is a sampling. Each of the writers quoted below insists that food matters both literally **and** figuratively. It tastes good, in other words, and it’s also a lens through which to express and examine the eater and his/her world.

How sad for Myers, that he cannot see the beauty, the artistry, and the literary importance of food. (Emily Wight, “B.R. Myers thinks you're single-minded and small”)

The fact that food, as a life-giving substance, so often operates as a metaphor for life itself, for life experience, is given no credence here. After all, “we foodies” are literalists in his eyes. (Ruth Tobias, “A Response to B.R. Myers”)

How joyless! How sad and dour he must be. I cook food because I love food. I eat food because I love food. But I write about food because I love people—I love the stories of people who cook and eat and share food, of how they come together around it, how they see the world through it, and how you can see a part of them through it. (Francis Lamb, “Do we need B.R. Myers' Moral Crusade Against Foodies”)

Myers' moral crusade against foodies is, simultaneously, a campaign for a particular kind of food writing. Between the lines, Myers tells us who should write (and who should not write), what s/he should write about, and how s/he should write it (using both common sense, and a common language). Not unlike his dissenters, Myers believes that food and culture are intimately connected; for Myers, too much mention of the former is a sure sign that the latter is in decline. Of particular interest to my own project is Myers' concern that the foodie shows very little “interest in literature or the arts—the real arts. When Marcel

Proust's name pops up, you know you're just going to hear about that damned madeleine again" (Myers). The categories articulated here require some attention. First, food (or rather the activities that surround it), he proposes, is not a real art. Marcel Proust's *À La Recherche du Temps Perdu* is a real work of art, but should not be read for the *madeleines* mentioned therein. I agree with Myers that the *madeleine* (though delicious) is the most overused cookie/cake in food studies circles. Nonetheless, I choose to align my project with Myers' dissenters. I argue that there is a necessary connection between food and art, food and culture, food and language. I argue for figurative, imaginative representations of food, and for the study of these representations.

"One woman's logic is another's chocolate-covered grasshopper" (Atwood, *CanLit Foodbook*, 3), writes Atwood to describe *The CanLit Foodbook's* organizational structure and its potential reception. What seems to her to be a "logical and easy-to-follow progression" may not be readily apparent to all readers, she fears. To avoid any grasshopper-flavoured misunderstandings, I shall proceed with brief descriptions of the chapters to come. They are organized as follows: Food **Production, Procurement, Preparation, and Consumption**. While these headings allow me to separate my writing into manageable chunks, these economic, social, and cultural practices/processes naturally overlap, intertwine, and collapse in on one another. While this thesis is structured around four key *foodways*, the primary focus within each chapter is on *foodbooks*, i.e. the written representation of food. I am interested in storied food, literary/food production,

supermarket literature, writing cooking, hunger for words, eating culture²⁶. How does one speak/write/narrate it and/or through it, in other words, are the kinds of questions I set out to address in the four chapters that follow.

In the first chapter, Production, I set my sights on the farm, as related to us by Hiromi Goto. I compare Goto (*The Kappa Child*) with Margaret Laurence (*The Diviners*) and Margaret Atwood (*The Journals of Susanna Moodie*). Each of these writers revisits a settler narrative—*Little House on the Prairie*, *The Canadian Settler's Guide*, *Roughing it in the Bush*, respectively—and rewrites it with “a critical difference.”²⁷ Furthermore, this business of settling and cultivating land, I argue, allows Goto to work through questions of migration, occupation, belonging, and location. I rely on poet-farmer Brian Brett, and food columnist Sarah Musgrave, for their insights into aliens, of both the plant and animal variety.

Chapter Two, Procurement, is about “the literary supermarket.” I approach this term from several angles. In what way is shopping a literary experience, I ask. The space itself is, I demonstrate, an arena of representation. It is a space to be read. It is narrated and staged for a consumer who may (or may not) be attentive to what goes on behind or between the scenes. I also explore and explicate Michael Pollan's notions of “Storied Food,” “Grocery lit” and “Supermarket Pastoral.” Finally, in her cultural history of the supermarket, Rachel Bowlby bemoans the “extraordinary infrequency” with which this

²⁶ *Eating Culture* is the title of at least two studies: *Eating Culture*, edited by Ron Scapp and Brian Seitz; *Eating Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Food*, eds. Tobias Döring, Markus Heide, Susanne Mühleisen.

²⁷ I draw here from Manina Jones' documentary-collage, *That art of difference: 'documentary-collage' and English-Canadian writing*.

shopping space appears in literature. My literary corpus belies this statement while, I argue, furthering our understanding of supermarket literacy.

Chapter Three is about food preparation. More precisely, it's about what my literary corpus has to say about the whys and wherefores of learning how to cook. These texts, I propose, ask us to acknowledge “learning opportunities” outside the written recipe or cookbook.²⁸ Cooking for Clarke, Goto, and Wah, is a kind of learned choreography. It is an oral tradition passed from one generation to the next. It is a formal and/or informal apprenticeship between student and teacher. To focus solely on the extratextual is to deny that the works in question are *foodbooks*. The second half of the chapter then is about writing cooking or the written representation of food preparation. I am attentive to the ways in which these writers write, not just recipes, but the sounds, the rhythms, and the ephemeral nature of cooking. Necessary to this chapter, considering its preoccupations, are the writings of Luce Giard²⁹ and Georges Auguste Escoffier. I read Giard for her interest in kitchen gestures and the challenges of expressing such gestures with body and through word. Escoffier's *Guide to Modern Cookery* is a source of tension with, and a surprising complement to, Austin Clarke's memoir about food—not “hot-cuisine” as Clarke is careful to point out.

The fourth and final chapter is an exploration of consumption. I examine literal depictions of ingestion, digestion, and egestion and discuss their figurative import. What, according to these writers I ask, does consumption communicate? In this chapter I pair/pit

²⁸ I borrow this term from Sandra Sherman's “‘The Whole Art and Mystery of Cooking’: What Cookbooks Taught Readers in the Eighteenth Century.”

²⁹ *The Practice of Everyday Life: Volume 2: Living and Cooking* .

Hiromi Goto with/against Terry Eagleton³⁰ and Emily Post.³¹ An unlikely trio, if ever there was one. Eagleton provides a point of entry through which to consider Goto's rapprochement of the eating mouth and the speaking mouth. Goto's eaters ask us to rethink Emily Post's notions of bodily eloquence. I read Tessa McWatt's *This Body* with a little help from Elspeth Probyn³² whose own readings/writings remind us of the extent to which food and bodies are on the move, both materially and metaphorically.

Quantitatively speaking, this project consists of four chapters on five books. The following chapters will, I hope, fill some of the spaces to which Nathalie Cooke refers in her call for contributions to the field of food and foodways in Canada. I set out here to provide a platform upon which to further formulate this notion of the foodbook – what it is, what it does, why it matters, because it does.

³⁰ “Edible écriture.”

³¹ *Etiquette*.

³² *Carnal Appetites: FoodSexIdentities*.

Chapter 1: Production

I think writing is a little like farming . . . (holy shit, am I having a Forrest Gump moment????). If I can be forgiven for continuing with this analogy please follow along.

The farmer ought not to plant crops in the same field year after year. It depletes the soil and causes erosion, etc. In the same way, I think the writer cannot write on and on without taking time to nourish [sic] and replenish her mind and spirit. You could artificially fertilize the field with chemicals and plant peanuts, year after year . . . but how will those peanuts taste? I would rather have delicious peanuts every three years rather than tasteless forced crops annually.

—Hiromi Goto, “reading not to write, righting the need to read” (hiromigoto.com)

A recent article published by *This Magazine* sports this compelling title and tagline: *Canada's an urban nation. Why is our literature still down on the farm? CanLit has the literary equivalent of the Y2K bug—it can't flip over into this century.* “Most Canadians,” continues Darryl Whetter for the magazine’s book column “don’t live on, or even near, farms anymore. More than 80 percent of Canadians live in cities, yet the CanLit spotlights continue to shine on rural literature, usually of yesteryear.” CanLit has in fact “flipped.” Or rather, there has been a shift in writing on Canadian literature, a critical “turn [from the wilderness, the rural, the small town] to the city” write Justin Edwards and Douglas Ivison in *Downtown Canada* (2005). In this collection of essays, Edwards, Ivison, and their roster of contributors assert that “any understanding of Canadian literature must pay attention to Canadian cities” (10). They further posit that this kind of city writing has been going on for a long time. It is not a new phenomenon, as the works of Hugh MacLennan (*Two Solitudes*), Adele Wiseman (*The Sacrifice*), Gabrielle Roy (*Bonheur d’occasion*), Mordecai Richler (*The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*), and Michael Ondaatje (*In the Skin of the*

Lion), to name a few, attest. This focus on the urban experience lessens the gap, they propose, between the (primarily urban) Canadian reader and Canadian literature; it also serves to refute “tired old myths” (12), about “lonely settlers and their wives, the difficulties in building a log cabin, and the eventual freezing to death of the protagonist” (Piper qtd. in Edwards and Ivison 3). In a sense, Goto’s central characters in both *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *The Kappa Child* demonstrate this demographic shift—the migration from the country to the city. Having spent their childhood on mushrooms/rice farms, both Muriel Tonkatsu (*Chorus of Mushrooms*) and the unnamed narrator (*The Kappa Child*) now live in Calgary. But is a “turn to the city” the only plausible critical/creative strategy or bid for relevance? Apart from the advantages of drawing from a milieu with which one is familiar—Goto grew up on a mushroom farm³³—the farm represents, pardon the pun, rich, tillable terrain for this writer. Her farm tales are anything but “dour,” “irrelevant,” and “outmoded,” as Whetter and company might lead us to believe.

I set out, within the scope of this chapter, to investigate the ways in which Goto revisits and reworks our understanding of the pioneer experience in Canada. *The Kappa Child*³⁴ is a critical revisitation of *Little House on the Prairie*, one that explores and exposes the historical and socio-cultural context in which *Little House* was written by bringing it into dialogue with the present. The farm is also, I contend, a site through which Goto (further)³⁵ explores aliens of all shapes and sizes (the extraterrestrial kind, the

³³ Goto talks about her mushroom farming days in several interviews and on her blog, hiromigoto.com.

³⁴ The primary focus of the first part of this chapter.

³⁵ See also Goto’s article, “Alien Texts, Alien Seductions: The Context of Colour Full Writing.”

terrestrial varieties, i.e. resident aliens and alien plants), the spaces they occupy, the political, economic, and social structures that work to naturalize/nationalize or alienate them. Lastly, this chapter will examine Goto's particular politics of location. The term, "location," in the "politics of location," according to identity critics, means race, class, gender, sexual orientation,³⁶ and in Goto's writing, also refers to a physical, geographical location.³⁷ In the third and final section of this chapter, I ask *what does place mean to Goto?*

Pioneering

One might describe Goto's characters as farmers, but, as the young unnamed narrator of *The Kappa Child* insists, they are also pioneers. To the narrator, pioneering means eating molasses sandwiches, hunting rabbits for dinner and all manner of activities described in *Little House on the Prairie*, a copy of which she keeps, protectively, inside her t-shirt, presumably for easy access. This verb, noun, and adjective, pioneer, has multiple meanings, many of which resonate profoundly within Goto's *Kappa Child*. To pioneer is to explore, to settle, to innovate, to colonize. It is to be an alien in a new territory. Goto's characters do and experience all of the above. They are settlers, having moved to (and within) a new country: from Osaka, Japan, to British Columbia, to Alberta. They are innovators, growing rice (or mushrooms) in a climate that does not naturally support such

³⁶ Such is an appropriate critical response to Goto's writings given her marked interest in addressing, interrogating, and unsettling these identity categories.

³⁷ See Pamela Banting's "Deconstructing the Politics of Location."

crops. They explore the land itself—acquainting themselves with its geographical, geological, climactic, cultural particularities—and their relationship to these particularities; they negotiate their place, their sense of belonging, and confront their *alienness*.

For the young narrator, *Little House on the Prairie* represents the standard by which one can learn to be a pioneer: to dig wells while being mindful of the threat of poison gas, to “chink” cabin walls as a means of keeping out dust and the incessant Prairie wind, to plant “golden wheat the color of Mary Ingalls' hair” (Goto 113), and so on. This portable paperback offers comfort, companionship, and information to its young reader. Equally striking is how at odds the narrator's own pioneer experiences are with Laura Ingalls Wilder's descriptions. The narrator's friend Gerald warns her about the *Little House* series: “It's not the same as real life, here” (Goto 169). In “real life,” Pa hits Ma, steals from the neighbours rather than work with them, and forces his daughters to pick up rocks in the fields, day in and day out, all summer long. There is no time to chase gophers as Laura and Mary did in their spare time, although, as the narrator asks, “who'd be stupid enough to chase gophers in all this heat” (Goto 162)?³⁸

There is, in other words, a gap between (Laura's) past and (the narrator's) present, between expectation and reality, between the narrator's initial reliance on *Little House* as a how-to manual for pioneering and her gradual rejection of it. This process of rejection begins with Okasan, surreptitiously nudging the book beneath the refrigerator when she thinks no one is looking (Goto 112). The book becomes mangled at the spine and at the

³⁸ “Real life” in Goto's writings, as I shall discuss in greater detail further on, is not without elements of the impossible, the strange, and the magical.

corners. This wear and tear is partly due to use and the narrator's peculiar storage methods (under her shirt). It has also been defaced; one of the narrator's sisters has drawn a mustache on Mary's face while Laura has been given a bloody nose. The narrator eventually rips *Little House* apart and burns it “until every page [is] blackened and the print unreadable” (217).

There is something of what Manina Jones has termed *documentary-collage* in Goto's re-envisioning of *Little House*. Documentary-collage is a kind of writing that “self-consciously brings non-fiction documents into a fictional or literary text” (Jones, abstract, 1). Strictly speaking, *Little House* is closer to historical fiction than non-fiction, although it has been and continues to be used as a source of information concerning the everyday life of pioneer or frontier women.³⁹ What Jones' documentary-collage shares with Goto's writings is that each challenges the authority of the document they cite while, as Jones writes, opening up a “gap for the circulation of alternative discourse” (Jones 18). I am interested in both the parameters and the possibilities of this gap.

Not unlike *Little House*, *The Kappa Child* tells the story of a couple's move to the prairies, in a covered wagon no less (a *station-wagon*), with four daughters in tow.⁴⁰ Worth noting, however, is the direction from which both families have come before settling on and in the prairies. As the narrator explains to her sisters, “The Ingalls family were from the east so they went west. We're from British Columbia, so we were in the west, but we

³⁹ Kathryn Adam, for example, uses Wilder's fictional work “to shed light on the role expectations and feelings of western women” in *The Women's West* (95).

⁴⁰ Grace, the Ingalls' fourth daughter is first introduced in *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, the fifth book in the *Little House* series.

moved east to get to the same place, funny huh?” (Goto 42). My interest in this short, but revelatory, paragraph is twofold. First, this easterly move is reminiscent of another, earlier migration: 22,000 Japanese Canadians were forced to move east of the Rocky Mountains, or be stripped of their citizenship and deported. The first person to welcome the narrator and her family to small town Alberta, the owner of the boxcar motel, makes this same connection/assumption. “I always thought that it was terrible what was done to you people,” he apologizes to the baffled newcomers. Second, as Sandra Almeida observes, by having her pioneer family move east, Goto reverses the traditional westward migration (Almeida 50). This change of direction aptly describes Goto's appropriation of Wilder's work, I would add. Goto signals to the reader here that she approaches the Prairies and the pioneer experience from a different perspective. “I was hoping,” she says “to deconstruct the colonial mentality that we might have swallowed unnoticed when we read the Little House books as children” (“Cross-Cultural Creatures” 18). The narrator is increasingly aware of what she swallows, so to speak, through her own close readings, and as she begins to compare Laura Ingalls' “book-world” (Goto 188) with her own life. Why did Laura want to have a Papoose, someone else's baby, so badly she wonders? For Laura Ingalls “Indians meant teepees on the prairies and that was that” (Goto 188). How does one then explain, or classify, a half blood, half Japanese, Gerald Nakamura Coming Singer who lives, not in a teepee but, on a chicken farm next door? “What was wrong with Laura Ingalls Wilder” (Goto 68)? The narrator actively engages with her storybook, seeking to identify with, confront, and challenge the central character who, as Kathryn Adam writes, “for all her

charming rebelliousness and spunk, is thoroughly embedded in the values of white, American, male late nineteenth century— its expansionism, optimism, and economic individualism” (Adam 106).

I have written that Goto's *The Kappa Child*, in its reworking of *Little House*, opens up what Jones calls a “gap for the circulation of alternative discourse” (18). Upon further reflection, I contend that this image of the gap, and the suggestion that what Goto has to say is *alternative* (I read marginal here) is not entirely accurate. It suggests, at least to my mind, that one might locate Goto's writings or that Goto positions herself somewhere along the fringes of Ingalls Wilder's “white, American, male late nineteenth century” (Adam 106). As Goto herself indicates in an interview, “I'm writing the experiences I have, not as marginal, but as central . . . and [readers] need to position themselves in relation to my centrality” (Goto, *Science Fiction Conversations*).⁴¹ Goto's writing is not just “moving to the centre of the literary landscape” (Simon 10).⁴² It is already there Goto insists, and should be read accordingly. This centrality of Goto's comes in the form of pajama-clad characters who collect shopping carts for a living, who converse in both English and Japanese

⁴¹ In “Alien Texts, Alien Seductions” Hiromi Goto describes Larissa Lai's writing strategies in the same terms: “In ‘The Sixth Sensory Organ,’ Larissa Lai writes of having two writing strategies: to speak with her world at the centre (rather than at the margins) and explain afterwards, if she feels it is necessary and desirable; and to remain open to change and challenge. In this way, she is able to imagine and create new worlds that may not otherwise be written or welcomed” (266).

⁴² Assessing the impact of Smaro Kamboureli's *Making a Difference* (1996) in her introduction to *Adjacencies: Minority Writing in Canada* (2004), Sherry Simon describes minority writing as “moving closer to the centre of the literary landscape” (10). Goto is aware of the critical discussions/debates on positionality, (even having participated in the “The Third Solitude: Canadian Minority Writing” conference held at Université de Montréal (1998), from which the *Adjacencies* essay collection emerged). Goto's work has been included in this category of minority writing by both Kamboureli and Simon. Goto echoes both critics here, asserting that minority does not mean marginal (Simon 10).

(alternatively or at the same time) with the living and with the dead(?)⁴³, who interact with, and tell each other stories of, mythical, alien, folkloric, amphibian creatures. They are Japanese-Canadians, living in the twentieth and early twenty-first century. Everything else is on the outside (Goto, *Science Fiction Conversations*).

For Goto, as is the case for the archaeologist of documentary-collage, much depends upon the reader. S/he participates in a discursive exchange with past writing (Jones 58), and, as Goto writes, activates the text s/he reads or thinks about (Goto, *Trap Door* 30). The act of reading is continually foregrounded in *The Kappa Child* (Harris). Goto's own reading of *Little House* changed as she moved from childhood into adulthood. For the young Goto, *Little House* was about basic survival, a state of being she set out to experience first-hand by building her own lean-to in the woods, and attempting through various means to cure animal (or pumpkin) hides (*Science Fiction Conversations*). Goto recalls, "When I revisited the novel as an adult I realized how much I had missed in terms of the historical politics of that time . . . in terms of aboriginal decimation and the stealing of their homeland" (*Science Fiction Conversations*). The reader's ever-evolving critical approach to, or deconstruction of, a text is what preoccupies Goto in *The Kappa Child*. In other words, what the narrator (and family) gets out of *Little House*, in her multiple readings of it, is explored. The narrator continually refers back to this text, pulling it out from under her shirt for a quick inspection or a lengthy interrogation. She shares stories with her parents, sometimes inadvertently, and reads excerpts of the novel to her sisters who challenge her

⁴³ I refer here to Muriel's communications with her grandmother who has disappeared and who may no longer be living.

interpretations with insights of their own. For Slither, the narrator's older sister, *Little House* is not about pioneers. It's about salt pork, “Do you think salt pork is like bacon?” and personal hygiene, “I like Mary most of all. . . . At least she was clean” (Goto 43). As Lisa Harris reminds us, the style in which Goto writes calls attention to the act of reading. In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, the reader must contend with sudden unannounced shifts between English and Japanese, the use of Japanese grammar in English,⁴⁴ hand-written diagrams⁴⁵ and other experiments with form and language that slow the reader down, or trip him/her up. The telling of *The Kappa Child* is anything but linear. There are three distinct voices: that of the narrator as a child in rural Alberta, the narrator as an adult in Calgary, and the kappa child. Visual cues—chapter titles for the narrator’s prairie adventures, italics for the kappa’s voice—demarcate voice and time, but not all the events are relayed in chronological order. Initial readings of both texts require an attentive reader. Further readings/study of *Chorus* and *Kappa Child* require an attentive reader armed with either an excellent memory or an ample supply of colour-coded post-its and paper clips to mark off those elusive, often buried vignettes.

Goto's novels certainly fit within a body or tradition of Canadian writing that looks to the past. “The past” may come in the form of explorers' maps (George Bowering's *Burning Water*), trappers' journals (John Steffler's *The Afterlife of George Cartwright*), photographs, newspaper articles and dime novels (Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works*

⁴⁴ In the acknowledgements section of *Chorus of Mushrooms*, as Mari Sasano observes in “Words Like Buckshot,” Goto employs a very “Japanese” sentence structure/construction as she thanks people for their “always encouragement.”

⁴⁵ See *Chorus of Mushrooms*, p. 90.

of *Billy the Kid*), literature and writers of literature (Robert Kroetsch's "F.P. Grove: The Finding"). For the purposes of this chapter, I locate Goto's work within a more narrowly defined group of women writers who seek to draw upon, situate their work in relation to, reject, as well as rework, pioneer narratives, written by women.

Morag Gunn's conversations with Catherine Parr Traill in Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* come to mind, as does Margaret Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*. Ingalls Wilder, Moodie, and Parr Traill share a similar history of emigrating west to "new" territory with their families in nineteenth-century British/North America and having committed this experience to print. They set out to educate their readers, some of them prospective settlers themselves, about the challenges and rewards of pioneering. Their writings, including but not limited to, *Little House on the Prairie* (Ingalls Wilder), *Roughing it in the Bush*, *Life in the Clearings* (Susanna Moodie), *The Backwoods of Canada* and *The Canadian Settler's Guide* (Catherine Parr Traill) have been widely read, and more recently widely published, distributed, taught, anthologized. They have received a great deal of critical attention.

Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* has been described as a revision of Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*.⁴⁶ Goto herself, as she explains to Robyn Morris, does not claim this connection: "When I was writing *Chorus* I knew that people would compare me to Kogawa because we are both Japanese Canadian, we both write about a prairie setting. . . . When I was writing *Chorus* the only thing I was writing back to was that it was *not* a redress book"

⁴⁶ See Mari Sasano, "Words Like Buckshot"; Guy Beauregard, "Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* and the Politics of Writing Diaspora."

(Goto 236). In terms of setting and subject matter, there is an observable degree of continuity between *Obasan* and *The Kappa Child*. *Obasan* has been described as a pioneer or settler narrative, itself a “revision of nineteenth-century Canadian immigrants' experiences of solitude and unbelonging in the New World” (Coral Ann Howells 17). Kogawa’s protagonists must, after all, contend with the remote wilderness of Slokan and the unforgiving Prairie climate (both socially and environmentally unforgiving), although *Obasan* does not explicitly refer to, or recuperate, a pre-existing pioneer narrative.

Whereas much has been written about Hiromi Goto’s work in relation to Kogawa, I explore the links between Goto, Margaret Atwood and Margaret Laurence, thus taking a slightly less critically worn path. Much has been written about each of them, but they are not often grouped together.⁴⁷ Each writer, I argue, grapples with a central and recurring question posed by their literary forebears: what makes for a good pioneer or who belongs here? The literary forebears themselves responded to earlier or contemporary pronouncements made about who was best suited to emigrate, to 'rough it in the bush' or on the prairies. In her introduction to *The Backwoods of Canada*, for example, Catherine Parr Traill responds directly to Dr. William Tiger Dunlop's *Statistical Sketches of Upper Canada for the Use of Emigrants, by a Backwoodsman*. Dunlop begins his pamphlet with a detailed discussion of who should come to the Canadas and who should not, but says relatively little of the female emigrant, an omission Parr Traill sets out to correct. Susanna

⁴⁷ See Eva Darias Beautell, “Hiromi Goto’s *Chorus of Mushrooms*: Cultural Difference, Visibility and the Canadian Tradition” (p.43). Beautell briefly compares these writers without entering into a sustained analysis.

Moodie's *Roughing It* qualifies and counters the promises made to the potential settler in private letters, public newspapers and pamphlets on the subject of emigration (Moodie 12). Not everyone, she insisted, could adapt to life in the bush. The gentry, she maintained, were “perfectly unfitted, by their previous habits and standing in society, for contending with the stern realities of emigrant life in the backwoods” (526). In the following few paragraphs, I sketch out some of the discourses, first official (Government of Canada) then unofficial (as articulated by Ingalls Wilder, Traill, and Moodie), that circulate around this question of suitability (i.e. who is best suited to emigrate and/or pioneer?) I read Laurence, Atwood, and particularly Goto against these declarations/evaluations of suitability.

Currently, applicants for Canadian citizenship are evaluated according to a points system. So many points are awarded for education, language ability (in Canada's two official languages), work experience (both inside and outside Canada), age, arranged employment and adaptability for a total score out of 100. The pass mark, as of 2010, is 67 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada). To immigrate to Canada is thus to meet a certain set of requirements, to check the right number of boxes. These requirements are classified and hierarchized in accordance with changing Canadian attitudes toward race or ethnicity, class, and gender. They do, however, remain boxes, rigid categories or receptacles for identity.

The characters of Goto's *The Kappa Child*, it is worth noting, do not easily fit into such categories. As such, they challenge the conditions of (Canadian) citizenship, one irrefutable condition being classification. Lisa Harris describes *The Kappa Child's* narrator as one who cannot be read or located, and therefore cannot be consumed, an apt metaphor

considering the central preoccupation of this thesis project. The narrator's gender is never clearly established. "I am *not* a guy" s/he corrects the Stranger though not affirming, I *am* a girl. The narrator replies to Gerald's question, "You a boy or a girl?" (Goto 168) with another question, "You Blood or Japanese?" (Goto, 168). "Humph"" replies Gerald without choosing to identify with one or the other. The narrator's Okasan, Emiko, who speaks little except to sigh or to apologize, best describes Goto's project (or at least one of many): "There's not always an answer" (Goto 231). As Guy Beauregard asserts, "Goto insists on the provisional nature of cultures and identities, and negotiates shifting and evasive Japanese Canadian feminist subject positions" (Beauregard 47). Goto's choice of crop, mushrooms, may certainly have to do with the fact that she is a mushroom farmer's daughter and the interpretive possibilities afforded by the seeming *impossibilities* of growing mushrooms in a prairie winter. Goto's choice also, I suspect, has something to do with mushrooms themselves. In the final chapter of *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Pollan rather convincingly argues, "Mushrooms are mysterious. We don't know the most basic things about mushrooms" (374)—like why some are toxic and/or hallucinogenic and others deliciously safe, how long they live, or what they look like.⁴⁸ Further, "We don't have the scientific tools to measure or even account for these fungi's unusual powers" (377). Goto's characters are much like mushrooms. They cannot be scientifically measured. They too are

⁴⁸ Mushrooms are only the visible part of a complex subterranean organism: "Mycologists can't dig up a mushroom like a plant to study its structure because its mycelium is too tiny and delicate to tease from the soil without disintegrating" (Pollan 374).

somewhat mysterious, their structure (what they are made up of) not so easily accounted for and categorized.

Though they did not wield the decisive powers of the immigration officer, Ingalls Wilder, Traill and Moodie did write for a wide audience of potential and actual emigrants and their children and grandchildren (if we are to take into account Ingalls Wilder's intended readership). They had points systems of their own, ones which privileged certain personality traits or characteristics. One needed to possess the right disposition, the right attitude, in order to survive the frontier, they emphasized. There was a frontier, in other words, which both required character and promoted character-building. Elizabeth Thompson, writing about the pioneer woman in English-Canadian fiction, lists five characteristics of the successful and/or well-equipped pioneer as discovered and defined by Catherine Parr Traill: "courage, resourcefulness, pragmatism, an ability to accept adverse circumstances with equanimity, and the strength to act decisively in the face of discomfort or danger" (Thompson 113).

Laurence, Atwood, and Goto, it should be noted, present us with characters who do not appear to possess such traits. Laurence's Morag, for example, admits to facing 'adverse circumstances' with anxiety rather than equanimity unlike "cool-as-cucumber" Catherine Parr Traill. "In cases of emergency, it is folly to fold one's hands and sit down to bewail in abject terror: it is better to be up and doing," a distressed Morag reads from her own copy of *The Canadian Settler's Guide* (Traill qtd. in Laurence 431).⁴⁹ Atwood's Moodie is,

⁴⁹ Deservedly so or not, Traill has acquired the reputation for unruffled and unwavering optimism, although as

famously, more than a bit ruffled. While in the bush, she feels “surrounded, stormed, broken / in upon” (Atwood 17) by her environment. When faced with danger, a bear approaching the family cabin for instance, she does not act decisively but is paralyzed, watching events unfold from a distance. The narrator's father in *The Kappa Child* is far from pragmatic. An easier crop, or one well-suited to the Prairie climate, like potatoes or corn, might have yielded financial security among other things. For this farmer and, incidentally, driver of a more than slightly used *Joan Dear* tractor, “it's Japanese rice or die” (Goto 192).⁵⁰

What makes for a good pioneer or who is best suited to emigrate? Another approach to these questions is to provide a new or different set of defining characteristics. Depending on the frontier (where, when, what), a pioneer might need to possess or develop different skills and qualities: imagination, organization, confidence, or, as Goto proposes below, determination and a commitment to do the impossible:

Dad dreamt a futile dream but one he never gave up. Is that respectable? Maybe it was the ultimate challenge, the last immigrant frontier: to do the impossible in a hostile land. Maybe he was just an asshole and couldn't admit he was wrong. Either way, the results are the same for the rest of us now. We drag around the baggage of our lives together. Even when we live apart. Baggage carried with nowhere to check it in. (Goto192)

Cynthia Sugars and Laura Moss have argued, this characterization of her is somewhat limiting and inaccurate. See *Canadian Literature in English: Texts and Contexts*.

⁵⁰ I do not wish to imply, however, that the pioneers of the earlier narratives were somehow more suited to the livelihood they chose (or were forced to undertake). Indeed, Laurence, Atwood and Goto each demonstrate an awareness of the very real hardships and failures expressed in the writings they have chosen to recuperate.

The narrator's father is certainly determined to succeed. The narrator herself, however, remains ambivalent about whether or not determination is a quality, at least as far as her father is concerned. In the second half of this excerpt, Goto describes what occurs as a result of her pioneer's obstinacy. The results may be understood in quantitative terms: refusal to plant a different crop equals no money. The baggage carried around by the narrator and her sisters refers back to the precariousness of the situation they found themselves in as children, always at the mercy of their father's violent and unpredictable mood swings, living “in the bitter halfway house of rural poverty” (Goto 192), and without a safe place to call home. As Sandra Almeida remarks in her close reading of this very excerpt, baggage that cannot be checked is a much used trope in diasporic narratives (Almeida 53). In this and in her other works, Goto's protagonists carry the effects of dislocation and homelessness, both material and metaphorical, into adulthood.

The narrator's father does, if only for one glorious, fleeting summer, achieve the impossible. A rainy season in lieu of the habitually dry and hot prairie summer produces a plentiful rice crop. In and among the rice plants are the “incredible footprints of some unknown creature” (Goto 230). The footprints might simply belong to a duck, suggests the skeptical narrator, or they might belong to a Kappa, as her father and mother believe. This commitment of the narrator's father to achieve what seems impossible along with the assistance of a “questionable creature from a different clime” (Goto, 231) mirrors/resonates with Goto's own commitment to acknowledge the absurd, the sublime, the “trap door to the impossible” in the everyday (“Trap Door to the Sublime” 29). Goto's writings are peopled

with ghosts⁵¹, aliens⁵², and monsters⁵³ who interact with, inhabit, or are embodied by, her protagonists while they eat cucumbers, plant rice, or sit on the toilet. The outlines of this 'trap door' are hinted at on the novel's front cover. Barely discernible among seemingly ordinary rice plants is the figure of the kappa. To look at it straight on is to miss it. The reader must tilt the book in the right light in order to catch a glimpse.

What makes for a good pioneer can be rephrased. It also means, who belongs here and *who does not*? In this next section of the chapter I look at that which separates those who belong from those who do not. In other words, I will look at the kinds of frontiers that are addressed, erected, negotiated, and dismantled in Goto's writings. I will be preoccupied with those who occupy the *wrong side* of the *frontier*, however "frontier" (between states, between ecosystems, between the real and the fantastic) and "wrong side" (aliens of the people, plant, or amphibian variety) are defined.

Aliens and Alienation

*I must be a mushroom,
Everyone keeps me in the dark
And feeds me horseshit.*
—Hiromi Goto, *Chorus of Mushrooms* (26)

Much of the literary criticism surrounding Laurence and Atwood's responses to Parr Trill and Moodie, respectively, is keenly focussed on their redefinition of the frontier. The

⁵¹ Old Lady Rodney's ghost.

⁵² "I have never seen an unidentified flying object. But I am fascinated by the idea of aliens" declares Hiromi Goto in "Alien Texts, Alien Seductions: The Context of Colour Full Writing."

⁵³ Consider Goto's book of short stories, *Hopeful Monsters*.

frontier, Elizabeth Thompson, Carols Ann Howells, and Fiona Sparrow stress, can refer to a state of mind, or at least require of its pioneers more mental than physical exertion. Morag of *The Diviners* is not “willing to let the sweat of hard labour gather on [her] brow” (Laurence 431). Her fields remain untilled and her garden is full of weeds and wildflowers or else, “how in hell could [she] get any writing done” (Laurence 57)? The frontier can refer to a geographical location, even an urban one. I am thinking here of Atwood's Moodie, on a bus along St. Clair Street in Toronto, noting the “unexplored wilderness of wires.” In short, the frontier is mutable. It can be, and has been, re-imagined.

The Ingalls family in *Little House on the Prairie* lives just beyond a frontier, near Independence, Kansas to be precise. They have settled in “Indian Territory,” land that has not legally been opened up for settlement. Their situation is somewhat unstable. They literally straddle the border between legal and illegal settlement and may have to leave this territory at any moment (and in fact do at novel's end). There are many frontiers in Goto's *The Kappa Child*. Goto's characters, as mentioned above, do inhabit a kind of borderland between the everyday and the impossible, the unimaginable (Almeida 60), between the “real” and the fantastic (Iwama 138). There are also many references to, and explorations of, illegal settlement in this novel, aliens in hostile territory. One illegal settler, or illegal alien, has taken up residence inside the narrator's own body. The narrator is pregnant with a Kappa child. I stretch the term “illegal” here to describe an unsought and, at least initially, unwelcome pregnancy, a pregnancy that did not, strictly speaking, come about through

sexual intercourse.⁵⁴ There are, of course, the extra-terrestrial aliens who, incidentally, abduct the narrator's mother. For the moment, however, I'd like to restrict this discussion to another kind of alien central to both *The Kappa Child* and *Chorus of Mushrooms*: the plant variety. This is, after all, a chapter about *food* production. Having spent quite a bit of time discussing the characteristics of the farmer/pioneer, I move to discuss his/her primary occupation: producing food.

B.C. poet, novelist, journalist, farmer, and author of *Trauma Farm: A Rebel History of Rural Life* Brian Brett describes, at length, the kinds of alien species that have taken up residence in, or that he himself has introduced to, his farm: broom, thistle, pecans, bananas, artichokes, hawthorn (Brett 73-74). These plants are not native to Salt Spring Island where the Bretts tend to their small, mixed farm. Brett is primarily concerned in these pages with the threats these introduced plants pose to native biodiversity. They may bring disease or insects with them. They might not have any predators and might, therefore, overwhelm native plants. As Brett writes, “The history of farming and gardening is the history of infecting landscapes with beautiful plants that turn into monsters in another habitat” (Brett 73).

I draw upon Brett's musings on the subject of farming and food production in Canada, in part, because they relate, in subject matter, to Goto's novels. Goto's farmers have brought in, and are engaged in producing, crops not native to the prairies: rice and mushrooms. In each case the grower must go to extreme lengths to harvest a crop. As Goto explains, on a

⁵⁴ But rather through a sumo wrestling match (123).

mushroom farm, such as the one figured in *Chorus of Mushrooms* “the space is enclosed and the temperature has to be maintained as well as the humidity—which is ludicrous, especially in a prairie winter” (“Cross-Cultural Creatures” 18). Growing rice requires water, of which there is never enough on the prairies. The narrator's father resorts to stealing water from neighbours, and designing, albeit never successfully implementing, a system of underground pipes to steal even more. In Goto's words, these agricultural ventures involve creating “alien environment[s]” on the prairies (“Cross-Cultural Creatures” 18). These alien plants (or fungi) in their own alien environments serve a purpose beyond that of backdrop to each novel. They allow Goto to work through, or draw attention to, a number of issues, some of which I shall attempt to articulate below.

First, reviewers and critics have picked up on Goto's interest (an interest which Goto herself confirms)⁵⁵ in depicting, and investigating, alien spaces, spaces that might represent safe havens, dangerous terrain, or a bit of both (Almeida 51; Iwama 138-9). She may be drawing upon a central trope of the *Little House* series here. In *Little House on the Prairie* the Ingalls family braves the unknown, “hostile Indian territory,” its inhabitants, its inclement weather. They take refuge in their snug little cabin with its gingham curtains, the furniture Pa built, and Ma's china doll shepherdess. She may also be referring to/playing with the Japanese social custom, *uchi-soto*: *uchi* (inside, home, familiar, us) and *soto* (outside, away, foreign, them). In *The Kappa Child*, Marilyn Iwama writes, “Goto reverses the idea of the impure, unsafe *soto* (outside) and the safety and purity of *uchi* (inside).

⁵⁵ see “Alien Texts, Alien Seductions.”

Home is a “defiled, dangerous place” (Iwama 138) with its “time-bomb compressed silences” (Goto 189), and its often spontaneous eruptions of violence. I would add to this observation of Iwama's that generally in Goto's writings much depends on who steps into, or makes use of, these spaces or considers them from without/outside.

Let us consider, for instance, the growing rooms at the Tonkatsu mushroom farm. The growing rooms are maintained at a constant temperature, regardless of the changing conditions outside. These micro-climates or controlled eco-systems are, ecologically speaking, alien spaces, surrounded as they are by a much colder and drier climate. Those who depend upon this crop, it must be noted, make use of and perceive these spaces in markedly different ways. For Naoe, who has spent most of her twenty years in Nanton, Alberta in a wooden chair at the bottom of the stairs of her daughter's household, a visit to the growing rooms proves regenerative. Goto likens Naoe's tiny, stooped, dry body to a starving plant in need of mushroom moisture (Goto, *Chorus of Mushrooms*, 84). She/the eighty-year-old grows tall and straight, her skin grows taut. But Naoe ultimately rejects safe, warm spaces such as this that could so easily become her prison (81). She walks back out into the snow and wind. The wind, once seeming hostile and unwelcoming to sheltered, seated Naoe, now loses its alien status: “We are sisters, you and I, and your cool breath upon my cheeks will comfort me” (81).

For Naoe's granddaughter, Muriel, these growing rooms with their smells of compost and formaldehyde that get into your clothes and permeate the walls of your house, represent all that is foreign: “For all that Mom had done to cover up our Oriental tracks, she'd

overlooked the one thing that people always unconsciously register in any encounter. We had been betrayed by what we smelled like. We had been betrayed by what we grew” (62). The Patricias, Joshs and Hanks who come into Muriel's life have literally sniffed out, she fears, her “Oriental tracks” (62). Scent, according to Goto, is a “site of culture” (“Trap Door to the Sublime” 29), a faculty that can detect, among other things, “foreignness.” These humid, carefully constructed and maintained growing rooms allow mushrooms to grow and thrive. Goto's characters visit this alien space, pass through it, work in it, and also embody it. Alien spaces are, much to Muriel's initial dismay, not limited by bricks and mortar. They are as mobile and as insidious as scent. They can be as close fitting, and as difficult to extricate oneself from, as skin.⁵⁶ What is illustrated in *Chorus of Mushrooms* runs through Goto's creative, critical and creative/critical writings—a preoccupation with one alien space in particular: race. In “Alien Texts, Alien Seductions,” for instance, Goto describes race as an “alien space” (264) that is composed (i.e. culturally constructed), imposed, and legitimized through “politics, law, education (nothing higher about this institution), administration, mass media, and yes, even its art” (265). “If you want out of alien space,” Goto adds “you must pretend not to notice daily references to the fact that you are an alien. And it doesn’t work. It can never work. Systemic racism dictates that an alien, no matter how genial, or easy-going, no matter how self-effacing and self-erasing, will always be recognized as such” (264).

⁵⁶ “I can never unzip my skin / and step into another” writes Goto in *The Body Politic*.

Sarah Musgrave offers us an approach to understanding alien plants that differs slightly from Brian Brett's threatening, monstrous, and invasive alien. Musgrave draws our attention to the political, economic, and social structures that work to naturalize, nationalize or *alien-ate* one crop in particular, Red Fife wheat. What Musgrave's article and Goto's novels share is an interest in aliens as "culturally-constructed phenomen[a]" (147). In her article, "Grain Elevated: The Fall and Rise of Red Fife Wheat," Musgrave sets out to trace the ways in which Red Fife wheat, not native to North America but to the Fertile Crescent (present-day Iraq, Iran, Syria, and so on), has become part of the national imaginary. Briefly summarized, this particular variety of wheat helped establish Canada's reputation as one of the world's top wheat producers. By the 1950s the wheat had been all but entirely forgotten, replaced by higher yield varieties "better suited to mass-market interests" (Musgrave 151). It has since been taken up by farmers, bakers, and members of the Slow Food Movement who wish to change the current status⁵⁷ of this "Canadian-identified," national food.

Rice and mushrooms have not had quite the same trajectory as Red Fife wheat. Or at least they do not have the same caché for the "granola-meets-gourmet" (Musgrave 152) set (unless we are talking about wild rice and foraged pine mushrooms) or those persons, businesses organizations, including the Heritage Wheat Project, the European Union and The World Trade Organization (Musgrave 148), interested in promoting or protecting local or "national foods." The mushroom, actively farmed in Canada—over 100 farms—is sold

⁵⁷ Legally speaking, Red Fife is no longer deemed fit for human consumption (Musgrave 155).

locally, nationally, and is exported abroad.⁵⁸ Rice farming (and I refer here to the paddy rice or rough rice grown in *The Kappa Child* and not the wild rice of Northern Ontario and Manitoba) remains a distant, future possibility or perhaps merely a long forgotten experiment.⁵⁹

While Musgrave is interested in the “players and processes that have shaped [the Red Fife] story for the last century and a half” (Musgrave 147), Goto is, I suggest, particularly attuned to the players and processes that shape those aliens who happen to grow plants (alien plants at that). There is no shortage of stories surrounding the origins of the arrival of Red Fife wheat in Canada. It may have come from the Ukraine. It may have crossed the ocean from Scotland, via Poland and Germany. It may have been deliberately sent or accidentally found (Musgrave 148-149). Regardless of how it arrived, this particular variety of wheat was soon given a new name, according to the naming practices of the time: Red, for its colour and Fife for the farmer who first planted it in Cobourg, Ontario, David Fife. This act of re-naming the alien is featured, variously, in Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*, beginning with the Vietnamese Boat People who have come to work at the Tonkatsu farm:

'Help me think of some nicknames for the people' Mom said, 'their real names are too hard to pronounce and no one will be able to remember them.' 'Okay,' I was eager, the thought of thinking up new names for grown-ups gave me a thrill of pleasure. I ran my finger down the rows of names, rolling foreign words on my tongue. Changing them. 'How about Jim?' I asked. 'How about Joe?' (Goto 34)

⁵⁸ Over 80 million lbs/ annum exported to the United States. See *Mushrooms Canada* (mushrooms.ca).

⁵⁹ The southwestern Ontario climate and soil conditions will support certain varieties of rice, according to studies and field trials conducted by the Ontario Research Federation in 1967. To date there have not been any new studies related to growing rice as an alternative crop in Canada (Andrews).

Whatever histories that were attached to their first given names have been erased, or, as Goto suggests, “swallowed into [the new] names” (Goto 38). There are many instances in both *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *The Kappa Child* in which “one name is dropped and another assumed” (Goto, *Chorus of Mushrooms*, 38). Naoe drops her married name, Dai, and recovers her maiden name, Kiyokawa, when she makes the move to (English) Canada. Following her departure from the Tonkatsu farm, Naoe assumes the name, Purple. The Purple Mask becomes her rodeo name (if the eighty-year old does, in fact, engage in bullriding). Muriel Tonkatsu is renamed, Murasaki (purple), by her grandmother. Keiko, Muriel's mother goes by Kay. Her father's name, Sam, may have come from Isamu (though this is not explicitly stated). The unnamed narrator of *The Kappa Child*, renames her sisters following their move to the prairies, Slither, Pig Girl or PG, and Mouse. Names, in Goto's writings, are *provisional*. “An easy thing to change a name,” she writes (Goto, *Chorus of Mushrooms*, 38).

There are striking parallels between food columnist Sarah Musgrave's investigation of Red Fife and Hiromi Goto's literary texts. What they are both talking about here, what connects one writer to the other, is the concept of place-based labelling. In food studies, such labelling (also referred to as *terroir* or *appellation*) refers to the formal acknowledgement of the land (soil conditions, climate) and the people that/who produce a particular foodstuff. There is a certain sense of fixity attached to this term. We are, after all, talking about an essentially anti-global food movement, one that seeks to defend, promote, and maintain the idea of an *origine contrôlée*. Both writers present us with subjects/objects

who submit to, or take on, labels, but who are also quite mobile. Red Fife is a food on the move, as Musgrave's history of, and predictions for, the grain clearly illustrate. A “place and patrimoine” (Cooke and Rabinovitch) has been assigned to it, (the prairies, the breadbasket of the world) by the bakers, farmers, restaurateurs, slow food movement activists who wish to preserve this “taste of place.” Musgrave, however, emphasizes the grain's multiple origins, and its continually evolving status. There is contradiction, as Musgrave points out, between the increased interest in the geographical origin of foodstuffs, as borders between nations become more blurred, as such foodstuffs are distributed on an increasingly international scale. Goto's characters, as I have indicated above, are given, or chose for themselves, labels that change depending on the ever-shifting places they occupy.⁶⁰ Goto's characters may be continually on the move (and in various ways) but they do not, as I argue below, remain unmoved by the place, the land, they occupy. In the final section of this chapter, I consider Goto's oeuvre through a particular lens: its “politics of location.”

Location, Location, Location

My understanding of the “politics of location” is informed by Pamela Banting's essay⁶¹ in Sue Sorenson's *West of Eden*—a collection of essays on Canadian prairie literature. Banting is undoubtedly responding to Adrienne Rich's “Notes Toward a Politics of Location,” given at the *Conference on Women, Feminist Identity and Society*, 1984. The

⁶⁰ I understand place to mean both physical locality and social standing.

⁶¹ “Deconstructing the Politics of Location: The Problem of Setting in Prairie Fiction and Non-Fiction.”

term, location in the “politics of location” refers to the positionings⁶² one occupies in time and space (Lorenz-Meyer 2), while “politics” are the “specific effects and consequences [of these positionings] . . . that need to be analysed and historicised” (Lorenz-Meyer 2). Banting here (and Rich for that matter)⁶³ insists on the importance of analysing and historicizing the effects of a subject’s physical, geographical location (in this case, the prairies). How do landscape, terrain, soil conditions, and weather inform, or are informed by, those who inhabit it, Banting asks (Banting 49). Goto is attentive to these very concerns in her writing.

Goto's characters are physically affected by their surroundings. The aridity of the southern prairies dries out their bodies (Naoe, *Chorus of Mushrooms*), and makes breathing difficult for some (narrator's father, *The Kappa Child*). They are bent and buffeted about by the wind and prostrated by the heat when, in summer, it is “[h]otter than an Easy-Bake oven” (Goto, *The Kappa Child*, 161). The weather affects their moods. They are “sweaty and cranky” (Goto, *The Kappa Child*, 161) with the heat while unexpected rain makes them laugh and “whoop with joy” (Goto, *The Kappa Child*, 275).

If terrain does indeed inform identity, the shifting and “unpredictable terrain” (“Cross-Cultural Creatures” 17) of Goto's writings must be acknowledged. Banting describes prairie literature as rife with references to, and descriptions of, aridity and drought (which have not been thoroughly explored by critics she adds). These references

⁶² I like Lorenz-Meyer’s use of the term “positionings” over “positions” here as it suggests movement/change.

⁶³ “A place on the map is also a place in history within which as a woman, as a Jew, a lesbian, a feminist I am created and trying to create” (Rich 212).

are certainly present in Goto's oeuvre. There is not enough water to flood the paddy fields. There is barely enough water to bathe in. And yet, and I draw from Banting's own description of Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* here, "Water leaks everywhere" (Banting 54) in these prairie tales of hers. Water connects Goto's characters with childhoods lived in Japan, those "years disremembered and half a world away" (Goto, *The Kappa Child*, 127). It connects, or introduces them (the second generation) to Japanese myth and folklore. The legend of Izanami and Izanagi, as told to Muriel Tonkatsu by her grandmother Naoe, begins on a bridge over the "oily water" (*Chorus of Mushrooms*, 29) that is earth. The narrator of *The Kappa Child* and her sisters grow up listening to tales of the amphibious creature for whom the novel is named. The kappa is known, variously, as a water god, a "water sprite (imp); a river monster; an excellent swimmer" (*The Kappa Child*, 277). It has a bowl-shaped head. In this bowl is water, the source of the creature's supernatural powers (Goto, *The Kappa Child*, 277).

Parched grasslands characterize the everyday life of these characters. With water comes magic and mythology. This unpredictable terrain chartered by Goto is intended in part, as Goto explains, for the reader's benefit: "I don't want to have complacent and relaxed-almost-falling-asleep readers. I want my readers to feel unsettled" ("Cross-Cultural Creatures" 17). There is no opportunity for the reader to settle as he or she is shuttled back and forth between narrators (Muriel and Naoe), between time and place (the narrator of *The Kappa Child's* childhood on the rice farm and adulthood collecting shopping carts in the

city, Calgary), between stories. Perhaps Goto is also trying to establish that her characters are not only informed by but also inform their surroundings.

Walking through his farm, and contemplating the various invasive species that now reside there, Brian Brett concludes, “I am the most dangerous alien invader of all” (Brett, 75). He has had, he admits, a direct hand in altering the landscape. He is concerned, he underscores with this statement, with the effects of settling and cultivating the land. Not unlike Brett, Goto too is preoccupied with the settler-invader's perception, or use, of the land. It is a complicated and sometimes uneasy relationship to say the least. Influenced by *Little House* (her multiple and evolving readings of it), as well as by her own explorations of, and experience working on, the rice farm, the young narrator of *The Kappa Child* is convinced only of the irony and the futility of working the land: the irony of not having enough water on land that was once an ancient ocean, the futility of spending an entire summer, all day, every day, clearing fields, picking up rocks that “were meant to lie on the earth in the first place” (Goto 182). The land, she concludes, is beautiful and functional in its own right, without the need of human intervention: “Had been beautiful long before Laura Ingalls ever noticed, before her Pa plowed it under (Goto 168). On both farms, in both *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *The Kappa Child*, it is also worth noting, there is a tremendous gap between what the farmer requires of the land and what the land can actually provide. The result? Disappointingly dry tambos, hermetically sealed mushroom farms, and lush chemically fertilized fields (Goto, *The Kappa Child*, 197) dot Goto's otherwise arid prairie landscapes.

Both Brett and Goto share a certain ecological or eco-critical sensibility, an interest in mapping out the ways in which the settler-invader adapts to, or simply adapts, his/her surroundings. Farming and gardening and settlement are not, they emphasize, neutral activities. At first glance, *Little House* does not seem to express such sensibilities. The novel is more likely to be described as a sentimental, though largely uncritical, portrayal of settlement. As far as Charles Ingalls is concerned, it is only a matter of time before this “empty,” and therefore appealing, territory will be officially open for settlement. Why not get in before the rush? In a covered wagon, with family and belongings packed up and dog in tow, Pa sets out to stake his claim where it suits him, builds a house, begins to till the soil and plants both crops and a vegetable garden (with help from Ma, Mary, Laura, Carrie and neighbour Mr. Edwards of course). It is as simple as that.

And yet, this wide expanse of prairie grassland already bears traces of those who regulate its boundaries, inhabit it or once inhabited it. It is not so empty after all, as Ingalls Wilder is careful to point out, and, incidentally, as the narrator of *The Kappa Child* happily discovers on her own family's plot of land: The prairies are “full of noise and presence. Not empty” (Goto 167). There are the “Indians,” the animals (birds, bugs, rabbits, deer, gophers—much to Mary, Laura and Jack's delight—and panthers), an increasing number of settlers, and the army, who patrols this as yet unopened⁶⁴ territory, all of whom, Ingalls Wilder stresses, leave traces of their occupation: nests, tracks, trails, camps, log cabins, barns,

⁶⁴ As in, not yet open to settlement.

fields (marked out, tilled and plowed), vegetable gardens, family pets, beads, buckets, fire pits, fireplaces and countless other remnants of everyday life.

Within this body of texts one finds detailed accounts of the complex and interconnected relationships that do, and can potentially, develop between the settler-invader, indigenous inhabitant (of all shapes and species), and the land upon which s/he takes root. Central to the relationships depicted above are questions of power. Whose land is this, these authors ask. Whose interests should be protected? Who is seen to have the right to this space (Calder 244)?⁶⁵ Goto is preoccupied by these questions, which she approaches from a number of different angles on a number of different occasions. The land belongs to those who live off it. The land belongs to those who work it, who attempt “to do the impossible in a hostile land” (Goto 192), like Charles Ingalls and the narrator of *The Kappa Child's* father. The land belongs to those who came before: “When we station-wagoned our way to the prairies, moving east instead of the traditional west, I didn't really think about the Indians, First Nations or otherwise. I didn't think” (Goto 189). There is the danger, Goto insists, of not asking questions, of simply claiming a space, plowing it under, without considering what or who came before. The land belongs to those who, by all accounts, should not be there in the first place: the unexpected ones, a kappa child or two, the frogs, the salamander among the mushrooms in *Chorus of Mushrooms*, and all other amphibious creatures who inhabit Goto's otherwise arid Alberta landscape. Goto writes stories about learning to live with the alien (in whatever form it comes), to share space with

⁶⁵ I borrow these rather pertinent questions from Alison Calder in “Why shoot the gopher? Reading the Politics of a Prairie Icon.”

it (even if it occasionally kicks you in the spleen or touches you on the tongue with its tiny hand).

Conclusion

Both *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *The Kappa Child*, I propose, may be read as valid and thought-provoking responses to Darryl Whetter's frustration with 'relentlessly rural CanLit'. Whetter writes,

Setting stories for urban audiences in (a) rural areas and/or (b) the past is another Canadian example of admiring something from away. Like an offshore queen or a neighbouring superpower, the rural past is elsewhere and well known, which is all that seems required by the CanCulture establishment.

The two novels in question address and challenge at least four aspects of that last excerpted sentence: that the rural and/or rural past is singular, elsewhere, known, and a staple of the CanCulture establishment. Now urbanites, Muriel of *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *The Kappa Child's* narrator make regular trips to their rural roots, both in person and in memory. These rural roots inform their city life—just as their urban “city-slicker” (210) habits creep into their rural returns. As the narrator of *The Kappa Child's* critical engagement with *Little House on the Prairie* demonstrates, there is not one singular rural experience. Laura Ingalls' nineteenth-century migration(s) is not the same as the narrator's twentieth-century century eastbound experiment. They are separated by time, place, and as Goto is at pains to point out, ideology. Even within the same time and place, there are subtle and not so subtle differences between the protagonists' rural experience—not just crop choice—and that of their neighbours. The well-known (read clichéd) rurality to which Whetter refers does not

have a place in Goto's unpredictable terrain, peopled as it is with fantastical characters/creatures, and unexpected events. As for the CanCulture establishment, it is not, as Goto asserts, a monolithic entity but a productive, flexible space in which there is room for a plethora of voices.

There is an abundance of farms on the Canadian literary landscape. My question, which brings us into the next chapter, is where are the supermarkets? I am working under the influence of Rachel Bowlby here, who in *Carried Away: The Invention of Modern Shopping* remarks upon the "extraordinary infrequency" (Bowlby 195) with which supermarkets appear in literature. There is certainly much to read *in* the supermarket (if not of): advertisements, labels, prices, magazines at the checkout counter, and paperbacks. In spite of this proliferation of text(s), the supermarket is not recognized as a place for "serious writing and reading" (Jarrell qtd. in Bowlby 193), or critical thinking for that matter. The supermarket is, or at least has long been represented in anti-supermarket literature as, the "antithesis of culture" (Bowlby 189). It is a space in which *Penguins* or *Livres de Poche* share shelf space with spatulas, for they are all one and the same, cheap commodities. In this next chapter I shall look at the writings (of the literary and of the cultural variety) that feature shopping spaces, including the supermarket, that require, provoke, promote, and allow for *serious* writing, reading, and thinking about "vegetable politics" (Goto 91) as it were.

Chapter 2: Procurement

The Literary Supermarket

Reading Rachel Bowlby's investigation of "the reader in the supermarket,"⁶⁶ I came across her rather thought-provoking term, "literary supermarket." What is a literary supermarket? For many, it is a contradiction in terms. The task, the mundane chore even, of pushing one's cart up and down the aisles of a somewhat utilitarian, barn-like building to the tune of elevator music is not art. It does not inspire poetic feeling on the part of the consumer, and/or writer. The argument that culture and commerce are antithetical to one another is a longstanding and well-documented one.⁶⁷ In *Fiction and the Reading Public*, for instance, Queenie Leavis holds "Big Business" responsible for "destroy[ing] among the masses a desire to read anything which by the widest stretch could be included in the classification of literature" (Leavis 17). The "Big Business" to which Leavis refers (in 1932) is not (yet) the supermarket.⁶⁸ For Bowlby, there is a connection between Big Business (read supermarket) and literature. She believes that these two elements come together in more complex and noteworthy ways. It is not simply a matter of one (supermarket) negatively affecting the other (literature and the reading of it). For Bowlby the term, "literary supermarket," is a reminder that the supermarket is a space *in* which one reads. The consumer is inundated with an abundance of reading material: from the flyers in

⁶⁶ A chapter in Bowlby's monograph, *Carried Away: The Invention of Modern Shopping*.

⁶⁷ F.R. Leavis, *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture*; Queenie Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*; Horkheimer and Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception"; *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; T. S. Eliot, *Notes Toward the Definition of Culture*, to name a few.

⁶⁸ The supermarket arrives in Britain after the Second World War (Bowlby 153).

the front entrance of the store, to the advertisements and food labels in the aisles, to magazines at the checkout counter. The supermarket is also a space *of* which one reads: in writings about culture, and in literature. As Bowlby demonstrates throughout her study, the supermarket itself is something which can and must be *read*. It is not quite so transparent a space as one might initially imagine. Artifice and simulacra are everywhere in the supermarket. In this arena of representation, food is narrated, staged for the consumer—who may not be attentive to these backstage factors.

I take Bowlby's term and her definition(s) of it as a starting point, as a frame of reference, for my own explorations of what it means to read in, and of, this space. Bowlby bemoans the "extraordinary infrequency" with which the supermarket appears in literature (Bowlby 195). "There is no supermarket classic to compare with what Zola's *Au Bonheur des Dames* did for the department store in 1883" she writes (195). To Bowlby's readings of supermarket-inflected writings—*White Noise* (Don DeLillo), "Supermarket in California" (Allen Ginsberg), "The Rector's Wife" (Joanna Trollope),—I add *Chorus of Mushrooms* (Hiromi Goto), *This Body* (Tessa McWatt), and *Pig Tails 'n Breadfruit* (Austin Clarke), on account of their depictions and discussions of the supermarket or, more generally, food procurement. These latter texts, I propose, complement or push against cultural writings on the subject. I refer here to Michael Pollan's supermarket pastoral, Lucy Long's culinary tourism, Raj Patel, Brian Halweil, Robert Polack, and Adam Leith Gollner's various approaches to supermarket simulacra, as well as Jean Baudrillard, David Boyle, Philip Vannini and Patrick Williams' understandings of authenticity. This chapter is about

furthering our understanding of the literary supermarket—as a space in which stories abound, and as a practice of interpreting those stories.

I should, at this point, say a few words about the shopping space to which I refer. The supermarket, an American innovation, came into being during the first decades of the twentieth century. Larger than the traditional grocery store, the supermarket offered a greater variety of goods to the customer at a smaller price: “pile the goods high and sell them cheap” (Uhrich qtd. in Bolwby 140). The customer was asked to take on a more active role in this shopping space. Full service would no longer be provided. S/he could simply help herself to a basket or cart and fill it with whatever s/he desired (or could reach). There is, as James Twitchell reminds us, a great deal of work involved in this self-service supermarket: “The only thing you don't do is stock the shelves” (125). While acknowledging the supermarket's American roots, I struggle to provide a geographical context for the supermarkets of which I write in this chapter. Many do business in more than one country and typically draw their supplies from major transnational food producers. And yet the supermarket has a dual personality. As Kim Humphery observes, “One can now visit a supermarket anywhere in the world and feel a familiarity but recognise also a particularity relating to the layout, the goods available, the people within it and the national and local cultures outside it” (72). In this chapter, while recognizing the uniformity of this shopping space, I shall also be attentive to some of the particularities of the Canadian context in which I write.

Supermarket Pastoral and Over-the-Counter Culture

The first part of this chapter brings together two very different depictions and discussions of the literary supermarket: Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*. What Pollan and Goto share is their insistence that food and stories are intimately connected, yet their notions of what these stories mean, and why they matter, are strikingly different and will do well to be considered together. As a journalist, Pollan's primary concern is to make things plain, to render legible what he calls "storied food." For Goto, there is such a thing as too much legibility or perceived legibility in the supermarket.

"I enjoy shopping at *Whole Foods* nearly as much as I enjoy browsing a good bookstore, which, come to think of it, is probably no accident: Shopping at *Whole Foods* is a literary experience too"(134) writes Michael Pollan. There is a reason, more than one actually, why supermarket shopping reminds Pollan of browsing a good bookstore. The two shopping spaces, supermarket and bookstore, have a great deal in common. Their internal layout, the way in which the merchandise is stocked and presented, is similar. This has not always been the case. Before the turn of the twentieth century, buying food at a grocery store meant lining up at a counter and allowing the clerk to locate the items on one's shopping list. Bookstores were first to offer customers something very much like self-service (Bowlby 193). Only in a bookstore could customers browse shelves for themselves. Supermarket executives made use of this design, this particular brand of "spatial management" (Humphery 86) in their stores. More recently, bookstores, of the big box variety, have "taken a leaf or two out of the supermarket's trade manuals" (Bowlby 193),

buying and trading books at a high volume, thereby lowering the cost for the customer: economies of scale, in other words. There is, as Rachel Bowlby tells us, a considerable overlap between book-selling and food-selling (Bowlby 194). Food-sellers have even become book-sellers in their own right. At *Provigo* or any of its supermarket siblings, *Your Independent Grocer* and *Loblaws*,⁶⁹ for instance, one can find an entire aisle dedicated to reading material: cookbooks, magazines, word searches, self-help books, novels, and children's literature.

One may read in and of this space in a variety of different ways—though I limit my focus here in this first part of the chapter to a literary subgenre Pollan calls “Supermarket Pastoral.” Pastoral means many things. It refers to a person or thing associated with spiritual care, to the countryside, and to the representation of that countryside through music, painting, and literature (per OED). Pollan draws upon pastoral, the literary convention, in his readings of the organic food labels on offer at *Whole Foods*. “Organic” on these food labels, Pollan argues, “conjures up a rich narrative” of farms, fields, contented livestock, shepherds, cowherds, a hero (the family farmer), and even a villain (agribusiness) (Pollan 137). As a consumer, Pollan's impulse is to praise the literary label. “It’s the evocative prose,” he writes, “that makes this food really special, elevating an egg or chicken breast or bag of arugula from the realm of ordinary protein and carbohydrates into a much headier experience” (Goto 134). *Whole Foods'* write-up of its *Indiana Drizzled Cinnamon Sugar Kettlecorn* is a particularly potent example. A sumptuous yet socially responsible treat:

⁶⁹ All three companies belong to Loblaw Companies Limited.

Rock your taste buds with this sweet, crunchy, handcrafted, kettle-cooked popcorn treat, drizzled with sinfully smooth white chocolate and spiced with premium cinnamon from Sri Lanka. Popcorn, Indiana and Whole Foods Market[®] partnered to create this exclusive flavor using organic sweeteners, flavors and spices. Our Whole Trade[®] Guarantee ensures environmental responsibility, fair wages and a healthy working environment for producers in developing countries.

For Pollan, good prose stimulates the appetite. It also opens the pocketbook. Story makes food more palatable to the buyer. Shoppers are “willing to pay more for a good story” (Pollan 135). Storied food is not just a marketing gimmick, Pollan insists, but a “new politics of food” (Pollan, “The Way We Live Now: Produce Politics”), where the consumer expects to touch, taste perhaps, and above all read his/her food and account for his/her choices.

Apart from their evocative, stimulating prose, food labels are literary, Pollan writes, because what's written on them possesses “complex, aesthetic, emotional, and even political dimensions” (Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, 134) that require, he suggests, the skills of a journalist or literary critic to interpret them (136). Pollan approaches these “texts”—the organic food labels found in *Whole Foods*—as would a journalist, pulling back the proverbial curtain so that his readers may have a look at the facts behind or between the lines of the storied food label. Pollan, I propose, is also working within what Terry Gifford calls the third use of the pastoral, or pastoral in the critical sense.⁷⁰ Gifford refers to the kind of writing that critiques the convention, for its overly simplified, idealized representation of life in the country (Gifford 2). Pollan puts what he calls supermarket

⁷⁰ Pastoral, as defined by Terry Gifford: First, pastoral is a “historical form with a long tradition which began in poetry, developed into drama and more recently could be recognized in novels” (1). Broadly speaking, pastoral “refers to any literature that describes the country with an implicit or explicit contrast to the urban” (2) and is “usually associated with a celebratory attitude towards what it describes” (2).

pastoral, and/or grocery lit, to the test. The stories one finds on food labels do not, he insists, always “hold up under close reading and journalistic scrutiny” (Pollan 139). They fail in his estimation when they are more fiction than fact. Choosing to trace select items from his shopping cart back to the farm from whence they came, Pollan discovers that Rosie's home, for instance, (I refer here to his named, sustainably farmed, free-range chicken of choice) “turns out to be more animal factory than farm. She lives in a shed with twenty thousand other Rosies who, aside from their certified organic feed, live lives little different from that of any other industrial chicken” (140). The successful stories, according to Pollan, are those that leave less to the imagination and recount or report, in a most transparent way, the “means of production” (“The Way We Live Now: Produce Politics”). Pollan's watchword, in other words, is legibility. Ideally, the consumer would not need the literary label to connect with his or her food sources. “The label itself,” writes Pollan, “is really just an imperfect substitute for direct observation of how a food is produced” (*The Omnivore's Dilemma*, 137).

To Pollan, the label writer is a kind of poet whose texts are densely packed with both information and also verbal play. He studies these wordy labels—their language, their fictions, their multi-layered meanings—and discovers that the label, while seemingly transparent, is also deliberately and/or necessarily opaque. These labels rely greatly on the imagination of the consumer or reader. Their narratives necessarily edit an ever-lengthening and increasingly complex chain of food production, processing, packaging, and distribution. There is simply not enough space on such a label to tell this story. The narrative of a product's provenance is, therefore, a carefully constructed one.

Free range, for example, conjures up images of large pastures, green grass, contented livestock and poultry, but this term is not legally defined or regulated in Canada. Further, as Carly Weeks reminds us in her *Globe and Mail* article on the topic, “Canada's harsh winters . . . make it difficult to let chickens outside.” Rosie's farm allows its Rosies out only once they are 5 weeks old. They are slaughtered two weeks later. Perhaps the answer is to regulate such terms under federal laws so that they are no longer just adjectives but must comply with a set of rigorous requirements. This, one might argue, makes them less open to interpretation, less available for manipulation. But, as Pollan points out, even a word like organic, one which is “owned or very carefully defined and regulated by the government”—both in the U.S. and in Canada⁷¹—is a slippery term that has its supporters but also its paradoxes, its dissenters, its alternatives.⁷² The organic industry may be regulated, but the organic movement is a different beast altogether. “Legibility,” Pollan discovers, “is in the eye of the beholder” (187). What is clear to one reader may not be to

⁷¹ According to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's press secretary, Megan Murdoch, “Canada's Organic Products Regulations (OPR), which [came] into force on June 30, 2009, set out rigorous standards for the certification of products as organic by accredited certification bodies. Products that meet the production requirements and contain at least 95 per cent organic content may be labelled as “organic” and feature the new Biologique Canada Organic Logo.”

⁷² Alternatives include *beyond organic* and *biodynamic* agriculture.

Beyond organic, as defined by Joel Salatin: “We never call ourselves organic—we call ourselves ‘beyond organic.’ . . . There are a whole lot more variables in making the right decision than does the chicken feed have chemicals or not. Like what sort of habitat is going to allow that chicken to express its physiological distinctiveness? A ten-thousand-bird shed that stinks to high heaven or a new paddock of fresh green grass every day? Now which chicken shall we call ‘organic’? I’m afraid you’ll have to ask the government because now *they* own that word” (Salatin qtd, in Pollan, 132).

Biodynamic: “Designating or relating to a method of organic agriculture based on the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), in which the farm is viewed as a single self-sustaining entity, and which incorporates certain astrological and spiritual principles” (per OED).

the other. Pollan places a great deal of emphasis on the reader of these food labels—on their supermarket literacy, on their level of engagement with these very compact texts.

Food labels tell stories. They have a certain poetic sensibility, but they are also an advertisement. While they evoke the pastoral with sometimes purple prose, they are also selling it. I move here from Pollan to Goto to explore what else is for sale in these literary food labels, apart from all things pastoral. Goto's novel *Chorus of Mushrooms* is about, amongst other things, the packaging and/or marketing of ethnicity for consumption. Goto brings her characters, and her readers, along to the supermarket so that they might experience, read about, and confront this kind of commodification. The following scene details an adult Muriel/Murasaki Tonkatsu's visit to *Safeway*. *Safeway*, as Roy Miki has observed in his close reading of this scene, is not a safe place (Miki). For the narrator/shopper, safety means invisibility, being left to her own devices, without having to engage in, or discuss, “vegetable politics” (Goto 91). This is not what happens:

I was standing in the ethnicChinesericenoodleTofupattiesexotic vegetable section of Safeway. Fingering, squeezing stroking Japanese eggplants for firmness, taut shiny purple skin and no rust spots. I love shopping. The touching of vegetables. Lingering of fruits and tap tapping my fingers on watermelon husks. Just minding my business and choosing eggplants. “What is that, exactly? I’ve always wondered.” I looked up from my reverie and a face peered down on me. A kindly face. An interested face. “It’s an eggplant.” “Oh really!” Surprisewonderjoy. “How wonderful! This is what *our* eggplants look like. They are so different!” She held up a round almost-black solid eggplant. Bitter skin and all. She looked up at the handmade signs above the vegetable with the prices marked in dollars per pound.

[LOO BOK \$.89/lb—they read—BOK CHOY \$.49/lb; SUEY CHOY \$.69/lb]⁷³

⁷³ These signs are illustrated by Goto.

“What are they called in *your* language?” I looked up at the signs. “I don’t speak Chinese,” I said. “Oh. I’m sorry.” Sorry for what? I wondered. And there, right above the eggplants where all the other handwritten signs were:

[JAPANESE EGGPLANTS - \$2.09/lb]

I took the long and graceful eggplant I still held in my hand and smacked it smartly against the sign. “Here. Here it is,” I said. And turned my back to examine hakusai leaves. Suey Choy in Chinese according to the Safeway produce staff. Leave me in peace. Let a woman choose her vegetables in peace. Vegetable politics. (90-1)

“Vegetable politics” is a somewhat open-ended term. It could refer to the environmental costs of a large and long-distance food distribution system, the traceability of food, the question of personal responsibility in the g/local (global/local) marketplace or the machinery, and/or the exploitative structures of food production and consumption. For Goto in *Chorus of Mushrooms*, “vegetable politics” has to do with vegetables, the people who sell them, the people who eat them, and how some people are made to feel like vegetables, i.e., too easily identified, categorized, and/or consumed. Too legible, or seemingly legible, in other words. In this scene Muriel is a kind of “press-out Oriental-type girl” (62). Her shape, in other words, has already been determined, no alterations required (or possible). As *an* Asian, she is called upon to act as an “authority” on Japanese eggplants. I use scare quotes here to underscore the fact that whatever “authority” Muriel has over Japanese eggplants is misidentified, grossly oversimplified by those, like the “kindly interested” shopper, who unwittingly bestow this kind of qualified cultural authority. Perhaps she should stick to shopping at the “Oriental Food Store” in South East Calgary. At least in this specialty foods shop, Muriel is not *an* Asian. She is simply Sam's

daughter: “Hello, you must be Sam Tonkatsu's daughter. I can see the family resemblance, nice to meet you” (135). Neither store, I must stress, allows Muriel to “choose her vegetables in peace” (91). Neither store is free, or safe, from “vegetable politics” (91). Rather than polarize the supermarket and the specialty foods shop into “unsafe” and “safe” spaces respectively, I propose that wherever there is food, Muriel is confronting, laying claim to, performing, submitting to, challenging, or being challenged by her identities.

The labels included in the excerpt above do not resemble those storied labels under Pollan’s scrutiny. He is specifically looking at *Whole Foods* which, he suggests, provides him with the most cutting-edge grocery lit. These *Safeway* signs, as mediated and drawn by Goto, seem to give us only two pieces of information: the name of the product and the price per pound. If we approach this label with Pollan's particular brand of analysis in mind, we might propose that this kind of bare-bones food label is the product of a cheap food economy, one which reinforces the idea of low price for the consumer and high yield for the farmer. But I would argue that these labels reveal even more than the principles of supply and demand. Let us consider some of the choices that have been made by the produce staff of this supermarket. The food names are transliterated into Romanized Cantonese (*suey choy*, though Muriel calls it by its Japanese name *hakusai*) or written in English but given a national designation (Japanese Eggplants). There is a spelling mistake—*Loo Bok* is *Lo Bok*—which hints at the staff’s lack of familiarity with this vegetable. These foods are housed within what Muriel calls the “ethnicChinesericenoodleTofupattiesexotic” section of the store. The words “ethnic” and “exotic” bookend a list of food items. Anything outside this section, I assume, must just be

food. Feta cheese and pasta are found in the dairy and dry goods sections respectively. Rice, noodles, tofu patties, on the other hand, are furnished with adjectives: “ethnic” and “exotic.” They are *othered* by these adjectives. As Roy Miki points out, the lack of spaces between these words “performs the textually visible equivalent of an indiscriminate fusing of culturally-specific particularities into a distilled abstraction” (Miki, 59). Muriel's own culturally specific particularities are abridged by the “kindly, interested” shopper. That Muriel was brought up in Nanton, Alberta, on a diet of glazed ham and mashed potatoes, wieners and beans, is not a matter for discussion in this space.

Goto does not simply replicate or mimetically reproduce, *Safeway* “as it is.” If Goto were interested in realism, she might not have had Muriel communicate telepathically with her missing, bull-riding, 100-year-old grandmother. And yet this contemporary Canadian novel, a product of the time and place in which it was written, reads well alongside other texts and elements of contemporary Canadian supermarket culture. Let us briefly consider, as an example, the *President's Choice Memories of . . .* collection of products. Pollan believes that *Whole Foods* is where the stories are. I propose that no more is the practice of storytelling more visible and more abundant than with this Loblaw in-store brand, *President's Choice*.

Most products on supermarket shelves, Robert Polack informs us, are presented to the consumer without reference to where they came from. A package of baking chocolate, for instance, “typically ‘faces inward’ away from the worlds of its origins toward the world of the consumer” (Polack). The *Memories of . . .* line of products is one exception to this “unspoken rule of retail marketing” (Polack). Here there is a deliberate referencing of

origins. One can acquire *Memories of Morocco, Argentina, Thailand, Portugal, Korea, Bengal, Tuscany, Szechuan, Montego Bay, Lyon, Kobe, and Dad's Grill*. And yet, as Charlene Elliott observes in her own recent investigation of PC product labels, this matter of “origins” is rather more complicated than one might initially imagine.

Take *PC Memories of San Francisco* for instance, which recreates the taste of San Francisco's Imperial Palace Chinese Restaurant. . . . it is a Canadian company⁷⁴ manufacturing an Oriental flavour principle based on [Dave] Nichols'⁷⁵ “memory” of a U.S. restaurant rendition of an “original” Chinese sauce. . . . By the time it reaches the table as a topping for asparagus, the sauce is pure simulacrum. (Elliott 188)

Who, I wonder, is this interpretation of a memory of an interpretation for? A certain consumer is, in fact, targeted here; the buyer of *sweet and spicy tagine sauce* is a kind of culinary tourist. Can one be a tourist in the supermarket? Much depends on how you define this activity. Perhaps one need not engage in international travel in order to be one. Culinary tourism, as defined by Lucy Long, is the “intentional, exploratory participation in the foodways of an other—participation including the consumption, preparation, and presentation of a food item, cuisine, meal system or eating style considered to belong to a culinary system not one's own” (Long 21). This *Memories of*. . . line of products, these “renderings of cultural dishes” according to Paul Uys, Vice-President of Fresh and Loblaw Brands, are marketed to the “diverse ethnic communities that make up our country” so that they can “find the tastes of home right at their local Loblaw grocery store” (Uys qtd. in Gavelle). The consumer looking for a taste of home might very well purchase this

⁷⁴ E.D. Smith, maker of jams, jellies, and pie fillings.

⁷⁵ Former President of Loblaws, whose taste and travels served as the memories in *Memories of*. . .

chimichurri sauce, but I am more inclined to believe that this product is specifically marketed toward the consumer looking to explore the foodways of another (or an *other*). Charlene Elliott notes that the *Memories of* . . . labels both explicate and illustrate the regions and cities being referenced. There are pronunciation guidelines (*Keen-wa* for Quinoa), photographs, maps and short history lessons for the uninitiated (185). Consumers are invited to incorporate these sauces into their everyday diets, to add a bit of spice to their barbecued chicken wings. What the consumer buys is *curried mango* or *Piri Piri sauce*, and what s/he buys into is the packaging and/or marketing of ethnicity for consumption at a most superficial level. Everything has been prepared and neatly packaged for convenient consumption. Glenn Deer would— and does—call this an “uncomplicated form[] of cultural fusion” (288). “Eating multicultural variety,” he writes, “is often easier than practicing a real politics of ethnic desegregation and inter-racial contact” (288). What is on offer here, in other words, is Italian or Korean culture in a bottle. One has merely to open this bottle and pour.

For Goto, too, I must point out that there is a difference between consuming culture and buying and/or eating food as a means of understanding a different culture. Consuming culture is an end. The ultimate goal has been reached once the groceries are bought and bagged, or once a morsel of food is introduced to the palate. Food and thus culture are, in such instances, instantly “used up” (to use the OED definition of consumption here). “Don't stop there my friend,” Goto implores her readers in the last pages of *Chorus of Mushrooms*. Food is not an end but rather, it is a point of departure for meaningful cultural exchange, one which challenges not just the eater's palate but also his/her vision of the world.

There are people who say that eating is only a superficial means of understanding a different culture. That eating at exotic restaurants and oohing and aahing over the food is not worth the bill paid. You haven't learned anything at all. I say that's a lie. What can be more basic than food itself? Food to begin to grow. Without it you'd starve to death, even academics. But don't stop there my friend, don't stop there, because food is the point of departure. A place where growth begins. You eat, you drink and you laugh out loud. You wipe the sweat off your forehead. You tell a story, maybe two, with words of pain and desire. Your companion listens and listens, then offers a different telling. The waiter comes back with the main course and stays to tell his version. Your companion offers three more stories and the people seated at the next table lean over to listen. You push all the tables together and the room resounds with voices. (Goto 201)

In an interview with Robyn Morris, Goto repeats:

This [food] is a good starting point. It is sadly inadequate, however, if food remains the only point of cultural contact/outreach. Food heightens our palates and nourishes our bodies but we must also feed our minds. (Goto qtd. in Morris 236)

We have, at least in the first passage, left the supermarket for the restaurant, but the connection between food and story made here is certainly worth investigating. As purveyors of food, restaurants and by extension supermarkets, are places where we can “feed our minds,” where “growth begins” (Goto 201). By feeding and growth, Goto means the delivery and the exchange of story.

Michael Pollan's supermarket pastoral and Hiromi Goto's over-the-counter culture both point to the innate tension in food labels. Food labels, be they of the bare-bones or wordy variety, purport to make food products more legible to the consumer. But this legibility has been carefully constructed. Just as interesting as what is on them is what has not been included in these compact texts. More than a list of ingredients and a guarantee of quality, these labels are complex narratives about food provenance, distribution, marketing,

and consumption. More than an inventory, they are projected images of a food system and its eaters.

The supermarket, as I have set out to establish, resounds with story. These stories come in the form of words on a page, or label as the case may be, and require a certain degree of supermarket literacy. Such talk of supermarket literacy begs to have some reference made to supermarket illiteracy. If only journalists and literary critics can effectively interpret these food labels, illiterate shoppers, who either cannot read or cannot read critically, must be plentiful indeed. That one should not have to read one's food has its own marketing campaigns. I refer here to a recent McCain commercial for sweet potato Superfries⁷⁶ that parodies the notion of supermarket pastoral. The following is a brief description of the commercial: The camera focuses on a farmer at work in a (perfectly manicured) field of sweet potatoes. An unseen narrator describes the product: "They come from the earth, dirty, ragged, but inside lies a natural sweetness that comes from being wrapped in the earth's embrace, and gently caressed by the hands of loving farmers" The obviously embarrassed farmer interrupts the voice-over. "Whoa," he exclaims. "This ain't no romance novel." They're just "nature's sweet potato." McCain (and the farmer) clearly prefers a more succinct tribute to its product, one which, nonetheless, fictionalizes, romanticizes, and edits the details of its production. It is left to the consumer to imagine what nature is, and how nature gets the product from field to market. Perhaps we need to expand our notion of what food literacy or supermarket literacy means. Food can be read with our eyes, but also with our other senses: touch, taste, smell, and a keen sense of

⁷⁶ Released in April, 2010.

observation. Reading the supermarket, as I emphasize in the second half of this chapter, is as much a matter of moving one's cart up and down the aisles, of taking in the floor plan, the displays, the colours, the cacophony (or lack thereof), as it is of reading a list of ingredients.

Supermarket Simulacrum

the racks of nuts and spices where whatever surprises might be [are] bottled and boxed with kindergarten attractiveness. . . . the vegetables, all shining and wet and sprinkled perpetually with a soft mist spread upon them, bringing out colors and presenting shapes impossible in the outside world. . . . unreal in their bright perfection as plastic representations.

Anita Desai, *Fasting and Feasting* (183-184)

The above quote, an excerpt from Anita Desai's *Fasting and Feasting*, describes Arun's first visit to a suburban supermarket in America. Arun, from India, pursuing his studies in Boston Massachusetts, is staying with an American family for the summer break. He is disconcerted, overwhelmed even by this shopping experience. He has the distinct feeling of having “stumbled into what was like a plastic representation of what he had known at home; not the real thing—which was plain, unbeautiful, misshapen, fraught and compromised” (Desai 185). One finds echoes of this passage in the texts that make up this dissertation's literary corpus. In *This Body*, for instance, Victoria is suspicious of what she finds in the supermarket: “Something about it does not sit right with her” (McWatt 49). This tension between the “real thing” and the representation of it is what I set out to investigate in the following paragraphs. The supermarket, the epigraph tells us, is an unreal, artificial place. It is a “plastic representation” of the real thing. There is, as it turns out,

much evidence to support such a claim. I read the supermarket here in terms of its formal devices, its inner workings, and its artifice.

What makes the supermarket an art-full place? Perhaps because it has been, and continues to be, made to look like something it is not. A supermarket is not a house and yet has, in the not so distant past, been made to look like one. I refer here to Carl Dipman's scientific salesroom.⁷⁷ In the scientific salesroom of 1931, a consumer could expect to find all the comforts of home, like curtained windows, or at least "Little imitation window *effects* with mirror backings" (Dipman qtd. in Bolwby, emphasis added, 147). This particular wall treatment, Dipman noted, "help[s] greatly to give the store the appearance of a cheery cottage kitchen" (Dipman qtd. in Bolwby, 147). This same consumer was invited to take a break from the rigours of food shopping in the store's sitting room or rest corner, complete with a "grouping of table, comfortable, colorful chairs, and if possible a telephone, fern stand, lamp, pads and pencils, a magazine or two. . . . a radio or canary . . ." (Dipman qtd. in Bowlby 148). The grocery buyer Dipman and O'Brien had in mind was the American housewife who, they surmised, would find comfort and cause to linger in this home away from home.

A supermarket is not a market and yet, in recent years, has begun to look and feel more like one. The bakery, the deli counter, the fish counter, for instance, in which a limited amount of food is prepared in full view of customers, are being made to look like they belong in a market. The walls are painted with murals of market scenes, or scenes of

⁷⁷ In the 1930s, Carl Dipman of the American trade journal, *Progressive Grocer*, co-wrote a series of short books (with John O'Brien) on food selling trends and methodologies.

the countryside, and products are advertised with such slogans as “market fresh” and “freshly prepared on site today.”⁷⁸

The supermarket may look like a home or a market, but remains beneath such window dressings, so to speak, a supermarket. It is, as the epigraph reminds us, very much an artificial space, a skillfully contrived space. It has been referred to by cultural critics as the pig run,⁷⁹ the jungle, the prison, the labyrinth, and the trap.⁸⁰ Such metaphors aptly describe this apparatus of controlled exits, entrances, and aisles through which the consumer must pass. It also looks and functions much like a theatre. I echo Robert Polack here who proposes that the modern supermarket “illustrates the essential structure of staging in every aspect of its design” (Polack). The word “staging” implies players, an audience, a performance, and, of course, a concealed backstage area that helps “create and sustain the world of this staged presentation” (Polack). What constitutes the backstage area of a supermarket? This question requires, at the very least, a two-part answer. First, “backstage” is that which is separated from the arena of retail presentation by a set or two of swinging doors, adorned, inevitably, with a bold-lettered panel that reads “authorized personnel only.” This is the space within which excess packaging is removed from products, bread and cakes are baked, and meat is processed from primary carcass cuts into secondary meat cuts. There are break rooms for the staff, maintenance rooms stocked with

⁷⁸ This particular trend may be a response to the growing popularity of the outdoor or farmer’s market. Farmer’s markets last year in Canada had a \$3.09 billion dollar impact on the Canadian economy. Also worth noting, as Harvey Levenstein reminds us, is that the fully prepared salads, cooked chickens, and samosas sold within these spaces allow the supermarkets to compete with restaurants and take-home outlets. In other words, the in-store market has a great deal to do with market share (236).

⁷⁹ See Bob Ashley et al. *Food and Cultural Studies*.

⁸⁰ See Rachel Bowlby, *Carried Away: The Invention of Modern Shopping*.

cleaning supplies, and offices from which the incoming and outgoing supply of goods is carefully monitored. Second, one could argue that what constitutes “backstage” in the supermarket extends far beyond the storage facilities and workrooms to include the food-filled dumpsters on the back parking lot, the trucks, the warehouses, the factories, and the farms. Backstage, in other words, refers to the ever-lengthening chain of production, processing, packaging, and distribution. What is being staged, performed in this space? Beauty, variety, cleanliness, and communion, to name a few of the acts on the program. The following is a series of small-scale investigations of these four common supermarket promises/performances.

Beauty

“You cannot sell a blemished apple in the supermarket,” writes Elspeth Huxley, “but you can sell a tasteless one provided it is shiny, smooth, even, uniform, and bright” (Huxley qtd. in Gollner 207). Huxley regrets this prioritization of aesthetics over taste. I add to Huxley's pithy observation that the tasteless apple to which she refers is not naturally “shiny, smooth, even, uniform, and bright.” By the time it arrives at the supermarket, it has already gone through a rigorous selection process. It has been chosen by hand and/or by machine on the basis of size, shape, degree of ripeness, and overall appearance. It may have been treated with pesticides so that its skin is free of insect bites and burrowings. This same skin may or may not have been dyed so that it appears more red than red or more green than green. Perfect produce, in other words, depends upon a number of interventions that, in the arena of retail presentation, includes organization, placement, packaging, directional

lighting, and water, lots of it. What one sees on the stands and in the bins of supermarkets are not just fruits and vegetables but fruits and vegetables as Anita Desai has described them: “all shining and wet and sprinkled perpetually with a soft mist spread upon them bringing out colours and presenting shapes *impossible in the outside world*” (Desai 183-184, my emphasis).

Variety

Supermarkets present the consumer with food that is both beautiful and *plentiful*. Trade journals advise food retailers that merchandise should occupy the customer's entire field of vision (Bowlby 146), and it does. S/he cannot even begin to take in the nearly 30,000 items such a store contains within the space of a twenty-five to thirty minute shopping trip (Halweil 15). Variety cannot be understood in terms of numbers alone. Let us speak rather in terms of seasons. Variety in the supermarket means “permanent global summertime” or PGST.⁸¹ It means kiwis, avocados, tomatoes, and oranges year round. In geographical terms, it means direct access to triple-washed California-grown Mesclun mix, pre-cored, peeled and sliced pineapple from Hawaii, and Chilean seedless grapes. Certainly one's grocery lists have become rather colourful, interesting, and “exotic” with the arrival of these and the thousands of other new and innovative foodstuffs making their way onto supermarket shelves every year.

There are, of course, limits to this abundance. One can purchase strawberries in February, but may only have access to two or three varieties. “Only a tiny fraction of fruit

⁸¹ A term coined by British food writer Joanna Blythman, 2002.

biodiversity is for sale . . .” because, writes Adam Leith Gollner, “most fruits aren’t dependable. They don’t ship well. They are precision calibrated. They don’t produce anywhere near the volume required by national chains” (208). Another reason for the limited access to certain foods may have something to do with slotting fees. Major supermarket chains charge food manufacturers and producers slotting fees⁸² to place new products on their shelves (Halweil 116), staying fees⁸³ to keep them there, and failure fees (Pearson).⁸⁴ The price of admission for a new product can be prohibitive for small manufacturers or producers (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada). It is, in part, for this reason that over half of the items one encounters in the supermarket are produced by 10 international food companies. Roughly 140 people form the boards of directors of companies that are implicated in much if not most of the food chain (Halweil 15). Food is, thus, controlled by a smaller number of global entities than ever before (Halweil 157).

Variety, I emphasize here, does not necessarily mean choice. Of the supermarket, Rachel Bowlby writes “choice is false choice” (Bowlby 188). She is quoting from Ian McEwen's novel *Child in Time* (1987). What does it mean to have false choice in a supermarket? In part, it means choosing from a large selection of breakfast cereals that, ultimately, come from the same company or contain the same ingredients. Chances are the common ingredient on the cereal shelf is corn. To briefly summarize Michael Pollan's sustained investigation into the production and distribution of this very crop, corn is

⁸² “Pay to play” (Pearson)

⁸³ “Pay to stay” (Pearson)

⁸⁴ Slotting and staying fees apply to manufactured grocery products as well as fresh-cut (pre-washed salads for example) and branded fresh produce (Pearson).

everywhere, from the food to the supermarket itself. “The wallboard and joint compound, the linoleum and fiberglass and adhesives out of which the building itself has been built,” Pollan observes, “is in no small measure a manifestation of corn” (Pollan, “What’s Eating America,”).

Variety *looks* like one thing (30,000 different items of food in a single store) and yet, as Pollan, Bowlby, Halweil, and Gollner each point out, *is* so many other things. Variety means permanent global summertime and monocultures. There are, to return to this metaphor of the stage for a moment, ropes, pulleys, costumes, set builders, and players involved in the staging of beauty and variety in the supermarket. Such backstage worlds or manoeuvrings may or may not be obvious to the consumer. Beauty and variety, like cleanliness and communion as I shall attempt to articulate below, are not quite what they seem.

Cleanliness

The supermarket must *be* clean. It must meet the targets set by Health Canada and the Minister of Health and be enforced by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (which reports directly to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food).⁸⁵ My aim here is not to determine whether such standards are being met. I am more interested in that which goes into making the supermarket *look* clean.

⁸⁵ Targets set and regulated by such agencies and federal departments regarding labelling, packaging, food handling, transport, processing, and so on, are found within the *Food and Drugs Act*.

Clean is a matter of costuming. I refer here to the butcher, the baker, the cashier, the stock person. All personnel wear crisp, immaculate uniforms. Uniforms are, of course, issued to employees for many reasons that have to do with visibility, in-store organization, and corporate branding. Dress conveys messages. Dress is not natural, as Anne Hollander reminds us, but meaningful (Hollander 105). This meaning has, in part, to do with the image of cleanliness.

Clean is also a matter of product packaging. Cans, bottles, boxes, tubs, and jars promote a number of different kinds of clean. Clean is fairly traded, green, fat-free, hormone-free, and filled with omega 3. Clean in these cases is most often negatively defined—i.e. promoted on the basis of what it does not contain: fats (trans or other), sugar, cholesterol, hormones, antibiotics, preservatives, or bacteria. Products that contain live and active cultures promise to keep your digestive system clean. They compete for shelf space with pasteurized yoghurts that can promote a different kind of clean: inactive cultures. The co-presence of these products with varying approaches to, or kinds of bacteria, demonstrates, to a certain extent, the instability of the boundaries we set between “dirt” and the rest. These boundaries are determined by more than the threat of pathogens, but by fashion and marketing strategies. Both filtered, and supposedly pure foodstuffs, and yummy, healthy bacteria are packaged for consumers with varied notions of what makes things clean.

Apart from the packaging of individual products, whole shopping sites are, and have been, packaged or mythologized as clean and/or dirty spaces. The market, it is worth noting, has been accused of causing “street litter, congestion, and offensive odor”

(Robinson qtd. in Donofrio 31). Urban planners adhering to the ideologies of the City Beautiful Movement,⁸⁶ for instance, sought to banish markets from the city. Relocating them to industrial areas, they replaced them with civic centres. The supermarket, on the other hand, has long been promoted as a thoroughly modern, scientific, hygienic, and ordered environment. Many traces of the market were initially effaced from the supermarket, this newer, developing retail space.⁸⁷ Missing from these “gleaming palaces” (Cohen qtd. in Powell 65) was the market hawker, this “shouting outdoor character” (Bowlby 35) who was ultimately replaced by window displays, brightly coloured packages, and even cardboard cut-out salespersons. After all, as Rachel Bowlby has observed, a clean, orderly supermarket is a silent one. Clean, I wish to emphasize here, is a rather slippery, shifty, concept that is appropriated and continually reworked and redefined within this space in which we buy food.

Communion

Seattle’s Pike Place market, Bob Ashley et al. write, is marketed as “a site of communion between producers and consumers, rather than a site of exploitation” (Ashley 114). This term of Ashley’s, “communion,” contains within it references to spirituality, communication, community, and union. Is this kind of contact possible within the supermarket? The supermarket offers consumer and producer something *like* communion, I suggest, but not quite. Both Michael Pollan and Raj Patel propose that in the supermarket,

⁸⁶ “Active in Canada from 1893-1930. It promoted the planned creation of civic beauty through architectural harmony, unified design and visual variety” (Canadian Encyclopedia).

⁸⁷ Though, as discussed above, the market has not been entirely expunged from this space.

the relationship between consumer and retailer, and consumer and food producer, has been all but replaced by the package. It is the kind of package that sells itself. It, not the salesperson, tells us everything we need to know about what the product inside does or what it is made of, or how it tastes. It is the kind of package that saves the consumer a trip to the farm to see how green beans are actually grown and harvested. “Think of it,” writes Raj Patel, “as a kind of culinary taxidermy in which the living social relations are shot, stuffed and mounted on shelves. Never having experienced a direct connection to the people who grow our food, we’re tricked by the simulacrum, mistaking the dead green ‘Certified Organic’ packaging for a living connection (Patel 246-7). Think of the package, proposes Michael Pollan, as “an imperfect substitute for direct observation of how a food is produced” (*The Omnivore’s Dilemma* 137). Storied packages present the appearance of social relations, but not the “real thing.”

In arguing that the supermarket is an art-full space, I have implied that there is such a thing as the “real thing” when it comes to shopping for food. Is that which is fraught, local, not too clean, and requires direct physical contact between grower and consumer somehow more real, more authentic? How can one find authenticity in this demonstrably art-full, artificial space? How can we, as Philip Vannini and Patrick Williams ask, distinguish the “authentic from the inauthentic, the real from the fake, the genuine from the fraudulent, the true from the false” (Vannini and Williams 1)? Such are the questions I wish to unpack in this next section of the chapter. They are questions being asked by cultural theorists, journalists, shoppers, and novelist Tessa McWatt.

Supermarkets as “Bastians of Authenticity”?

“Bastians of authenticity: supermarkets deserve a place on the traveller's must-see list” is the tag line of a recent article written by Daisann McLane for *National Geographic Traveller*. Supermarkets for McLane are an “easier cultural read” than markets, bakeries, and butcher shops. Information about how people “really live” in a given town or city are more accessible in the supermarket, McLane argues, because they are quiet and predictable, museum-like: “So you [the tourist and cultural notetaker] can just relax and focus on the amazing lithograph of a peasant woman on the can of *gandules* in the Puerto Rican *supermercado*. Or guess what each of the 15 vinegars in a Manila market is made from” (McLane).

I have engaged in this very type of supermarket tourism. While visiting French hypermarkets,⁸⁸ *Auchan* and *Carrefour*, I have taken pictures of the (many) cheese and yoghurt aisles, much to the bemusement of local shoppers. Am I photographing, tasting, experiencing, and accessing authenticity here? Jean Baudrillard would likely say no. He argues that we have lost contact with the real world. All we are left with are simulations. “To dissimulate is to feign not to have what one has. To simulate,” writes Baudrillard, “is to feign to have what one hasn’t. One implies a presence, the other an absence” (5). What we are left with in the supermarket or *hypermarché*, in other words, is a picture of a grazing, free-range cow on our milk cartons. This cow is counterfeit in a few ways. First, she is an illustration. Second, she represents the kind of life most cows do not enjoy. This image, then, marks the absence of the bucolic scene being referenced.

⁸⁸ A supermarket and department store combined.

There is another analytical current that runs counter to Baudrillard's work. Included in this particular camp that privileges the idea of active, creative, and resistant subjects of everyday culture who will “launch a determined rejection of the fake, the virtual, the spun and the mass-produced” (Boyle 4), is David Boyle.⁸⁹ Boyle insists that authenticity is out there. It is up to the “new realist” to find and demand it. The new realist can and must distinguish between what Boyle terms the virtual/fake (pot noodle),⁹⁰ the fake real (*Big Brother*)⁹¹, the virtual real (Martha Stewart),⁹² and the authentic (real ale, live yoghurt, brick homes, organic free-range eggs, natural childbirth, and the Tate Modern) (Boyle 67).

Tessa McWatt's *This Body* does not fit into either of these definitions of, or approaches to, authenticity. In *This Body*, authenticity has not disappeared, as Baudrillard would have it. Neither is it an inherent and seemingly indisputable quality, as Boyle would have it.⁹³ For McWatt, authenticity is, as I shall attempt to articulate below, a “moving target” (Peterson, 1094). McWatt’s novel speaks to and demonstrates the social constructedness of authenticity, as espoused by sociologists Richard Peterson, Philip Vannini and Patrick Williams, to name a few. *This Body* contains numerous food-foraging

⁸⁹ Boyle is author of *Authenticity: Brands, Fakes, Spin and the Lust for Real Life*.

⁹⁰ A ready-made, overly processed and therefore fake meal, says Boyle.

⁹¹ “The ‘reality TV show where a group of ordinary people are locked for a month in a house filled with television cameras. There’s no doubt that the emotions that they are feeling are absolutely real. . . . But somehow the situation is so ludicrous and contrived” (60-1).

⁹² “a real experience delivered by virtual systems” (67). “An advocate of authenticity” writes Boyle, “Martha is intricately enwrapped in the virtual world” (85), where instructions for the homespun can be accessed online.

⁹³ See Charlotte Raven’s review of Boyle’s *Authenticity*. Raven expresses a number of concerns about this study, including Boyle’s assumption that an object, like ale and an egg is inherently authentic. “When you ask for ‘authenticity’” says Raven “rather than a cooker or a coat, you are asking for a quality that actual things don't have. Authenticity is a value that is added during the marketing process. It doesn't inhere in a pair of jeans any more than sophistication inheres in a bottle of perfume. This means that the "genuine article" is always, in some sense, a fake”(34).

scenes. Cook, caterer, overall food enthusiast, and the novel's protagonist, Victoria Blayne is preoccupied by this question of good, real food. Real food is many things to Victoria. It is organic. It is not implanted with jellyfish genes or growth hormones: “that madness had a taste” (McWatt 31). It is local and traceable as the following passage so explicitly illustrates:

In the supermarket she [Victoria] can buy fresh frozen pakoras, lychee fruit, and ingredients to make the Chinese dishes her daddy used to cook. The world of food is available in a single long aisle of cans and plastic wrap. Hundreds of years of gastronomy are packaged for take-away dining. Something about it does not sit right with her. She's always believed, just like her daddy, that it's best to know the person who grows what you eat (McWatt 49).

Real food is pleasurable, sensual, should not be neutralized by plastic packaging (McWatt 108), and should be distributed democratically; everyone, she argues, “Not only residents of South Kensington or Hampstead with their posh nosh delis and delicacies from Spain, Italy, or New York should be able to sample the sensations on the lip and tongue that blaze with the glory of the earth” (McWatt 108).

Victoria's search for real food is rather involved. She gathers information about food from a variety of sources, some more reliable than others: books, television, newspapers, the internet, hearsay, and her own personal experience. She adjusts her shopping practices based on her findings. She no longer buys eggs from the supermarket because of what they may or may not contain (McWatt 31). She buys sheep's milk cheese over the phone from Neal's Yard dairy. She stays away from beef and chicken “on principle” (McWatt 153). She buys her produce from Waitrose when she must and from Dalston market when she can. She buys potatoes from Spain and not the more local Jersey Royals after the *Daily Mirror*

reports the unexplained death of a potato farmer who grew this particular cultivar. Victoria suspects the potatoes (McWatt 48). For Victoria there are authentic foods and authentic ways of producing, distributing, and procuring foods. Her foodscape⁹⁴ changes as her own knowledge about food changes and develops. What is evident in *This Body* is that authenticity, for McWatt, is “socially constructed, evaluative, mutable” (Vannini and Williams 3), highly personal, sometimes irrational, not easily articulated: a moving target, in other words.

That authenticity is a “moving target” as Richard Peterson describes it, is most effectively demonstrated in *This Body* by McWatt's supporting characters, in their varied reactions to Victoria's food and food choices. Organic means one thing for Victoria (food safety and environmental responsibility) and quite another thing for Kola, Victoria's long-disappeared lover. “Organic?” he exclaims. “Everything is organic in Africa, we can't afford the pesticides” (McWatt 109). Kola's pithy expressions and aphorisms often serve to remind Victoria that (good) food is more often than not a privilege—not a right. Much depends on who the consumer is and where s/he happens to be standing. From Kola's Kenyan perspective, organic is not about making the right purchase. One simply does not have the choice.

For her nephew, Derek, the fruits of Victoria's shopping excursions are a regular source of physical discomfort and embarrassment. There are a number of scenes detailing Derek's dinnertime deportment: “suppressing heaves” (McWatt 50), drowning mouthfuls of

⁹⁴ Defined in Gisele Yasmeen, “Plastic-bag Housewives,” as the “interconnections between people, food, and places” (525).

red pesto potatoes *aux épinards* with water just to get them down, and finally losing his hold on this red and green purée. At school, Derek trades the “delicate gourmet meals his aunt packs for him” (McWatt 154) for more appetizing, less visibly different fare. Like most of his classmates, Derek would prefer to subsist largely on a diet of Coke and crisps from the corner shop. Coke and crisps are a more acceptable kind of social currency than sandwiches made of “organic dark rye bread, roasted peppers, roasted aubergine, a sprinkling of goat's cheese” (McWatt 154). On holiday, Derek observes that “they've certainly eaten well these last two days. Pizza, cod, and chips, chocolate. Not Auntie Vic's food” (McWatt 165). Derek eats Auntie Vic's food out of obligation and out of a desire to please his aunt, but without much pleasure.

Unlike Derek, Alexander (Victoria's love interest) is happy to eat at her table. He makes for an appreciative but opinionated dinner guest, willing to challenge Victoria, questioning her food fears and habits, playing the devil's advocate. On the subject of genetically modified foods, Alexander takes a different tack than his hostess (GM foods, as far as Victoria is concerned, contain contaminants and impurities and pose a direct threat to her health and to those who eat at her table and pay for her catering services): “I suppose it's not that I'm for it or against it, I just think we need to keep our fears in check. It would be horrible if we stopped everything we were afraid of” (McWatt 177) says Alexander. References such as this to Victoria's irrationality, particularly when it comes to food, appear frequently throughout the text. They come from Alexander. They come from the narrator, who explains that “Victoria's life has been predicated on the irrational. It's how she was made” (McWatt 72). What I wish to emphasize here is that Victoria's decisions to cut

bananas, tomatoes, potatoes, eggs, beef, chicken, and lobster (because it feeds on waste) (McWatt 103) out of her life often have more to do with instinct than extended investigation.

These instincts, I would add, are not easily articulated. As Victoria's encounter with the lettuce vendor demonstrates, one's purchases or *consom'actions*,⁹⁵ though they may be undertaken with sincerity and purpose, are not so easily or effectively articulated. “What do you mean?” (McWatt 109) the vendor asks defensively when questioned about the origins of his romaine lettuce. Victoria cannot, as it turns out, “put into words her theory on distribution—destroying supermarkets and replacing them with farmer's markets—or explain to him that she'd be willing to pay more to the person who grew this if she knew him” (McWatt 109). The result is a rather unsatisfying exchange between consumer and vendor. While money and lettuce change hands, there is little mutual understanding between Victoria and vendor. Both explicitly and implicitly, McWatt continually points out that what makes food good, real, authentic is personal (McWatt 109). There is no consensus amongst her characters. And while more space is devoted to Victoria's particular food platform, owing to the fact that this story is largely about her, the men in her life have very strong ideas about what makes food good, about what is acceptable in the shopping cart, to the palate, and on the plate, and what is not.

MacMillan Caribbean praises *This Body* for its depth and authenticity. John Berger describes *This Body* as “a book of unusual authenticity” (Harper Collins Canada). I am

⁹⁵ A neologism that refers to the practice of making socially and environmentally conscious purchases or voting with one's pocketbook or shopping cart.

more inclined to argue that it is not authenticity (as a given, as a state of being) but the *question* of, or quest for, authenticity that matters in this novel. What makes food authentic is debated, negotiated, articulated (though with difficulty) throughout this text. There are, of course, other debates and negotiations taking place here that do not just have to do with food. While Victoria worries about hens shot through with growth hormones, McWatt is busy shaping Victoria into cook, caterer, parent, lover. Victoria searches for more than real food in this novel. She searches for Kola, her lost lover. She looks for peace upon learning of his demise. She searches for a real home (in Guyana, in Canada, in London England, and once more in Guyana). She searches for real love and for what it means to “live in and eventually leave this body” (325).

Why procurement?

That the title of this chapter is procurement and not shopping is significant. The writers in question certainly make use of, and comment on, the supermarket. Yet food, they insist, can be acquired elsewhere, outside the shop or market, through gifting, growing, trading, foraging, fishing, gleanings, stealing, and obtaining packages from the post office. Their texts speak to the heterogeneous and complex realities of food procurement. In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, for instance, Goto introduces us to an alternative food procurement practice that is not even on Agnès Varda's radar.⁹⁶ In order to satisfy her cravings for salted squid, Naoe collects coins from the couch cracks after dark. With this money, she pays for her own box at the post office where she receives goods gifted to her by her brother in

⁹⁶ Filmmaker Agnès Varda's documentary *Les Glaneurs et La Glaneuse* tracks alternative food (and goods) procurement networks.

Japan. It is Muriel who then picks up these packages and sneaks them into her grandmother's room after everyone is asleep. The (relative) stealth and creativity with which Naoe and her accomplice procure food is impressive and also necessary. Naoe cannot simply drive to the local “Oriental Food Store” (Goto 134) and pick out what she needs or wants. First, she has never left the house and rarely does she leave her wooden chair at the bottom of the stairs. Second, her daughter Keiko does not allow anything remotely “foreign” to enter her home. In the Tonkatsu household, squid and salted seaweed paste are scarce, contraband substances to be consumed in secret, in bed, at four in the morning (Goto 15).

There is nary a mention of supermarkets in the Barbados of Austin Clarke’s youth. Food was acquired through various means, from various sources, according to a somewhat rigid schedule. Milk, cheese, and buttermilk were collected on a daily basis from Reid’s dairy (8). Cucumbers, “punkin,” pigeon peas, tomatoes, lettuce, sweet potatoes, and yams were grown in, and harvested from, the kitchen garden (6). Most meat came from the backyard: “we kept ducks, along with fowls, sheep, a goat, and pigs. And we kept turkeys” (29) Clarke recalls. Pigs were butchered on Saturdays and lamb on Wednesdays. Fish could be bought in town or came straight out of the boats from the fishermen themselves. Friday night was the night for thieves to steal sweet potatoes, yams, tomatoes, cassava, plantains, figs, and eddoes from neighbouring plantations (69). Thieving was an intellectual/instinctual business: “Only through scientific calculation, intimate knowledge of Plantations and innate instincts honed over generations could a thief become successful at his profession of stealing ground provisions” (71). Thieving was a dangerous business.

One had to look out for Mongoose traps, nosy neighbours who would “through crab-in-the-bucket jealousy be the first to give-you-way” (71), and the night-watchman’s gun, loaded as it was with coarse salt. Clarke warns, “Stealing sweet potatoes from the Plantation is a serious thing. ’Cause if you slip and make a lil mistake, you’ll be walking through the village for the rest of your life just like Sweets – shot in the testicles” (73).

Each of this chapter’s various procurers is implicated in a kind of transaction, or rather *transaction*, when acquiring food. What might seem like an extremely localized exchange—\$.49 for 1 lb of *bok choy* at Safeway—resonates, as the prefix *trans* suggests, beyond buyer and vendor (or thief and night-watchman as the case may be). Clarke (and Muriel and Victoria for that matter) learns and participates in “a fascinating kind of geography and sociology” (Clarke 15). Dinner is a lesson in trade routes: “Rancid butter came from Australia. Thin, hard, bony, smelly cod fish, from Newfoundland. Biscuits and marmalades and toffees from England. And soaps for the skin. Apples wrapped in fine paper, from Canada” (Clarke 15). More complex even than the trade routes are the trade relationships. Clarke recalls,

I did not like Newfoundland because of the poor quality of the salt fish they sent down to us. And I did not know, or feel, that Newfoundland could be in the same continent as Canada. Canada was better than Newfoundland. Canada sent us McIntoshes, which we called “English apples.” Our own apples, “sugar apples” and “mammy apples,” were good, and we ate them, of course, but the English apples were superior because they came from Away. (Clarke 15)

That Clarke’s “Away” is capitalized emphasizes the island's second-class status in relation to the purveyors of butter, biscuits, and apples. Shoppers are “invited,” so to speak, to purchase high-priced, well-travelled foodstuffs of an inferior quality, which they can little

afford (Clarke 62). Clarke maps his world and his place in it according to the foodstuffs in his mother's (or Aunts') larder. This text is a reminder that, willingly or not, shoppers participate in a global food market. There are advantages, certainly. Clarke can locate most of the ingredients needed to reproduce dishes from home in his current home, Toronto, and instructs his readers to do the same. And yet, for Clarke, it is not simply a matter of celebrating the global reaches of the food system. The fascinating geography to which he refers has been mapped out by the slave trade, and by colonizers, and more recently by those neo-colonial powers whose offshore investments offer and impose new, or repeat old, trade structures.

To fully grasp *Pig Tails 'n Breadfruits'* gastropolitics,⁹⁷ one must also look to its gastropoetics.⁹⁸ A sweet potato for Clarke “is not a sweet potato, like a carrot is a carrot or a rose is a rose is a rose. Oh no! Some sweet potatoes are ‘six weeks potatoes,’ some are ‘eight weeks,’ and so on” (71). Clarke alludes here to Gertrude Stein's poem, “Sacred Emily.” While Stein's rose is what it is, Clarke's sweet potato is laden with historical, cultural, socio-economic significance. Sweet potatoes for Clarke are a lesson in thievery: stealing ground provisions from a plantation, a Friday-night-thief must blindly identify, or accurately recall, which sweet potatoes are ripe for the taking. Sweet potatoes are part of a lesson in inequality: between those who owned the plantation and those who laboured in its fields. Stein has written food poems. Or rather, a section of her *Tender Buttons* collection is

⁹⁷ Gastropolitics: defined by Arjun Appadurai as the “conflict or competition over specific cultural or economic resources as it emerges in social transactions around food” (“Gastro-politics” 495).

⁹⁸ Gastropoetics: a term employed by Parama Roy in *Alimentary Tracts: Appetites, Aversions, and the Postcolonial*, to refer to the discourse, the grammar of food in a South Asian context.

called Food. Stein is preoccupied here with the sounds and rhythms of words. So is Clarke, for that matter (which I shall discuss in detail in the next chapter). For Clarke, context is also key: the time(s), place(s), and hands through which sweet potatoes pass.

Conclusion: How to recognize a literary supermarket when you see one.

The subtitle of this conclusion is a reference to Stanley Fish, or rather to an essay of his titled, “how to recognize a poem when you see one.” Fish conducted an in-class experiment. He asked his students to analyze a poem that was, in fact, not a poem but an assignment intended for the previous class. In what was, essentially, a list of names (of linguists Roderick Jacobs, Peter Rosenbaum, Samuel Levin, J.P Thorne and Curtis Hayes, and literary critic Richard Ohman), his students saw a poem rife with Christian iconography. Their teacher trained them to do so. Fish concludes that “it is not that the presence of poetic qualities impels a certain kind of attention but that the paying of a certain kind of attention results in the emergence of poetic qualities” (326). What does this have to do with the supermarket? What connects both the creative/critical writings on the supermarket—including Goto, McWatt, Clarke, Pollan, Halweil, Bowlby—is their insistence that as shoppers we pay a certain kind of attention. For readers of poetry, or literature in general, “everything counts” (330) writes Fish. Even the omissions, the spaces, the silences. This holds true for the writers in question—who read the space, its contents, its silences, its “complex, aesthetic, emotional, and even political dimensions” (*The Omnivore’s Dilemma* 134)—and ask us to do the same. Goto, in *Chorus of Mushrooms*, explores the ways in which we read food, as well as the ways in which we read other

shoppers—or, how we *other* shoppers—based on how they look, by the manner in which they conduct themselves, and what they buy. In *This Body*, Tessa McWatt demonstrates that reading one's food is as much instinctual as it is an intellectual exercise. Austin Clarke of *Pig Tails 'n Breadfruit* reminds us that reading food has a great deal to do with context (geographical, historical, socio-political). Apples from Canada mean something very different when purchased in Barbados, than in Canada. Clarke's gastropoetics are also a lesson in gastropolitics. Shopping for food goes beyond “going out to buy bread so you can have your lunch tomorrow” (Brian qtd. in Humphery 200-201). Finding the literary in the supermarket means looking out for and interrogating the kinds of exchanges that go on in this space and beyond: commercial exchange (who is buying what?), cultural exchange (what and who is for sale?), and ideological exchange (what does this purchase mean?)

Chapter 3: Preparation

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.
—Luce Giard, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (154)

Writing is a processing of raw speech just as cooking is a transformation of raw materials.
Terry Eagleton, “Edible écriture” (203)

Writing, Cooking, Writing Cooking

“Americans, more than any other culture on earth, are cookbook cooks; we learn to make our meals not from any oral tradition, but from a text,” declares food writer John Thorne (197). Sociologist Stephen Mennell reaches a similar conclusion in his history of French and English cooking practices.⁹⁹ The publication and distribution of cookery books, he writes, attenuated the need for apprentice and teacher to share a direct personal relationship. Recalling her own foray into *doing-cooking*, Luce Giard initially turns to what, for her, has become a familiar learning tool: “Just like everything else, these sorts of things could be learned in books. All I had to do was find in a bookstore a source of information that was 'simple', 'quick', 'modern', and 'inexpensive' according to my then naive vocabulary” (Giard 320). The cookbook is identified here, and in the examples above, as the primary means through which cooking instruction is transmitted and disseminated. And yet, as Giard's personal recollections indicate, the cookbook is not her only source of information. Confident that her paperback cookbook, happily “devoid of both illustrations

⁹⁹ *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present.*

and feminine 'flourishes'" (320), would guide her through her first attempts at preparing food, Giard is surprised to discover that an apprenticeship has already taken place, one which she had studiously tried to avoid:

I thought that I had never learned or observed anything, having obstinately wanted to escape from the contagion of a young girl's education . . . Yet my childhood gaze had seen and memorized certain gestures and my sense memory had kept track of certain tastes, smells, and colours. 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. (320)

Though she has not actively sought to learn how to cook by her mother's side, Giard has had an education *malgré elle*, one that accompanies her to her new, her own, rudimentary kitchen.

Perhaps, as Giard discovers, the art of cooking is *not* wholly reducible to printed instructions.¹⁰⁰ The literary texts that are the focus of this chapter: Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Austin Clarke's *Pig Tails 'n Breadfruit*, and Fred Wah's *Diamond Grill* acknowledge and investigate a complex network of food information exchange, which includes, but does not solely rely upon, the written recipe. All three texts in question contain recipes. *Pig Tails 'n Breadfruit*'s is even framed by, and/or named for, Barbadian dishes. As texts themselves, each demonstrates an interest in the written expression of food preparation: what it means, and why it matters. And yet, these writers argue, cooking skills cannot simply be acquired "from the pages of a book" (Clarke 3-4). In this first part of the

¹⁰⁰ As Sandra Sherman asserts in her analysis of late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century English cookbooks in "The Whole Art and Mystery of Cooking."

chapter, I explore those “learning opportunities” (Sherman 116)¹⁰¹ outside the text, as enumerated and explored by Goto, Clarke, and Wah: in/formal apprenticeships between student and teacher, the oral transmission of culinary knowledge, and kinesthesia or cooking as a learned choreography.

Learning Opportunities

In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Muriel Tonkatsu's Obachan and Sushi, a clerk at Calgary's east-end *Oriental Food Store*, represent two invaluable sources of information when it comes time for Muriel to take her place in the family kitchen. The idea of cooking Japanese food for her ailing mother and the list of ingredients that she must purchase are transmitted telepathically and in Japanese to English-only-speaking Muriel by her missing Obachan. Without Sushi's intervention, this shopping list would remain outside Muriel's realm of comprehension. “I know what the words mean, but I have no idea what they are” she confesses to Sushi, who wonders if her customer might be suffering from some kind of aphasia. It is Sushi who decodes her shopping list, makes the connection between Muriel and the breaded deep-fried pork cutlets with which she shares a name, *Tonkatsu*, and urges her to try her hand at making the dish.

Clarke's “culinary memoir”¹⁰² is chock-full of cooks/teachers, primarily his mother and various aunts, who take it upon themselves to instruct a young Clarke on the “ways of cooking” (Clarke 246), assigning him such tasks as helping to prepare a kitchen garden and

¹⁰¹ Extratextual learning opportunities, writes Sherman, can take place in a “household, community, or apprenticeship setting” (115).

¹⁰² Clarke's subtitle to *Pig Tails 'n Breadfruit*.

mashing English potatoes (6), in exchange for the occasional piece of salt meat, right from the pot of course (15). *Pig Tails 'n Breadfruit* functions as a cookbook, or at least one that constantly reminds the reader of the need for “extratextual guidance” (Sherman 116). The author's instructions to the reader mimic, to a certain extent, the highly personal/ized apprenticeship between mother and son. The voice of the author, as Gamal Abdel-Shehid writes, is two-sided. There is Clarke, addressing the reader, and Clarke “remembering the voice of his mother telling the young boy how to cook” (Abdel-Shehid 461).

The kinds of student/teacher relationships featured above are largely family-oriented. Knowledge here is not sought from, or provided by, a culinary institute but is, rather, passed down from one generation to the next. What connects the writings of Goto and Clarke is their attentiveness to how such apprenticeships are affected by migration. They entreat us to ask, under what conditions does the rupture or breach in the transmission of culinary knowledge arise? What happens to these relationships, to this body of knowledge when familial, communal, and cultural ties are stretched or even snapped by migration? How is the migrant, or the son or daughter of migrants, to bridge this physical or cultural gap, if at all?

Having left Barbados to study in Toronto, the young Clarke faces isolation of a geographic kind. He is physically separated from, and therefore no longer has direct access to, the community of women who raised him, and the body of recipes, cooking tips, and “culinary magic” they possess (41). *Pig Tails 'n Breadfruit* may be read, in part, as an attempt to traverse the geographical and temporal (for this is a memoir after all) gap

between the writer and his family. In lieu of much-needed ingredients—“no sweetbread, no sugar cakes, no buckled-back flying fish, no cassava pone” (40)—Clarke carries with him on this first extended stay in Toronto “all the conversations and all the eccentricities of [his] mother, [his] aunts, cousins and grandmothers . . . who nurtured [him], fed [him] from their pots” (41). This anecdote about baggage, both the rectangular case with handles and the cultural/intellectual/emotional kind, reveals much about Clarke's project which, as is outlined in the introduction, is to recall, commit to memory, preserve, and ultimately share these conversations about “our ways of cooking” (41).

Goto writes of a different kind of rupture, one that has less to do with geography and more to do with the dominant culture's demand for cultural integration. Whatever culinary heritage Muriel might have received from her parents is lost, or at least put on hold, the moment Keiko and Sam step foot on Canadian soil. Sensing that their children must be “as Canadian as everyone around them” (207), Keiko and Sam relinquish their hold on the Japanese language, and “convert[] from rice and *daikon* to wieners and beans” (13). Goto chooses her words carefully here. Her characters do not casually replace fish cakes and pickled plums with overdone rump roast. A conversion, with all the weighty connotations of the term, has taken place. The decision made by Keiko, or Kay, and Sam to put Japan behind them creates a cultural/linguistic and eventually physical divide between Muriel and her Obachan. Goto's use of magic realism, particularly Muriel's conversations with her missing (and possibly dead) grandmother, emphasize the nearly-impossible-to-believe lengths to which Muriel and Obachan must go to cross the space between them.

Learning how to cook involves more than following a series of printed instructions or listening to a lecture, watching *Food Network Canada*, or accessing recipes online.¹⁰³ One does not become a cook, these authors (and I include in this list Fred Wah) take pains to point out, without practice; *discimus agere agendo*, in other words. As much as the mind is implicated in the processes of *doing-cooking*,¹⁰⁴ the ingenuity, organizational skills, intelligence, and inventiveness required to plan and execute the daily meals, we must also take into account the movements of the body: I am interested here in the actual *physical* activity of cooking, the kinds of kinaesthetic learning that takes place. I shift my focus here from bodies moving globally to those same bodies moving about in the kitchen.

Cooking requires a certain degree of *entraînement physique*. To prepare an entire meal is to put together a sequence of gestures (Giard 199), a choreography of sorts that begins with “moving hands, careful fingers” (153) “wrist-work” (Clarke 107), until the “whole body is inhabited with the rhythm of working” (Giard 153). In *Diamond Grill*, Fred Wah, waiter and keeper of the soda fountain, is very much attuned to the movements and to the rhythms that necessarily accompany food preparation in his father's restaurant:

Hands on the move, and with one of them break an egg into the coffee grounds, turn taps, fill cream jugs, body picks up speed. A little spark to the step starts. . . . This is work. Rhythm. Don't love it but count on it, get into it. Some kind of dance; patterned yet yielding at the edges, room for subtle improv. Things touch and snap and flip and the shoulders and arms feel loose and precise, measured. (37)

¹⁰³ See Gamal Abdel-Shehid's “Cultural Globalization and the Soul Food Memoir: Austin Clarke, Ntozake Shange and Marlon Riggs” for an investigation of the ways in which *Food Network Canada* affects the reading and reception of food-filled CanLit texts.

¹⁰⁴ Timothy Tomasik's translation of Luce Giard's phrase *faire-la-cuisine*.

How does one acquire and begin to assemble such gestures or, to borrow a term from Marcel Mauss, “techniques of the body”?¹⁰⁵ An education in cooking as Luce Giard, drawing on Mauss' classic essay, points out has much to do with imitation (202). One imitates what one has seen or what one has been shown. The apprentice might also figure out how to do certain things her/himself (202). One cannot underestimate, as Hiromi Goto indicates, the importance of trial and error. Having received a grocery list from Obachan, and instructions from Sushi and the colour photo recipe book, Muriel must work with the tools and the raw materials at hand in order to come up with the desired result. Cited below are her three attempts at preparing the *Tonkatsu*:

The deep-frying was a bad scene. I didn't know how done they were and took the first two out too soon, the outside fried, but the inside meat still pink and bleeding. Possible tapeworm fears. So I put them in the oil again, but I had waited too long and the bread crumb coating was too soggy so it all broke apart. I had to go outside, dump the oil on the gravel driveway, and start over again. The second time, I fried them too long and they came out harder than leather thongs. But it wasn't a wasted effort because, by then, I figured out that the *Tonkatsu* sank when they were raw and floated when they were done. What does this mean? The third batch bobbed up light and golden, the pork just done and still tender. (150-151)

Perhaps Luce Giard puts it best when she describes her initial foray into the kitchen as a “*groping* experience” (152, emphasis added), a term with several meanings, some of which I make use of here. Making *tonkatsu* is, as far as Muriel is concerned, a matter of “feel[ing] about in order to find one's way” (per OED). To produce pork that is both “light and golden,” Muriel must first search for, experiment with, and settle on the most efficient gestures. To grope, as further defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, also means to

¹⁰⁵ “Techniques du Corps,” originally published in *Journal de Psychologie* 32.3-4 (1934).

“us[e] the hands in feeling, touching, or grasping” (per OED). For Clarke in particular, cooking is a highly sensual *art-de-faire*. He underlines the importance, not only of “cooking food with feeling. Feeling is stretched to include 'feeling up' the food: touching the fish; pulling out the entrails of a chicken with your fingers; peeling potatoes and slicing them with a knife while holding them in your hand” (Clarke 3). There are obvious sexual connotations associated with groping or feeling up, a sentiment that permeates the recipes of *Pig Tails*, from turning *cou-cou* to making an omelette.¹⁰⁶

More compelling than the gestures themselves, whether they be efficient, expressive or both, is the argument put forth by Mauss and taken up by Giard that these movements or techniques of the body are not natural, neutral, or static (Giard 202). They change over time. This choreography of everyday life, as Elizabeth Behnke succinctly summarizes, is socially/culturally shaped (Behnke 182). As Clarke explains, cooking had much to do with social status, which determined the kind of kitchen or “cooking area” (Clarke 19) in which one cooked and what kinds of utensils were used, which, ultimately, determined the kinds of gestures made. The very poor, Clarke recalls, generally cooked on three stones placed in the shape of a triangle, upon which they balanced a customized tin can or kerosene tin. By shifting, extinguishing, replacing fuel, dried sugar cane in some cases, the cook could regulate the heat, a practice that required a great deal of skill. In keeping with Guy

¹⁰⁶ Cou-cou: “the important thing is that you don’t want lumps in your cou-cou. Lumps are an important cultural embarrassment with serious sexual connotations, especially for a Barbadian woman cooking cou-cou” (108).

Omelette: “With an omelette, you dealing with nuances, with implications, with innuendo. You have to fall in love with the omelette first, before you can touch she. And when you touch she, remember that you touching something precious and fragile, like the body of a woman you love. It is all touch” (235-6).

Thullier's pronouncement—"There is a life and death of gestures" (qtd. in Giard 202)—Clarke is keen to establish that certain gestures fall by the wayside. In a case such as this, it is a question of technology: the more general use of electricity, or the arrival of gas stoves. Those three stones, and the gestures that accompanied them, are no longer ubiquitous as they were in Clarke's youth. Gestures also depend on geography or political and economic might; if you are members of "the Gee-Sevens economic club" (Clarke 50), for instance, you do not have to pick wee bulls, ants or the occasional mouse out of your flour before use.

For Clarke, preparing food and moving about one's kitchen is deeply informed by, but also informs, culture. The cou-cou stick is more than a tool for preparing cou-cou. It is, or has been used as, an instrument of discipline (106). Turning cou-cou, in the local vernacular, is a euphemism for a woman's sexual prowess. This cooking utensil has, as it turns out, crept into other areas of everyday life, requiring new sets of gestures, acquiring new meanings. Turning cou-cou is to Clarke what the mixed grill is to Fred Wah, a dish whose ingredients and mode of preparation are neither neutral nor static. This menu item is a staple of "Empire cuisine" and is, Wah argues, part of the Chinese cook's "colonial . . . training" (2). Shu, the Diamond Grill chef, puts together and presents a version of this dish, changing the "original" assortment of meats, frying rather than grilling, boiling vegetables instead of steaming, and renaming it the "mixee grill" (Wah 2). The mixed grill, while a symbol of British Imperialism, is also, as Lily Cho asserts, an opportunity for Chinese migrants to rework and recode colonial discourse, on a large scale (Cho 47). This "quick

and dirty” (Wah 2), “mixee grill” is widely available in Chinese-Canadian restaurants that, during the period of which Wah writes, make up approximately one fifth of the restaurants across Canada (Cho 39).

Within Goto, Clarke, and Wah's kitchens, culinary knowledge is obtained through pedagogy, practice, and requires of its students a healthy dose of intuition (particularly when one is receiving one's instructions through telepathy and in a language one does not speak) as well as, apparently, a good sense of rhythm: “So what happens to you that you can't shake up your body line too? Move, man! Show me your motions girl” (Clarke 91). These foodbooks, though texts themselves, explore and ask us to acknowledge “learning opportunities” outside the cookbook (Sherman 116). Or perhaps my definition of the cookbook has, up to this point, been too narrow. I have only referred to its written character, its status as a printed text.

The recipe is often associated with pleasure. The use of it can, depending on such variables as the cook's skill and the eater's palate, elicit pleasure. The activity it describes and promotes, cooking, has also been linked to routine, repetition, and domestic duty, or servitude, as many would have it. For Jack Goody,¹⁰⁷ Norbert Elias,¹⁰⁸ Stephen Mennell,¹⁰⁹ and Arjun Appadurai,¹¹⁰ to name a few, the recipe is something that is written and read. They are interested, in other words, in the “textualization of the culinary realm” (Appadurai 290). The fixing of ingredient lists and cooking instructions in written form is described in

¹⁰⁷ *Cooking, Cuisine, and Class: A Study in Comparative Sociology.*

¹⁰⁸ *The Civilizing Process.*

¹⁰⁹ *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present.*

¹¹⁰ “How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India,” *Food and Culture: A Reader.*

terms of progress, as a sign of, or a push toward, mass literacy. But what of oral traditions? Does the written recipe necessarily replace all other methods of obtaining and transmitting information about food?

The apparent shift from oral to written culinary cultures, I argue, is alternatively conceived by Austin Clarke, who creates a *talking text*.¹¹¹ The *talking text* aptly describes Clarke's project: to create a space in which the oral and the written come together. *Pig Tails 'n Breadfruit*, while committing Bajan recipes to paper, simultaneously, if somewhat paradoxically, insists upon the importance of the oral transmission of Barbadian cooking culture. Clarke acknowledges this paradox in his introduction:

It is ironical to be suggesting a book about food cooked in Barbados, because in every self-respecting Barbadian household the woman (who does most of the cooking, whether she is wife, daughter, or maid) would not be caught dead with a cookbook. To read a cookbook would suggest that she has not retained what her mother taught her; . . . There was never, and still is not, a cookbook in my mother's house. (Clarke 3)

The food rituals of Barbados, Clarke suggests, have more to do with the availability of foodstuffs than the availability of text. Clarke explores various economic and social factors that contributed to the cooking culture of his childhood. The combination of ingredients or “ingreasements” that made it into the pot were determined by the neighbourhood butcher

¹¹¹ The term, *talking text* references Andrew Warnes' discussion of the “talking recipe,” the “oral sensibility” of African-American cookbooks. And yet, to casually insert *Pigtails* into the body of soul food writing to which Warnes refers though would be a misstatement. Indeed, Clarke locates Barbadian cooking outside of, or at least identifies it as a predecessor to, an *Amurcan* tradition: “The Amurcans would call it soul food, but I would argue that we Wessindians, and Barbadians in particular, had come to soul food long before African Amurcans, African Canadians and Africadians” (Clarke 60). See also Berndt Ostendorf, “‘Jambalaya, crawfish pie, file gumbo’: the creolizing cuisines of New Orleans.” Soul food, Ostendorf writes, only formed in the 1960s in the wake of the rise of black power. Slave food writing or, more generally, writing of the Caribbean, has its own particularities, its own lexicons and, as Clarke insists, aesthetic.

(who would only kill pigs on Saturdays), by the growing season, by the accessibility of imports of often inferior quality from Australia, Canada, England, and France, and by one's social status: "If you were not a woman of standing," writes Clarke, "a purse full of shillings could not guarantee you any groceries; you had to wait until the 'regular' customers were served" (37).

The way in which these cooking instructions, family and cultural histories are delivered and remembered is certainly worth noting. Clarke's prose has, at times, an unmistakably oral quality: "we *talking* about food boy" (Clarke 2, emphasis added). This book, it is important to keep in mind, does not contain recordings. There is no CD or DVD insert fitted into a back pocket of a dust-jacket.¹¹² Clarke, in other words, is engaged in writing the oral, in writing, for instance, Bajan inflections and rhythms into the text.

Writing the oral is central to both *Pig Tails*, and to *Diamond Grill* as well, a text that alternates between the Chinook jargon employed by Wah's grandfather, the banter with and between customers in the dining area of the café, the Chinese and diner lingo, "Stack a hots! Half a dozen fry!" spoken in the kitchen (Wah 1). I wonder what writing the oral means for Clarke and Wah and I am interested in the utterances, the exchanges, taking place in the kitchen. I speak of a kind of kitchen vernacular here. Vernacular refers to a kind of speech that is native, indigenous or natural (per OED).¹¹³ Clearly for Clarke and Wah, the kitchen is a space to which they return, in which they recuperate and contemplate

¹¹² I am recalling here, an interview with Tessa McWatt, through the *Literature Alive* documentary series in which she expresses a desire to publish books with a multimedia component, including cds or dvds.

¹¹³ This latter adjective conjures up rather more problematic adjectives like pure, unalterable, or static.

their childhood and their cultural heritage. That recuperative process is as much a matter of form as it is of content for these writers as they take on, and play with, forms of speech of a certain time or place. Clarke insists early on in *Pig Tails*, “The way of cooking [Privilege¹¹⁴] has to be narrated in the native language of the people who invented it; the Bajan language” (Clarke 60). And yet I sense that there is more to be said about this matter. I do not wish to restrict Wah and Clarke's syntax to a question of origins. I am influenced by Lily Cho's reading of Wah criticism in *Eating Chinese*. She notes a tendency, in various critical approaches to Wah's work, to essentialize Wah's Chineseness, to reduce the complexity of Wah's form to autobiography (and a skewed autobiography at that): “Wah is either so Chinese that his syntax echoes an imaginary spoken Chinese or not Chinese enough” (Cho 137).¹¹⁵ Neither do I want to suggest that for these writers the kitchen is “an integral and coherent site of belonging” (Cho 138). The number of kitchens and the range of kitchen talk¹¹⁶ explored and expressed in both Wah and Clarke's writings suggests otherwise. After all, there is no one kitchen in either text. Kitchens of all types abound in both *Pig Tails* and *Diamond Grill*: kitchens of the present, kitchens remembered, private kitchens and professional kitchens, kitchens limited by a set of walls and a swinging door, outdoor kitchens, plantation kitchens, and so on.¹¹⁷ I am more inclined to describe these

¹¹⁴ A dish of rice, pig tails, salt beef, and okra.

¹¹⁵ As Wah reminds us, “Well Fuck! I don't even speak Chinese” (Wah qtd. in Cho 133)—or more precisely, Toisanese, Cantonese, Mandarin, Wu, and so on.

¹¹⁶ *Kitchen Talk* is also the name of an anthology of contemporary, Canadian, women's prose and poetry about the kitchen.

¹¹⁷ In her introduction to *Kitchen Talk*, Edna Alford lists the many kitchens she came across while gathering material for this anthology of food writing. I sought to make a similar list from the many kitchens featured in my own corpus.

spaces as contact zones. Mary Louise Pratt's contact zone, as cited by Fred Wah, refers to the “spatial and temporal co-presence of subjects¹¹⁸ previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect” (Pratt qtd. in Wah, 70). This kind of contact zone is described or made manifest by Clarke and Wah writing of, and in, “tongues all over the place” (Wah 1), as in different languages and different registers of the same language. In this room with the stove, Chinook jargon meets diner lingo (Wah). A Caribbean English Creole (Baena 111) or a “reader-friendly adaptation of Barbadian English” (Lopez-Roper 86) intersect (Clarke).

I also read *contact* more literally here. I take my cue from the opening prose poem of *Diamond Grill*. Wah and Clarke are concerned not just with tongues, but with “*Fingers and tongues all over the place*” (Wah 1). In both texts, contact zone refers not just to talk, but also to touch and taste. The kitchen is also a place where food is made and eaten, in other words. These writers explore a vocabulary of both sounds and utterances that reflect these practices: the *WhapBamBoom* (Wah 21) of a server's foot against the brass sheet at the base of the kitchen's swinging door, “the buzz” (38), the “muffled thunk syncopated to the dance of plates” (41), “the cacophony of busy-ness” (21). This “vital percussion” (Wah 21) includes the sounds of food preparation, as well as those related to consumption: the clicking sound as your teeth meet the nicely ripened (day-old) bakes (Clarke 53), the sound and “fragrance of expectoration” (115) following a meal of wind-inducing breadfruit coucou with braising beef.

¹¹⁸ and objects, specifically foodstuffs, I would add.

Related to this discussion of oral and written transmission of information about food is, as I shall attempt to articulate below, the question of formalization. To formalize is to give shape to, to render ceremonious, or render formal, all activities which I, given my own cultural heritage and (informal) culinary training, automatically associate with French cuisine. I should, therefore, like to conclude this section on learning opportunities and food information exchange by probing this notion of formalization and by comparing Austin Clarke's "hot cuisine" (Clarke 1) with Escoffier's *haute cuisine*.

"What do French-people know about cooking food?" (1), asks Austin Clarke's mother in the opening lines of *Pig Tails 'n Breadfruit*. She rejects outright, "that kind of French sophistication with sauces and garlic" (1). Her question quickly and efficiently places Barbadian cooking culture in opposition to French cuisine. The reference here is specifically to *haute cuisine*, *cuisine classique*, or "hot cuisine" as his mother calls it (1). Even a cursory glance in the direction of Escoffier's *Le Guide Culinaire* reveals the differences between *haute cuisine* "with its emphasis on spectacle, disguise, and display" (Appadurai 290), and the "simple, basic food" (Clarke 2) to which Clarke refers. Escoffier's *Guide Culinaire* has acquired the status of ultimate and indispensable textbook of this particular school of cooking.¹¹⁹

I read the two culinary guides together, in part for their striking dissimilarities (already alluded to by Clarke and his mother). They do not share or at least target the same readers, nor do they promote the use of similar cooking techniques, materials, and

¹¹⁹ See Amy Trubek's *Haute Cuisine: How the French Invented the Culinary Profession*.

presentation styles. One is playfully written (Clarke), while the other is quite serious in tone (Escoffier). Clarke's intended reader, as identified by Abdel-Shehid and reiterated by Rosalia Baena, is one who is “unfamiliar with Bajan cooking, and thus someone who must be led through each recipe” (461; 111). Clarke attempts to render his recipes culturally relevant to a very specific audience: “we call them eschalots back in the Wessendies, but up here in Canada a 'shalot' is not the same thing as a green onion” (Clarke 81)—unless you live in Quebec I would add.¹²⁰

At the very least, Escoffier's reader must know how to kill his or her own turtle. Not for the neophyte, nor for the faint of heart or stomach, this book was written with the professional chef in mind. Escoffier warns his readers of the dangers of using cheap provisions. Good results, he writes, are entirely subject to the use of good materials. A chef's reputation depends upon it: “Amphitryons who set aside these essential principles may hope in vain to found a reputation for their tables” (Escoffier ix). Left with nothing but cheap or second-class provisions, the “leavings of left-overs, the remnants of the better cuts of meat eaten by the plantation owners” (Clarke 60), the cooks to which Clarke refers extract wee bulls, blackened grains and other impurities from their rice, and cure inferior cuts of meat in brine in order to make a dish taste “sweet.” That which was designed in and for “palatial hotels” and “sumptuous restaurants” (Escoffier v) has no place, says Clarke, in the “dark, smoky kitchens” (Clarke 41) of his youth. *Pig Tails* is highly diverting and humorous. The humour in this text is not without function. Lopez-Ropero likens Clarke's

¹²⁰ in Quebec, *échalote* refers to the green onion, while *échalote française* describes to the brown-skinned, purple bulb.

narrative style to Calypsos and Caribbean folk songs “which tell stories that mask in humour and irony a serious commentary on historical or political matters” (Lopez-Ropero 81). It not only entertains but, as Michael Fischer argues, humour “is a survival skill . . . an art for affirming life in the face of objective troubles” (qtd. in Baena 112). Describing her own encounter with Escoffier's formidable 5,000 plus recipe guide, Gina Mallet observes the lack of “flights of fancy” within *Le Guide Culinaire*: “I realized I was reading the gastronomic equivalent of a mechanic's manual” (60). Escoffier's unembellished prose lacks even “a smidgeon of charm, unlike the cookbooks of today which make cooking sound as rewarding as motherhood. Nor has it a flash of humour,” writes Mallet (62).

And yet Escoffier and Clarke have more in common than one might initially imagine. Both writers, I suggest, promote, practice, and demonstrate an interest in, “getting it right” (Abdel-Shehid) when it comes to cooking and talking about cooking. “Getting it right” for Escoffier, indeed for many food writers and critics of food writing, refers to the formalization of culinary rules, “technical cohesion” and the idea of a “common repertoire of methods” (Mennell 67), and is directly linked to the development of a “literate culinary culture” (67). *Le Guide Culinaire* was to be read and recipes replicated, no variations accepted, by any practicing chef, in any Grand Hotel (Mallet 61). An industrial language for an industrialized cuisine, in other words (61). Escoffier, as is particularly evident in the English translation of the *Guide*, promotes the use of a standard kitchen vocabulary. A greater part of his titles and technical terms are left in French. “I introduce or promulgate this system,” he writes, “since it is growing every day more customary to write menus in

French” (Escoffier ix). Escoffier is engaged in the process of codifying, Gallicizing (Escoffier ix) and widely disseminating French cooking terminology, providing a glossary for those as yet unfamiliar with these terms, and insisting on the importance of adapting to, and adopting, this one mode of speech, this one set of techniques, in the kitchen.

The fixing of a particular approach to cooking is linked to “the fixing of a text in an objective, written form” (Mennell 67). The form to which we cling is, of course, the recipe. Stephen Mennell draws our attention to the imperative tone of the written recipe, “indeed the word 'recipe' itself . . . means 'take', typically the first command in the instructions for each dish” (Mennell 67). How, then, do we understand or begin to talk about food writing that does not, strictly speaking, subscribe to the recipe (or to that form of it)? One does not find lists of ingredients followed by numbered, step-by-step instructions in *Pig Tails*. The word 'recipe' did not exist in the vocabulary of Clarke's youth (Clarke 5). Any number of dishes or combinations of ingredients are simply referred to as “food” (Clarke 2). Andrew Warnes describes African-American cookbooks and his understanding of them “less as acts of writing than as transcripts in which the fleeting spontaneity of speech is apparently captured” (Warnes 55). This statement of Warnes', I argue, replete with contradiction, *apparently spontaneous transcript*, most effectively characterizes Clarke's writings. There is an observable interplay, in other words, between scriptedness and improvisation.

A marked sense of spontaneity, an element of the unplanned in *Pig Tails*, has much to do with the memoir's conversational-style narrative. As Rosalia Baena remarks, this text is rife with “inconsistencies, repetitions, contradictions, and corrections” (112), as the

narrator instructs the reader: “Christ, you know something? I forgot to tell you to bring a package o’ beef bouillon” (Clarke 202). This off-the-cuff speech parallels Clarke’s claim that the essence of Bajan cooking is creative improvisation. Improvisation for Clarke is about making do: “You have to use the ingreaselements that are available, or that grow in your backyard” (Clarke 157), “If you don’t have a horse, ride a cow. Or jackass. Or a mule” (Clarke 90). Clarke provides a history of slaves/plantation workers, and his, primarily female, relatives making do with leftover bits of pigs’ feet and snouts, pieces of ear and tails, the little vegetation that grows in garden plots, and the occasional sweet potato gleaned from plantations under the cover of night.

“Making do” Lynn Marie Houston argues¹²¹ is a philosophy or trait “common to both Caribbean food culture *and* literary culture” (99, emphasis added). Without summarizing the article in its entirety, I will make mention of two of Houston’s many interpretations and explications of “making do” that best correspond with Clarke’s work. “Making do,” writes Houston, is more than just about working with, and creating something out of, inferior materials. Drawing from Michel de Certeau’s use of Lévi-Strauss’ *bricolage* (translated into “making do” in the English translation of *The Practice of Everyday Life*), Houston reminds us that the *bricoleur* “speaks not only *with* things . . . but also through the medium of things” (111). For the cook, making *bakes* is both a way to make a meal with what’s left in the larder (flour, salt, sugar, and lard oil) and, more recently, a way to express to your eaters “that you know and love your [Barbadian] culture”

¹²¹ “Making do: Caribbean Foodways and the Economics of Postcolonial Literary Culture.”

(Clarke 49). As well as recounting his own personal encounters with the dish, for Clarke bakes are . . .

A food of great *historical* significance that can be found in the lexicon of Barbadian *sociology*, with a strong *anthropological* association with the days of slavery, thereby giving bakes a most serious cultural-culinary antecedent in the life of this great little nation of Barbados. (Clarke 45, emphasis added)

Bakes are the medium through which to broach such topics as social and economic status, colonial (and neocolonial) rule, nationalism, and the fact that bakes “is food and it taste sweet” (Clarke 49). Both in the kitchen(s) and on the page, Clarke explores the practical (making Privilege—the national dish of Barbados—out of pig tails) and the poetic (making pig *tales* out of Privilege) ways of “making do.” A *bricoleur* creates something out of bits and pieces, of remnants. Houston describes the style and structure of Caribbean writer Marcia Douglas' *Madam Fate* as that of collage, “a form based on the philosophy of 'making do'” (109). This text, she writes, is a piecing together of genres (songs, poems) and textual materials (Houston 110). Clarke's writing strategy in *Pig Tails*, I argue, may be described in similar terms. Clarke innovatively draws from a number of sources (both personal and public histories) to write a culinary memoir that may be called a cookbook, a history, an ethnography, and an autobiography all at once (Lopez-Ropero 78).

This notion of creative improvisation or “making do” is limited, both geographically and temporally speaking, to the Barbados of Clarke's childhood. Clarke, as Abdel-Shehid proposes, does not reflect at length on the “hybrid and improvisational ways that immigrant cooking gets reproduced outside of 'home,' where ingredients are scarce, and frozen foods must be substituted for fresh ones” (Abdel-Shehid 461). Instead, Clarke sets out to instruct

his North American readers on how to reproduce certain dishes and even provides them with addresses in Toronto and Brooklyn, where cou-cou sticks, pigs' feet, and souse can be acquired. The emphasis here is on reproduction rather than creation.

Not unlike Escoffier, Clarke places a great deal of emphasis on “getting it right”¹²² (Abdel-Shehid 461). The reader is asked to refrain from adding a salad or a dessert to a Barbadian meal. In doing so, he or she runs the risk of “digress[ing] too radically from the cultural origin of this food and destroy[ing] its authenticity” (Clarke 88). The writer wishes to make clear that the oral transmission of ingredients, though they may not be precisely measured into “ounces and grams, cups and litres” (2), and instructions does not make them any less codified or ritualized: “Things handed down must be remembered, word for word, so as not to dilute 'the way of cooking' (4).

Claim

Both Clarke and Escoffier (and also Wah, Goto and Giard) are also invested in, or wrestle with, the idea of the recipe as private or collective property, as a birthright, as something that can be claimed and/or shared. This claiming, coming into, taking possession of, or transferring information about food and food preparation is, for Escoffier, a matter of reputation by way of copyright. The chef's reputation, he insists, depends upon the public's continuing recognition, and approval, of his work. He bemoans the lack of legal protection available to the chef who wishes to claim a recipe as his/her own invention: “The painter,

¹²² Clarke's position is quite polarized here. He insists on improvisation and precision in both writing and cooking.

sculptor, writer, and musician are protected by law. So are inventors. But the chef has absolutely no redress for plagiarism on his work” (Escoffier vii). The cookbook itself is clearly an exercise in, as he writes, “claim[ing] the monopoly of his secret discover[ies]” (vii).¹²³ Given its status as “the bible of classic cuisine” (Mallet 58), it is safe to say that Escoffier has had a certain degree of success in what he set out to do. My interest, as far as these writings are concerned, is not so much the simple fact of ownership of recipes, the commercial rights, the paper on which they are written, but rather what these recipes allow the writers and/or their protagonists to claim, be it prestige in Escoffier's case, or a particular culinary/family/cultural heritage. I am also interested in how these writers understand or define what it means to make or stake a claim.

For many of these writers under scrutiny, food is a thing of the past. Food functions, in other words, as a vehicle through which they can begin to rifle through, expose, explore, or come into possession of histories: their own, those of the characters they've created, or the culture(s) about which they write. With this interest in food, history, and food history comes the tendency to practice what Rachel Laudan has so aptly termed *Culinary Luddism*. Culinary Luddites¹²⁴ oppose “Culinary Modernism,” or industrially prepared foods: frozen, canned, wrapped in plastic, transported in trucks, cooked in electric ovens and served on melamine plates (Laudan 1). Down with canned peas and frozen dinners, in other words.

¹²³ And yet, as Cathy Kaufman asks, what can be copyrighted? “Is it the dish—that is, the ephemeral edible product that results when recipes’ instructions are followed, or is it the recipe, that is, the language memorializing the instructions needed to make the dish? . . . The accretive nature of culinary knowledge,” Kaufman argues “makes such attribution [i.e. copyright] ill-suited for culinary works” (189).

¹²⁴ Luddite - British textile workers (1811-1816) who destroyed the manufacturing machinery that threatened their livelihood - as skilled artisans, not unskilled labourers simply paid to operate machinery (per OED).

Up with artisanal cured meats or cheese with “soul” (Mallet 145). In its place, the Luddite advocates a return to traditional foods and, as Amy Bentley summarizes, tends to “offer[] up a romanticized and historically inaccurate, and never-existing, notion of 'authentic cuisine'” (Bentley 96).

Luce Giard stands accused of this very tendency in *The Practice of Everyday Life:*

Living and Cooking. I quote at length here from Joanne Hollows:

Luce Giard, while seeking to validate the practice of ‘doing cooking’ and its role in women’s culture . . . employs a narrative of cultural decline that employs some of the tropes of mass culture theory. The skilled and inventive female cook of yore, she argues, is being transformed into an ‘*unskilled spectator* who watches the machine function in her place’ (1998: 212; emphasis in original). Although Giard warns of the dangers of ‘archaistic nostalgia’ (1998: 213), her culturalist analysis nonetheless rests on a distinction between an ‘authentic’ popular culture, reproduced in a living tradition of women’s culture, and an ‘inauthentic’ mass-produced and industrialized culture that is produced *for* women rather than by them. . . . Giard seek[s] to celebrate and validate a prefeminist feminine practice located in a world ‘outside’ capitalist industrialization. (189)

I do not entirely agree with Hollows here. Like the Luddites, Giard does indeed demonstrate a preference for the homemade over that which has been made by machine; she claims, “there is a profound pleasure in achieving by oneself what one offers to one's guests” (Giard 213). I happen to share this preference (though not when it comes to making gnocchi or puff pastry). Giard revisits/records past, and now defunct, kitchen gestures without being uncritically sentimental about them. “The past cannot be reborn from its ashes,” she writes, “a culture that stops moving decrees its own death” (213). Giard’s work on doing-cooking is more about acknowledging change and valuing responses to change, than employing a narrative of loss and decline. The women she interviews (of various ages,

status, and professions) are very much of the time and place in which she works (the late 1980s in France). Some of their kitchen gestures are inherited. These women have also acquired new knowledge: learning to read elaborate food labels, open cans and jars, defrost food, whip egg whites, all either by hand or with the appropriate kitchen gadget. Giard concludes that “alimentary habits constitute a domain where tradition and innovation matter equally, where past and present are mixed and serve the needs of the hour” (151). Giard’s focus on change, or more precisely on the challenges of adapting, and adapting to the ever-changing kitchen¹²⁵ reinforces her central thesis. Kitchen work, she seeks above all to demonstrate, requires “intelligence, imagination, and memory” (151).

It is very easy, initially, to read Clarke's memoir as a Luddite’s attempt to reclaim an authentic Barbadian culinary/family/cultural history. Clarke offers to share the details of a cuisine “born and bred in Barbados” (Clarke 41). As was discussed earlier, Clarke insists at certain moments within the narrative (although not in others) on the importance of reproducing recipes accurately, of making *real*, “*pure*, simple and good” (Clarke 2, emphasis added) Barbadian food. Cou-cou, he claims, “along with other elements of superior cultural and gastronomical significance . . . have all been born, invented, started first or originated in that small paradise of an island, Barbados” (Clarke 100). Both Lourdes Lopez-Ropero and Lily Cho express concern that talking about “an essence or purity” in cooking risks “reconsecrating a kind of ethnic nationalism” (Cho 1), or “ethnic absolutism”

¹²⁵ These changes, Giard writes, are the result of industrialization, increased mechanization of kitchen work, the “elevation of the standard of living and the generalization of education, increased geographic mobility and the multiplication of travel, as well as the practice of exogamy” (201).

(Gilroy qtd. in Lopez-Ropero 83). The search for purely authentic food is also a search for dishes with ingredients and/or modes of preparation that remain relatively static, unchanging. Clarke's writings on *Privilege* and flying fish, both considered “national” dishes, challenge such Luddite watchwords as authentic, pure, rootedness by reminding us, as I shall attempt to articulate below, that food *moves* (in many senses of the term, food moves from one place to another, its status is subject to change and its histories are unstable).

Clarke begins by situating *Privilege*—a dish of plain rice, okra, salt beef, and pig tails—at the very head and heart of the nation, the Prime Minister's office. In the presence of a handful of Cabinet Ministers, Clarke, then an advisor on internal political affairs, having been called into the Prime Minister's office, is taken to task for not knowing what *real* *Privilege* is: “Look at the big professor from a Ivy League university up in Amurca, who doesn't know what privilege is! You see what happens to our biggest brains when they leave here, to go Away to North Amurca and learn a lot o' foolishness? And then come back here and forget their roots?” (Clarke 59). The author thoroughly enjoys this dish cooked for him by the Prime Minister. He has three helpings after all. While the chapter begins with an account of the author's apparent loss of cultural roots, the author himself is not preoccupied with rootedness. As Lourdes Lopez-Ropero observes, “Clarke does not overlook the complex linkages and mixed traditions of the food cooked in Barbados” (Lopez-Ropero 84). Food moves, in other words. *Privilege*, advises Clarke, can be served

with the local specialty, *Mount Gay Rum* mixed with *Coke*¹²⁶, or with the slightly less local *Heineken*. It is significant that one of the main ingredients of this national dish, rice, cannot be grown in Barbados. Like so many other “ingreasements” on this island, rice came, and continues to come, from Away.

Food, and the people who eat it, are on the move . . . or they run or they swim, as is emphasized by Clarke and as is most delightfully illustrated by the author's description of the fate of the flying fish:

The seas round Barbados used to be inhabited by one of the sweetest fish in the world: the flying fish. But Barbadians cooked the fish that used to live in the sea surrounding the island so damn bad, drowning them with too much lime juice, seasoning and pepper sauce, and then frying them too long in oil, that all the fish – especially the flying fish – got vex and swim away from Barbados. . . . The poor fish had no other alternative but to run to Trinidad, as refugees, to save their cultural identity. (Clarke 92-93)

Truth be told, the flying fish were more put off by pollution and overfishing than the question of cultural identity. Their migration was not, as Clarke muses, an act of protest against the manner in which they were being prepared. This tongue-in-cheek description of Barbados' official national dish/fish suggests that islands are not necessarily insular. As Clarke is at pains to point out, the food of Barbados is always and ever part of a global food economy: “If you want flying fish nowadays you have to import one. As a matter of fact, flying fish are easier to get in Toronto than in Barbados” (93).

¹²⁶ See Daniel Miller's “Coca-Cola: A Black Sweet Drink From Trinidad,” for his assertion that Coca-Cola is considered both a meta-commodity, a stand-in for imperialism and Americanization, and an “intensely local, nationalist drink” (172).

In the hands of Laudan's Luddite, the search for, or retrieval of, an authentic cuisine entails an inevitably inaccurate, overly simplified and romanticized look at the past. Very much attuned to this philosophical/gastronomical current, one might suggest, Clarke writes, "Why couldn't I have been a slave too?' You are bound to axe yourself this question. 'Why did they have to abolish slavery before I learn how to cook Privilege?'" (Clarke 65). Dripping with irony, this statement is not a dismissal of the grim realities of slavery. As Rosalia Baena argues, Clarke mocks the cult of cultural authenticity (112). He draws our attention to the exaggerations we make, the lengths to which we go when speaking of, or searching for, the original, the first-hand, the perfectly authentic, cultural moment. "We don't have to retread those paths to the slave days in order to reproduce and enjoy the culinary preciousness of slave food" explains Clarke at a later moment within the text (Clarke 88).

Food for Clarke, as is most effectively illustrated through his personal and yet rather public encounter with Privilege in the Prime Minister's office, is very much a product of Barbadian history. Clarke is intent on exploring the various ways in which slavery and colonialism, for instance, have shaped Barbadian cuisine (Baena 114). Privilege, as Prime Minister Barrow emphasizes, is "slave food, based on the leavings or left-overs, the remnants of the better cuts of meat eaten by Plantation owners" (Clarke 60). The flying fish story, I would argue on the other hand, demonstrates the extent to which Barbadian cuisine

is not just shaped by history, but helps to shape his/story,¹²⁷ encourages myth-making, inspires storytelling, and challenges what passes for historical fact. Clarke appears to have differing degrees of appreciation for, and interest in, myth in connection with food. Echoing the voice of his mother, he argues against using “fancy words or fancy attitudes . . . to give [food] more appeal, myth, and class than it deserves” (2). Myth, in the opening lines of *Pig Tails*, is oppressive, pretentiousness, imposed upon those who prefer the “simple,” “basic” Bajan cuisine (2) by the proponents of French or “hot” cuisine. Clarke's mistrust of myth here echoes another collection of writings on food. French food that is. I refer to Roland Barthes essays “Wine and Milk,” and “Steak and Chips” in *Mythologies*. Myth, writes Barthes from his mid-century French perspective, has an “imperative, buttonholing character” (Tager 632). Myth, for Barthes, was a tool appropriated by the bourgeoisie to justify its dominance, both on a national and an international scale (632):

Our press, our films, our theatre, our pulp literature, our rituals, our Justice, our diplomacy, our conversations . . . the cooking we dream of, the garments we wear, everything, in everyday life, is dependent on the representation which the bourgeoisie *has and makes us have* of the relations between man and the world. (Barthes 140)

It is this kind of representation of food, this instance of French culinary colonialism that Clarke resists in the opening pages of the memoir. The memoir ends, however, with praise for his mother's cooking know-how, for “her understanding of the myths that surround *our* ways of cooking” (Clarke 246). This might simply be a case of Clarke preferring *our*

¹²⁷ I make use of the neologism his/story in this case, to emphasize the more personalized historical writing that Clarke engages in.

(Barbadian) myths over *theirs* (French). I am more inclined to suggest that the appeal of myth for Clarke has much to do with it being a synonym for fiction, fabrication, the imaginary.¹²⁸ Throughout *Pig Tails*, Clarke plays with the boundaries between truth and fiction, story and history. As he explains in an interview, “story must be magical in its presentation of the facts—and the facts need not be facts in the historical sense. The facts could all be invention and all lies” (qtd. in Hewson). While Barthes seeks to demystify wine and milk, steak and French fries in *Mythologies*, Clarke turns fish into fish tales, pig tails into pig tales.

To claim, by definition, is to act, to assert oneself, to make demands. Clarke has laid claim to a culinary heritage of a particular kind, one that is subject to change, makes room for his/story, and undermines notions of authenticity. As much as this chapter has been about food preparation, it has also, I must emphasize, been about the written expression of food preparation. Food-writing categories, as was discussed in the introductory chapter to this thesis,¹²⁹ are somewhat permeable. This permeability, I argue, also extends to the activities of cooking and writing. I draw on Luce Giard again who in “Doing Cooking” explains the link between the two activities as she understands it. Giard writes of a less than enthusiastic initial encounter with cooking, which she once dismissed as “elementary, conventional, pedestrian (and therefore a bit stupid) . . . feminine *savoir faire*” (Giard 152).

¹²⁸ Reminiscent of Tomson Highway’s *Comparing Mythologies*. In Cree, he writes, “mythologize” is a word that belongs between the words that mean “to tell a story,” “to tell the truth” and “to tell a lie” (22).

¹²⁹ Representations of food in print are often divided into, or are identified as belonging to, seemingly distinct food-writing categories: cookbook/noncookbook, practical/expressive, cookery books and gastronomic literature.

Far from claiming it, Giard describes herself as having been claimed by a body of culinary knowledge. She is its reluctant “heiress or guardian” (320). For her, learning to cook “implies returning to the maternal hearth and agreeing to slip back into that discarded feminine model” (320). She regards this “women's knowledge,” this matrilineage, as a kind of “contagion” that had, in spite of her efforts to the contrary, “crept into [her], slipping past her mind's surveillance” (320). Cooking involves, in part, learning certain gestures and then fitting them together into a sequence of gestures, a kind of choreography. Such gestures not only facilitate the learning process, they also, in Luce Giard's case, allow her to reproduce, thereby laying claim to, her own culinary heritage. To claim, for Giard, is to practice or to live these recipes or ways of cooking with her “hands and body” (153). It also, as she goes on to explain, has as much to do with writing. Part of Giard's project is to explore the connections between writing and doing-cooking, to discover why she “twine[s] such tight kinship ties between the writing of gestures and that of words” and to establish “a kind of reciprocity between their respective productions” (153).

In “Doing Cooking,” Giard aims to take on the voices of the women who came before her. To remain faithful to them is, for Giard, not so much about giving them a voice and, by extension, promoting her own. She sees her role as that of the public writer (or *écrivain publique*), the writer for hire, the scribe, the ghostwriter. To follow in their footsteps is, for her, a matter of reconstructing their silence, the ephemeral nature of their art. For Giard, the public writer, not unlike the generations of women who came before her, performs a valuable service before, ultimately, fading into the background. Given the

widespread circulation and translation of *The Practice of Everyday Life* and given her distinguished career as a research fellow at the *Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique* (CNRS), visiting professor in the Department of History at the University of California, San Diego, and editor of Michel de Certeau's works, I hesitate to describe Giard as a public writer as she has defined it. She is very much a public figure with a very public voice.

And yet, Giard's invocation of *l'écrivain publique* gives us food for thought. I do not make this pun flippantly here, as I try and work through the relationship between food (preparation) *and* thought (writing). In his introduction to M.F.K Fisher's *The Art of Eating*, James Beard writes, "For an art as transitory as gastronomy there can be no record except for a keen taste memory and the printed word" (Beard xx). For Beard, the printed word serves gastronomy (thought *for* food). It records and disseminates the ephemeral art of making food. Note also the sharp distinction between the two art forms: one is permanent, the other is not. The writers upon whom I am focusing—from Goto to Wah to Clarke to Giard—are more concerned with drawing parallels, dulling the distinction between the two activities. Escoffier is the exception here. He emphasizes the ways in which text serves food, giving him copyright, recording and disseminating his work to a large and international audience. Determined to point out the poetic qualities of cooking, these writers acknowledge not only the manual skills but also the mental acuity required to cook

a meal.¹³⁰ Cooking, like writing, involves planning, creating, composing, organizing, pacing, and presenting.

That Clarke makes connections between writing and cooking is evident in the text's opening line: "Food. It is a *word* that defines my life" (1, emphasis added). Food is to be cultivated, procured, prepared, and eaten as Clarke will suggest. It is also, he emphasizes here, a word. It is to be uttered and written, and written about, and talked about. A second of many noteworthy examples may be found in the final chapter, "Chicken Austintatious." Working in his mother's kitchen, Clarke is charged with the task of watching the pot, making sure nothing boils over. In this kitchen, Clarke is the sous-chef while his mother, he insists, is a poet (218). Clarke does not specify whether she is a poet because she makes "sweet food" (218), or because of the way she describes the cooking process: "A little sprig o' thyme from offa my tree, and cover-she-down . . . and that's that! Boy, we cooking!" (218). In this passage, cooking and poetry are one discipline. Both poet and cook take on both roles simultaneously in this scene.

The two activities are further enmeshed by those who set out to write the experience of food preparation or writing cooking. I draw from *Diamond Grill* here to illustrate what writing cooking looks like to Fred Wah. It contains certain elements of the written recipe. The ingredient lists are missing but the procedural notes with their imperative tone are there (although not physically separate from Wah's other narrative threads). Wah's instructions for cooking rice—an excerpt of which I include below—are sandwiched between a prose

¹³⁰ See Lisa Heldke "Foodmaking as Thoughtful Practice" in, *Cooking, eating, thinking: Transformative philosophies of food*. She too describes cooking as a mentally manual or theoretically practical activity.

poem about rice porridge and the memories it triggers, and another about the daily routine of *Diamond Grill* waitress Donna Mori:

Put enough water in to cover rice plus the thickness of your fingers as you hold them top-of-the hand down on the rice (variation due to age, gender, race, or class is negligible—the results are always perfection). Bring to a boil then simmer with a heavy lid on for about half an hour. (75)

For Wah, writing cooking is not just about writing recipes. He also sets out to acknowledge the rhythms, the gestures, the sounds of preparing food. I have referred to the kitchen sounds, delivered to the reader, in part, in the form of onomatopoeia: the buzz (Wah 38), the *whap*, the *boom*, the *whapbamboom* of the kitchen door (Wah 21), the yum yum of Gim jim (Wah 129).¹³¹ The rhythms of kitchen labour are underscored by highly rhythmic prose poetry. Rosalia Baena suggests that Wah employs jazz rhythms in his writing of *Diamond Grill* (108).¹³² One can certainly recognize the repetition, the syncopation one finds in jazz in the following description of kitchen work: “Things touch and snap and flip and the shoulders and arms feel loose and precise, measured” (Wah 37). As a whole, this and other kitchen-centred passages are saturated with references to rhythm, measure, and improvisation. Cooks and waiters work *in sync*, *in tune* (Wah 37). They “make the day *hum*” (Wah 37, emphasis added). One might say that Wah applies the principles of jazz, or music in general, to his writing. I would add to this observation that Wah is, at the same

¹³¹ or *gum jum*, a dish of lily buds and steamed chicken.

¹³² Glenn Deer also comments on the jazz rhythms of Wah's work: “Diamond Grill” he writes, “syntactically performs the sizzle of the food, the jazz of the bodies working, serving, weaving, and sweating their way across the restaurant floor” (293).

time, looking to reproduce the rhythms of everyday life, to acknowledge the innate musicality of making pancakes and Boston cream pie.

Conclusion

This chapter has been about what happens to food once it leaves the market or grocery store and before it arrives on a plate in a dining room or breakfast nook. This chapter has been about food preparation as expressed in, and explored by, Austin Clarke in *Pig Tails 'n Breadfruit*; Hiromi Goto in *Chorus of Mushrooms*; and Fred Wah in *Diamond Grill*. The writers in question share an interest in *doing-cooking*: the ingenuity, organizational skills, inventiveness, and physical training required to produce daily meals or celebratory feasts as the case may be. They describe various ways in which one might obtain, exchange, and transmit information about food preparation—of the textual (recipes and recipe books) and extratextual variety (in/formal apprenticeships between student and teacher, the oral transmission of culinary knowledge, and kinesthesia or cooking as a learned choreography). Food preparation certainly has its literal/practical applications. Food is made to be *eaten* (the preceding chapter's point of focus). But cooking, these writers insist, is also about laying claim to culinary, cultural, familial heritage(s). It is about fabrication—in the sense of making, making do, and making up. It has a great deal in common with writing in other words. That the two activities are complexly connected is the thread that ties these texts together.

Chapter 4: Consumption

I was always hungry for words
—Hiromi Goto, *Chorus of Mushrooms* (98)

The second chapter of this thesis was partly about consumption: of the supermarket kind. In this final chapter, I refer to another kind of consumption. To borrow from Margaret Atwood's introduction to *The CanLit Foodbook*, “I'm talking about the things people put into their mouths with a view to ingestion” (1). This chapter is about eating. “Some novelists,” writes Atwood, “make sure that their characters are given a square meal, or at least a disgusting one, at rapid intervals; others merely furnish them with drink; others neglect their digestive tracts entirely” (1). The literary texts I examine in this chapter, Hiromi Goto's *The Kappa Child* and *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Tessa McWatt's *This Body*, and Fred Wah's *Diamond Grill* are teeming with meals, some more square than others. The *Diamond Grill* is a restaurant. It stands to reason that people should sit down to a meal in this space; Goto's characters are food producers, growers of rice and mushrooms. They are also, it turns out, eaters; Victoria Layne, of Tessa McWatt's *This Body*, is a hospital cook, caterer, and volunteer cook for the Salvation Army shelter. She eats too, though perhaps less than she cooks.

The eaters of this collection of texts eat a lot (frequently and in large quantities). They do not eat discreetly; repasts are literally punctuated by the sounds of mastication. For these characters, consumption goes beyond ingestion, digestion, and egestion. Goto, as well as McWatt and Wah, provide their readers with nuanced and dynamic portraits of the kinds

of things that may be communicated through food (social standing, relationships, states of being) and how such things are communicated (through words, sounds, body language).

The Eloquence of Eating or mastication, gesticulation as voice

It all begins with the mouth.

—bp nichol, “The Mouth” (229)

In *Les Cinq Sens*, Michel Serres postulates that we have two mouths: “the speaking mouth which is given primacy by the elevation of language, and the subordinate tasting mouth” (Howes 3).¹³³ In *The CanLit Foodbook*, Margaret Atwood describes eating and speaking as distinct stages in one's intellectual growth and development: “Eating is our earliest metaphor, preceding our consciousness of gender difference, race, nationality, and language. We eat *before* we talk” (Atwood 2, emphasis added). Must one activity precede, or be given primacy over, the other? Not so suggests Terry Eagleton in “Edible écriture.” He writes, “food is what makes up our bodies, just as words make up our mind, and if body and mind are hard to distinguish it is no wonder that eating and speaking should continuously cross over in metaphorical exchange” (207). In this same critical vein as Eagleton, Goto’s *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *The Kappa Child* insist, variously and constantly, that you eat from the same place you speak. This notion that the mouth has two functions—to ingest food and to emit vocal sounds, and that these functions overlap, and are complexly connected—is the primary focus of this first part of the chapter. For Goto, “it

¹³³ Serres laments this hierarchization of the two mouths. As David Howes explains, Serres describes the “language-bound body as a desensualized robot, moving stiffly, unable to taste or smell, preferring to dine on a printed menu than eat an actual meal” (Howes 2).

all begins with the mouth” (nichol 3). In part two of the chapter, I shift my focus from (primarily) the mouth to the rest of the body, from speaking, to (more generally) communicating, as explored by all three of the writers in question.

“Food is dear to me both physically, literally, and symbolically,” writes Hiromi Goto in a personal correspondence with Lisa Harris. There is much in Goto's writings that speaks to this preoccupation with the physical, literal side of eating. Whether it's a sit-down Easter dinner (*The Kappa Child*), an impromptu cucumber-eating session in the doorway of the fridge (*The Kappa Child*), a lobster feast at an all-night diner (*Chorus of Mushrooms*), or a picnic of rancid, fried chicken under the prairie skies (*The Kappa Child*), Goto provides her readers with frequent and detailed trajectories of her characters' food intake. From ingestion: “crack crack lobster shell between my molars . . . chew chew of lobster flesh . . . Sip, slurp from my cup of tea” (*Chorus of Mushrooms*, 148), to digestion: “Bile rose acid-painful and splashed the cavern of my mouth” (*The Kappa Child*, 36), and, occasionally, to egestion: “before I could say a word, a coil of intestine drained into my bowel and squeezed. I dashed to the washroom . . . just in time to explode into the toilet bowl” (*The Kappa Child*, 72). First, Goto stresses, comes the act of eating, the biological necessity of taking in food. “A body's gotta eat when a body's hungry” (*The Kappa Child*, 209), says Janice approvingly as she watches her neighbour and guest, the narrator of *The Kappa Child*, cram wedges of bacon into her mouth. “What can be more basic than food itself” asks Naoe of *Chorus of Mushrooms*, “Food to begin to grow. Without it you'd starve to death, even academics” (*Chorus of Mushrooms*, 201). But neither is Goto immune to the

symbolic, figurative import of eating. She has her characters slurp, chew, gulp down, and gobble their way through their meals, but her writings are more than a faithful representation of the mechanics of eating. For Goto eating is very much a matter of eloquence. Eloquence is “the action, practice, or art of expressing thought with fluency, force, and appropriateness, so as to appeal to the reason or move the feelings” (per OED), and in Goto's writings, this art of expression takes on various guises. First, I refer to Goto's generally wordless, masticating, gesticulating eaters. The noise, the vigour, the general lack of discretion with which they eat, may be read, I propose, as a form of bodily eloquence. At the close of this section, I turn to the stories exchanged during or following the meal. Feasting, particularly in *Chorus of Mushrooms*, leads, inevitably, to telling tales.

The following is a list of table manners, as articulated by a handful of guardians of everyday etiquette: Emily Post, Amy Vanderbilt, Mireille Guiliano,¹³⁴ offset with passages from Goto's novels:

1. Eat Slowly. Sitting down (Guiliano 47).

I go to the fridge for a cucumber. Stand in the open cool, stand there and crunch and crunch. (Goto, The Kappa Child, 28).

2. Avoid slurping, smacking, blowing your nose, or other gross noises (Post, “Top Ten”)

I shove the mass into my mouth and chew, chew, smack, chew, squelching between my colossal teeth (Goto, The Kappa Child, 21).

3. Don't use your utensils like a shovel or as if you've just stabbed the food you're about to eat (Post, “Top Ten”).

¹³⁴ Though Guiliano does not write strictly about matters of etiquette, her writing fits well within this collection of texts.

I jab my fork through the last three pizzas. Cram my mouth so full that fruit paste, bits of canned ham spurt from my nose. (Goto, The Kappa Child, 21)

4. Never talk with a mouthful of food (Vanderbilt 5).

“This is fantastic!” Tengu says, his mouth full of lobster meat, ginger pungent cream dripping from his lips (Goto, Chorus of Mushrooms, 146).

5. Remember to use your napkin at all times (Post, “Top Ten”).

He licks his fingers from his pinkie to his thumb (Goto, Chorus of Mushrooms, 146).

6. It is unforgivable to take anything out of your mouth that has been put in it (Post, *Etiquette*, 378).

I spoon a glob [of potato salad] into my mouth. The flavor is odd and before I stop myself, the potato flies out of my face and into Okasan's cabbage sink. (Goto, The Kappa Child, 24).

Etiquette guides are perhaps not the most obvious point of entry into Goto's novels.

Goto's characters, as the selected passages so effectively illustrate, do not pass muster in the decorum department. Table manners aside, what Goto and Post, for instance, have in common is their preoccupation with nonverbal communication (NVC) or body language.¹³⁵

Etiquette, according to Emily Post, requires an understanding of ethics and manners.

Manners, she explains further, are a matter of personality and deportment. And deportment has a great deal to do with one's physical bearing. More telling than what one says is the way one moves within social spaces, Post proposes. To the hostess of a formal dinner, she gives the following instructions:

¹³⁵ Barbara Korte writes that the term body language is misleading as it suggests “that the body speaks a ‘language’” (26).

On all occasions of formality, at a dinner as well as at a ball, the hostess stands near the door of her drawing-room, and as guests are announced, she greets them with a smile and a handshake and says something pleasant to each. *What she says is nothing very important*, charm of expression and of manner can often wordlessly express a far more gracious welcome than the most elaborate phrases (which as a matter of fact should be studiously avoided). (Etiquette 137, emphasis added)

Much of Post's advice has to do with that which is wordlessly expressed: a silent nod to the butler when a utensil is missing from one's place, a man's half-rise from the chair when a lady enters the room. In Post's own social circle and for her intended readership, such gestures are meaningful. I take up Post's interest in, and emphasis on, bodily eloquence in my reading of Hiromi Goto's gesture-laden dinner scenes. Post and Goto certainly have very different ideas as to how such eloquence must be acquired, performed and read. Emily Post writes, "All rules of table manners are made to avoid ugliness; to let anyone see what you have in your mouth is repulsive; to make a noise is to suggest an animal, to make a mess is disgusting" (Post, *Etiquette*).¹³⁶ Post and company advocate a kind of gestural and gustatory restraint: small delicate gestures for small dainty meals, in other words. To do otherwise is to exhibit a lack of civility, of respect for those with whom one shares a meal. When Goto's characters sit down to a meal, on the other hand, they do so with gusto. Meals are a cacophony of gnashing, and nibbling, a hive of activity. What's with all the fidgeting and audible mastication? Perhaps it makes up for the lack of talk which, at Goto's tables, is generally kept to a minimum. At a Post-inspired dinner party, whether formal or informal,

¹³⁶ Many of these matters of table etiquette have remained unchanged for centuries. See Mark Morton's *Gastronomica* article, "Table Manners," in which he brings together "morsels of etiquette" from the 16th to the twenty-first century in the form of a handy chart.

conversation is a must.¹³⁷ Dinner conversation in many a novel is more important than the meal itself. In both *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *The Kappa Child*, it is a relatively rare commodity. There are, as I shall articulate below, numerous reasons for this *kind* of silence. Mastication, the facial contortions that accompany it, and gesticulation, I propose, go a long way to filling in those apparent communication gaps. I read such gestures as a kind of bodily eloquence. They are an effective means of communicating with the other characters at the table, and with the reader. Not only do these characters not eat discreetly, they also, I argue, do not eat/speak discretely.

In *The Kappa Child*, the novel's unnamed narrator describes the “time-bomb compressed silences” of her childhood home. To speak is to call attention to oneself, and to do so in this household is to risk a beating. When the grownup daughters return home for an Easter dinner, they do converse, but their most meaningful or telling exchanges, I suggest, have to do with the way they work their mouths or hold their forks. I include the following purposely abridged excerpt from this Easter dinner¹³⁸

Okasan sits with pinched lips, still trying to force a happy face, taking little sips of her martini. Like James Bond. PG eats slices of the dark meat from the thighs of the turkey like meat is going to be extinct tomorrow. . . . PG's eyebrows screw ever closer together, her left eye looking for an escape route while she forks up more meat. . . . Okasan's cheek gives a little jerk. She lifts her martini-cooled hand to stroke the jumpy place on her face. . . . My sisters and I hold our forks still. . . . My small eyes dart. . . . Slither smiles. The foundation on her face doesn't hide her tremor. . . . Okasan nods slowly. She hasn't eaten a bite. Dad points his finger at the

¹³⁷ “One inexorable rule of etiquette is that you must talk to your next door neighbor at a dinner table. You *must*, that is all there is about it” (Post 41)

¹³⁸ I have extracted the actual dialogue to underline the extent to which Goto privileges nonverbal communication at this dinner table.

turkey. Juts his chin at Mice to cut him a slice. Mice flicks her panicked eyes at each of us in quick succession, but we turn aside our faces . . . Mice makes a small sound and raises trembling hands. . . . Dad's jaw tightens. (Goto, *The Kappa Child*, 25-26)

Mice then accidentally sends a drumstick flying onto the father's plate. Realizing he can no longer strike his grownup daughters (which they convey, I must add, without saying a word but by standing up around him), the father takes his frustration out on Okasan's dinner, overturning everything onto the floor.

The nonverbal in this scene is given primacy; Goto grants more space and consideration to what the characters *do* at the table than what they *say*. Speech consists mainly of eldest daughter Slither's attempts at making pleasantries. It cannot be called conversation, since Slither's questions and words of advice do not actually go anywhere: "You'll be constipated if you don't get some vegetables" (25), "And how's work, PG" (26)? "Isn't this turkey nice . . . This turkey is free-range. It's never had any antibiotics" (26). The most significant thing about these one-liners is the fact that they provoke so little [verbal] response. Goto's detailed descriptions of pinched lips, jerky cheeks, jutting chins, and trembling hands are what actually drive the scene forward. They are the action, the emotion, the conversation, at this dinner.

This interest of Goto's in the eloquence of silent, or not so silent, mouths includes and extends beyond meal times. Her descriptions of the narrator and the narrator's family and friends often include a reference (or several) to mouths: how they are set, how they are used, what they communicate, even when not speaking. There is Midori's "Mona Lisa smile from irreverent lips and a mouth that could be fouler than all of the Great Lakes put

together” (*The Kappa Child*, 84) to contend with. Though “plain as Wonderbread” (52), the air that flows from Genevieve's mouth, the narrator assures us, is “as pure as an infant's, like breastmilk, like dew on spring fresh grass, and sun-warmed peaches, peeled by someone you love” (52). One cannot forget PG's sneering mouth, as she stuffs it with dry cereal, Dad's unexpected pumpkin-toothed grin which the narrator has inherited, or Gerald's mouth, “barely wide enough for the words to get out.” The narrator wonders if perhaps Gerald is “afraid important personal stuff might spill out” (69). Such descriptions allow both the narrator and the reader to measure the moods, to contemplate the occupations and preoccupations of the owners of these mouths.

In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, the characters gesture and masticate their way across a cultural and linguistic divide. Sam and Kay Tonkatsu have mysteriously forgotten how to speak Japanese. They experience a kind of aphasia. Naoe, Kay's mother, is anything but silent. From her worn wooden chair at the bottom of the stairs, she chatters non-stop in Japanese. Her “mouth bursts wide and the words rush out, a torrent of noise” (24). Hers is a one-way barrage of sound. Sam and Kay have stopped listening to this tirade, while Muriel, who speaks only English, does not understand. Muriel and her Obachan cannot communicate directly as they do not share a common language. What they do share, however, is food. Muriel and Naoe hold late night picnics. Eschewing leftovers from the kitchen, they eat and drink contraband substances—contraband according to Kay, maker of “honey smoked ham and overdone rump roast” (13). “Crackers dipped in soya sauce, sea squid, tiny crocks of pickled plums, and *sake*” (16) sent by Naoe's brother and sister-in-law

in Japan, are smuggled in by Muriel. There is little need for words, they happily discover, when one can communicate through facial expressions and through the sounds of smacking lips:

the girl looked up, saw the old woman's eager mouth, and smiled because she could taste how sweet the *sake* was from her grandmother's face. (16)

She cannot understand the words I speak, but she can read the lines on my brow, the creases beside my mouth. (15)

Smack, smack! (Obāchan)
Smack, smack! (Me)
Smack, smack! (Obāchan)
Smack, smack! (Me). (17)

This last seemingly inarticulate exchange between Naoe and Muriel is meaningful in several ways. Naoe's habit of smacking her lips is, for Keiko, an irritating, rude, inappropriate habit. What is a point of contention between Naoe and Keiko is a point of connection for Naoe and Muriel. Muriel watches and copies Naoe's smacking lips and begins to understand its significance: as a “symbolic gesture of respect to what you've consumed” (17). It is their first (featured) conversation. More surprising and confounding forms of communication follow. Though she does not speak Japanese, Muriel somehow manages to understand her Obachan's stories. Once Naoe leaves the family home for good, they communicate through telepathy. Food figures prominently in these exchanges as well, with Naoe sending Muriel shopping lists so that she might at least feed Keiko “properly” i.e. no hot dogs. Following Naoe's advice, Muriel cooks for her parents in an effort to get her mother out of bed and speaking again. The result is a delicious meal without the

“wellspring of words” Muriel, or perhaps readers, may have been expecting: “We sat and ate. No one saying a word, just the smack of lips and tongues” (153). In both novels, Goto's characters communicate while and through eating, particularly when speaking is not possible. Mouths, eating habits, the set of another's jaw line, or the line of someone's brow, and the smacking of lips, constitute valid and often necessary forms of communication.

Goto's writings remind us that nonverbal communication at the dinner table is not just a matter of *politesse*, or lack thereof (a binary overwhelmingly present in Emily Post's *Etiquette*). The characters communicate more than just their social status and social roles. Gestures are information. They tell us about the characters' appreciation and dislike of, or indifference toward, the food they eat. They provide clues about the characters' personalities, moods, thoughts, and relationships. They give us a more detailed portrait of the ways in which these characters communicate (i.e. not just through dialogue). Are all gestures meaningful? Meanings ascribed to body language are multivalent and always changing. To read them is to understand the social, economic, geographic, cultural, and historical context in which they are made. They might even require a familiarity with the individual who made them in the first place. Further, to read gestures at Goto's dinner tables is not, Barbara Korte would insist, the same thing as reading gestures at one's own dinner table. “Contrary to its occurrence in real life, non-verbal behaviour in *literature*,” Korte writes, “is *always* significant” (Korte 5, emphasis added). It matters to the characters within their fictional situation. It matters to the reader, who is or might not be so attentive to these signals.

Thus far I have emphasized the noisy wordlessness of Goto's eating scenes suggesting, as Naoe does, that “[t]here is a time for words, but there is a time for food also” (Goto, *Chorus of Mushrooms* 146). There is a certain ambiguity to this statement. The conjunction, ‘but,’ separates the two activities while the adverb, ‘also,’ unites them. This ‘also’ is a subtle reminder that, when it comes to food, Goto does not, cannot, dispense with words altogether. After all, *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *The Kappa Child* are texts. The nonverbal, paralingual aspects of these eating scenes are *written*. How does Goto “transcribe[] the nonverbal into words?” (Korte 93). Stephen Portch titled his 1985 study of nonverbal communication *Literature's Silent Language*. Goto's novels are not so silent. She makes use of onomatopoeia to render all the more palpable the sounds of her masticating characters: smack, smack, chomp, chomp. These smacking lips are, on occasion, given the status of dialogue. The exchange, “Smack, smack!” between Muriel and Naoe has the look of a privileged conversation, set apart as it is from the rest of the text. That Goto *writes* the act of eating is just one of many noteworthy ways in which food and words are tied together. That her characters eat their words is also cause for comment and analysis.

Generally speaking, to eat one's words is to express regret, but Goto's writings rework, and ask us to rethink, this idiomatic expression. The following few paragraphs explore and explicate the idiom and its various iterations. To eat one's words means, among other things, to speak through mastication. The “smack of lips and tongues” (Goto, *Chorus of Mushrooms*, 153) as discussed above constitute for Goto a means of communication. In three of Goto's more literal explorations of what it means to eat one's words, her characters

eat their own name (tonkatsu, *Chorus of Mushrooms*), write with or speak through their utensils (chopsticks, *Chorus of Mushrooms*), and are scolded for saying what they eat (meshi, *The Kappa Child*). As these readings of two dishes and a utensil demonstrate, the act of eating one's words is literally and figuratively nourishing. It is also generative and creative.

During a late night dinner, the Tonkatsu family of *Chorus of Mushrooms* eats *tonkatsu*, a kind of breaded, deep-fried pork cutlet. Tonkatsu, as a dish, as a word, as a name, has several layers of meaning. A western-style bread cutlet, Tonkatsu is served with raw cabbage, miso soup, rice, a sweet tonkatsu sauce (made up of ketchup, Worcestershire sauce, dark soy sauce, prepared mustard and *saké*), and is eaten with chopsticks (Tsuji 240). The word, *tonkatsu*, is the result of various influences. As Sam explains to Muriel, “*Tonkatsu* isn't really a purely Japanese word. *Ton*, meaning pork, is Japanese, but *katsu* is adopted from cutlet, and I don't know the origins of that word” (209). It is and it is not the family's last name. It is not the name with which Sam and Kay arrived in Canada. It is the only Japanese word Sam can remember once they decide to put Japan behind them. It is a name that represents a lost connection and, as aptly expressed by Muriel, a hunger, a craving, for words. “I was always hungry for words” (98) explains adult Muriel, as she revisits her childhood. Muriel is particularly attentive to the ways in which those around her use or lose their words. One can refuse to use them, adopt them, hide behind them, tie them up and ignore them, manipulate them. Some utterances for Muriel, like “pass the gravy boat,” do not have the power to linger, while others “take form and live and breathe among

us. Language a living beast” (99). Muriel is ever on the lookout for words, a vocabulary, that feeds her “malnourished culture” (99). Tonkatsu is one such word. The dish literally nourishes the family, and the last name connects Sam, Kay, and Muriel to parts of their cultural heritage that have been forgotten and/or denied. But, as Guy Beauregard rightly observes, Tonkatsu's multiple meanings and associations “locate[] the family's identity outside culturally “‘pure’ markers” (Beauregard 59). That Muriel learns of the food-related aspect of her name from Sushi, the Oriental Food Store clerk, is significant (and funny). Like tonkatsu, sushi is a dish that has not stood still. It travels, has evolved, been altered, appropriated, and re-appropriated.

And what of the utensil with which such foodstuffs are eaten? While eating lobster with Tengu at the Ruby Restaurant, coaxing the meat from the shell with her chopsticks, Naoe tries to give in to the sensual pleasures of eating. “Eat now” she reminds herself, “now is the time to eat” (Goto, *Chorus of Mushrooms*, 146). But while she eats, her thoughts turn to etymology: “What does ‘chopsticks’ mean anyway?” she asks herself. “Who made it up? The world is cluttered and heaping with things untold and forgotten” (146). Naoe is not the only one unable to separate mealtimes from wordsmithing. “You're not holding your chopsticks quite properly,” advises adult Muriel's lover. “I know,” she replies. “I don't hold my pen properly either. But I can still write. And I can still eat” (121). The two activities here share equal footing. Regardless of whether or not she has the right technique, what is most important, as far as Muriel is concerned, is that she can do them both.

That the narrator of *The Kappa Child* is scolded by her mother for referring to their lunch as *meshi* (boiled rice) is a reminder that food is not just something you eat but something you say. The word, *meshi*, holds meaning beyond its ingredients, its preparation, and its taste. “Don't say *meshi*” says Okasan. “That's what low-class people say. And we're not low class” (110). Heather Latimer writes, in her own close reading of the incident, “Okasan’s comment highlights the slippery border between eating and speaking in the novel” (Latimer). I would add to this observation of Latimer's that, apart from the comment, the dish itself performs the work of blurring the distinctions between eating/speaking. *Meshi*, or rather the expression *yokomeshi*, literally means “a meal eaten sideways” (Moore). As linguist Christopher Moore explains, “This is how the Japanese define the peculiar stress induced by speaking a foreign language: *yoko* is a humorous reference to the fact that Japanese is normally written vertically, whereas most foreign languages are written horizontally” (Moore). Goto has chosen a dish which, according to Okasan, speaks to its eater's social standing and which, as Moore proposes, expresses the challenges of speaking/writing another language. While Goto does not specifically mention *yokomeshi*, her characters, at various points within both novels, are unable, refuse, or take it upon themselves,¹³⁹ to eat sideways.

¹³⁹ Janice: “can't speak a word [of Japanese] and no shame about it either” (Goto, *The Kappa Child*, 163).
 Naoe: speaks English but refuses to let on that she does: “Solly, Obachan no speeku no Eeenglishu” (Goto, *Chorus of Mushrooms*, 4)

Muriel: “I'm glad I learned Japanese because now I can juggle two languages and when there isn't one word in English, it will be there in Japanese and if there's something lacking in your tongue, I'll reach for it in English” (Goto, *Chorus of Mushrooms*, 54).

“Sideways” is one of many ways in which Goto's characters eat their words. “Obachan,” Goto writes, “always chewed like mad, words falling out with each snap of her jaw” (*Chorus of Mushrooms*, 18) while Muriel “held [her] words inside [her] mouth until they swelled and softened” (18). This passage from *Chorus of Mushrooms* suggests that, for Goto, eating is a broad metaphor for the challenges of speaking/writing in any language, of translating one's thoughts into words, and one's words to story as this passage also marks the moment of transition in which the “bed of feasts”—whereupon Naoe and Muriel share their illicit, late night picnics—becomes a “bed of tales” (18). To eat one's words then is also to listen to, and be fed by, story. “There must,” Naoe/Muriel muse,¹⁴⁰ “be a lot of people out there just starving for a filling story. Something that would leave a rich flavour on their tongue, on their lips” (201). To eat one's words is to earn one's keep through storytelling: to work for one's meals, to “trade a bowl of soup and a slice of bread for a tale or two” as Naoe proposes to do (201).

A word or two about these tales. There is a proliferation of stories and storytellers in *Chorus of Mushrooms*. It is a veritable chorus, divided, as choruses are, into several parts. In the outer frame, an adult Muriel tells a story to her lover about her Obachan. In the inner frame, Naoe tells stories to the reader, to Tengu, to herself and, of course, to Muriel, who reciprocates with stories of her own. Apart from the stories themselves, there is much in this novel about what makes them good and why they matter. These stories generate a certain, in Muriel and Naoe's case, unexplainable degree of understanding between teller

¹⁴⁰ Not sure who the narrator here is. It could be Muriel, Naoe, or both.

and listener. “It’s easy to travel distances if you fly on a bed of stories” (29), says Muriel. The kinds of distances to which she refers have to do with geography, time, language, culture. They allow both teller and listener to travel such distances together, apart, or towards one another. Some of these stories are adaptations of myths (“Izanami and Izanagi,” “Issun-Boshi”) and folk legends (“Uba-Sute Yama” and “Yamanba” or “Yama-Uba”) (Beauregard 49). Some are personal recollections by Naoe, of Muriel, of Muriel’s lover. All are metafictional, mutable, multiple. Metafictional: the storytellers consciously and carefully expose the nuts and bolts of their approach, their use of, and relationship to, words. Mutable: the tales are repeatedly reworked and revised by both the teller and the listener. The words themselves, as Naoe proposes, also “change with the telling” (32). Multiple: as both Guy Beauregard and Steve McCullough observe, many voices are “co-implicated in the telling of the text” (McCullough 159). At times, these voices are indistinguishable. Not even Muriel can tell “where Obachan ends and [Muriel] begins[s]” (68). They even, on occasion, share a pet name/pen name/alternate identity. The name, Murasaki, is attributed to Muriel (by Naoe), and adopted by Naoe (who becomes its direct translation, Purple, as well as the Purple Mask).¹⁴¹

These metafictional, mutable, multiple tales, Steve McCullough writes “exemplif[y] in literary form both the possibilities and anxieties of a postmodern vision of fiction” (149). One of the anxieties or “uncomfortable implication[s]” of postmodernist writing as outlined by McCullough is that “everything is merely language, and that postmodern language

¹⁴¹ Muraskai also refers to the female author of the *Tale of Genji*. See Steve McCullough, ““Trust Me”: Responding to the Threat of Writing in *Chorus of Mushrooms*,” for a detailed discussion of these overlaps.

games do not admit experienced corporeal reality; they absurdly or dangerously reduce all human experience to a linguistic plane”(160). This to me suggests a lack of investment in or responsibility for words, a kind of linguistic relativism. I agree with McCullough that Goto addresses this particular anxiety concerning the postmodern and add that she does so, in part, through the metaphor of food.¹⁴² Her storytellers must “taste the words they utter” (Goto, *Chorus of Mushrooms*, 7). Not to do so, insists Naoe, is to produce stories in which “the words are covered with honey and nectar but the flesh inside is weak and hollow” (7). What Goto is advocating for here is anything but the use of words for words' sake. The teller who ingests his/her words suggests an experiential and corporeal level of engagement with words and stories. Without this level of engagement, words merely “collide in the space between” teller and listener (4). Words are “only noise” (11).

Food and Bodies on the Move

Move, Man! Show me your motions girl.
—Austin Clarke, *Pig Tails 'n Breadfruit* (91)

Thus far, I have written largely about the mouth: that orifice of ingestion and instrument of speech and sound (Hinz iii). The characters of these texts, I emphasize in the paragraphs that follow, are not simply talking, masticating heads. Whole bodies, this corpus insists, consume/communicate. This latter part of the chapter then is about bodies, food,

¹⁴² McCullough provides some analysis on food – eating the name Tonkatsu and learning to translate between the Asian names of food and the experiential reality to which they refer (166-167).

and the material and metaphorical relationships between the two, as articulated by McWatt, Wah, and Goto.

Thinking through the etymology, the pathologization, the possibilities, of nostalgia in *Eating Chinese*, Lily Cho writes, “the body bears the record of experiences rooted in the materiality of the day-to-day” (Cho 153). Food is very much a part of that material, day-to-day landscape. What kind of record, I wonder, does it make? How is food inscribed onto the body? Victor H. Lindlahr, author of *You are what you eat: How to Win and Keep Health With Diet* approaches this problematic from a nutritionist's prospective. Food, he writes, has a direct bearing on an eater's health, on the ease or dis/ease with which the body functions. According to a *Life Magazine* advertisement for Lindlahr's book, colds, sinus infections, constipation and rheumatism may be avoided. A clear complexion and “better blood” may be achieved through diet (5). Michael Pollan's writings remind (or in my case instruct) us that the omnivore's jaws, digestive tracts and brains have evolved in direct correlation with his/her eclectic, expansive, and “mentally taxing” diet (Pollan 289). The relationship between food and body is not, McWatt, Wah, as well as Goto emphasize, unidirectional. Food affects but also reflects and refracts what we eat and what eats us (Probyn 23/32). I draw from Elspeth Probyn here. If Probyn's name and work appears numerous times below, it is because her writings (I make particular reference to *Carnal Appetites: FoodSexIdentities*) read well alongside this literary corpus. Though engaged in different projects, they share a similar understanding of, and approach to, bodies that eat. Eating, Probyn writes “becomes a visceral reminder of how we variously inhabit the axes

of economics, intimate relations, gender, sexuality, history, ethnicity, and class” (Probyn 9). The keywords for Probyn here and, I suspect, McWatt, Wah, and Goto, is “variously inhabit,” meaning multiple, changing ways of being.

The references to bodies in *This Body*, as the title intimates, are plentiful. The novel opens with a description of Victoria Layne's sixty-one-year-old body as she sits on a park bench in Kensington Gardens, contemplating Prince Albert's gold effigy. Ironically, the statue is all sensuality—“this is a monument to sex” after all (McWatt 4), while Victoria's body has been numb for three decades—a symptom perhaps of her lover Kola's disappearance, incarceration, and death.¹⁴³ Her blood has only just begun to circulate again.

I miss being dead, she thinks as she stares into the palm of her hand, examining the criss-cross of lines. Her thighs and buttocks leak through the spaces between the wood slats of the bench, her flesh bulging like a lean rump roast tied with string at the butcher's. She adjusts her right buttock with a flick of her fingers. That's better. (McWatt 3)

The novel, we are expeditiously informed in this opening paragraph, is in large part about Victoria, *This Body* of hers, and food. Were I to unpack this relationship in a few choice phrases, I would say the following: This novel is about Victoria (in part) coming to grips with this *body*, acknowledging its concrete materiality: its weight, its changing shape, its discomforts,¹⁴⁴ its needs, its limits (like mortality). That the novel's title refers to *this* body and not *the* body is also worth noting. McWatt is interested in specificity, in the kinds of factors/contexts (migration, loss, grief, memory, belonging) registered by, resisted and

¹⁴³ “When Kola disappeared, she disappeared too . . . and everything she did felt as though it was through gauze” (McWatt 35).

¹⁴⁴ “Why do bodies house such discomfort?” (McWatt 207), Victoria wonders.

unique to, Victoria's body, or Derek's, or Alexander's¹⁴⁵ In Victoria's case, these factors are quite often expressed, mediated by, or are food: like a “lean rump roast” (McWatt 3) for instance.

“Eating is intimate” (Probyn 16), Elspeth Probyn reminds us—in many senses of the term: eating is a universal but also a highly individual act (Simmel in Probyn 63), eating is sensual, eating involves bringing the outside world into the body, eating is visceral, literally (Probyn 14). Victoria experiences an even closer degree of intimacy with food. She is, as the passage above informs us, likened to a rump roast. One may read this simile as a straightforward description of Victoria's physique. She is carrying extra weight (which she will shed as the novel progresses). There is more to this comparison, I propose. Victoria has risen from the dead, we are informed, and is only just beginning to recover a lost corporeality.¹⁴⁶ Everything tingles. McWatt has chosen this simile carefully, as, according to painter Francis Bacon, meat sits somewhere between life and death. “We are all potential carcasses,” says Bacon, i.e. lifeless bodies (qtd. in Clausius 118). A visit to an exhibition of Bacon's “meat paintings” (McWatt 191) has this kind of contradictory effect on our protagonist: “even in the face of rotting flesh [Victoria] feels more alive than in the last thirty years” (McWatt 191).

¹⁴⁵ In this respect *This Body* reads well alongside the work of Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* (1994). She writes, “The specificity of bodies must be understood in its historical rather than simply its biological concreteness. Indeed, there is no body as such; there are only *bodies* – male or female, black, brown, white, large or small” (19).

¹⁴⁶ Sneja Gunew's description of Wah's “attempting to recover a lost history/corporeality through food” (231), works well for McWatt's depiction of Victoria.

Victoria is more than a lean rump roast. She is also, as the narrator recounts, partially made up of dough, onion, and rice. While “time was hollowing out small holes in [Victoria]. . . the slap of dough, the slicing of onion, the frying of rice filled the holes just a little” (McWatt 4). How so? On the one hand, food functions as a kind of known, safe space for Victoria. When surrounded by food, Victoria is “confident and in her element” (McWatt 191). Certainly food, its preparation, its procurement, occupies her thoughts. It also allows Victoria to connect and communicate with the men in her life. Not having quite worked out how to talk to her nephew Derek, for instance, or how much personal space to grant him/herself, Victoria expresses her affection through conscientiously prepared meals: to remind him of home (Granny's curry), to keep him healthy—“spuds are good for you: vitamin C and B . . . and from the earth . . .” (McWatt 50), and to tempt his appetite—“You don’t like it, do you, luv?” (McWatt 50). Further, dinner is an excuse, an occasion, to extend a first invitation to Alexander Hodge, who will become Victoria's lover. Food procurement and preparation are initially “the only sensual experiences she can bear” writes Heather Birrell in her review of the novel for *Quill & Quire*.¹⁴⁷ There is much in the way of textual evidence to support this claim. Victoria looks for traces of pleasure and desire in the Dalston market: “lettuce that unfolds like lips between a woman's legs. . . . ripe tomatoes filled with seed” (McWatt 108). She has a sensory (particularly tactile) approach to shopping for food: “pick[ing] up a thick plantain and hold[ing] it, weighing it, feeling its firmness and breadth in her fist, rubbing her palm along it” (McWatt 108). Gradually,

¹⁴⁷ And what of the sensual experience of eating? Goto's characters smack, chew, and gulp away with rather impressive frequency and vigour while descriptions of Victoria ingesting food are few and sparse in detail.

Victoria seeks out other sensual practices and experiences, like sex, which temper somewhat her focus on food; she neglects the Brazilian stew (which burns) in favour of sex with Alexander.

This novel, I propose, reads like an encounter between Elspeth Probyn's writings on the body: “instead of the body as location, let’s take the body as *loca*-motion” (Probyn, *Sexy Bodies*, 6), and her reading of Appadurai: “Food moves all the time. It constantly shifts registers, from the sacred to the everyday, from metaphor to materiality; it is the most common and elusive of matters” (Probyn, *Carnal Appetites*, 63). Simply put, bodies and food in *This Body* are on the move, both literally and figuratively. Victoria has settled in London, England by way of Guyana and Toronto, Canada. The reader is invited to follow Victoria (and company) as she migrates from continent to continent, travels from country to country, and even as she moves through the city she calls home, London *Inkland*, (though home remains a somewhat slippery concept). Apart from the macromovements of migration and travel, McWatt is, I propose, equally attentive to the micromovements of the body: changes in posture, shifting weight, losing weight, pulling back, leaning in. A yearning to “possess[] the space around [oneself], comfortably, confidently. Born to it” (McWatt 82), is accompanied by the feeling of not belonging in one's container. “I've never felt inside what I look like on the outside” Alexander confesses to Victoria, “And one thing's for sure: I don't feel English” (McWatt 192). The effects of living “slightly out of this world” (McWatt 207) in other words, as most of McWatt's characters do, are inscribed onto the

body. And, as Victoria notes, manifests itself into a kind of physical (as well as emotional) discomfort (McWatt 207).

Food in *This Body* also moves variously: in the form of culinary knowledge acquired, transported, and practiced by Victoria (Rosenthal 1), and in the form of product: foodstuffs produced and distributed on a global scale. “The world of food is available in a single long aisle of cans and plastic wrap,” Victoria observes of the supermarket. Similarly, the Dalston Market offers “various specialties from various islands, Africa, and India” (McWatt 108) to a clientele that “seems as mixed up as stew” (McWatt 107). Victoria’s attitude vis-à-vis this global supermarket, this “new taste for new taste” (McWatt 49) as she calls it, is somewhat conflicted. On the one hand, she subscribes to this widespread availability and variety of foodstuffs. She makes *Pissaladière*, *Red Pesto Potatoes aux Épinards*, *Dry-Braised Yi Noodles*, *Matoke and Lamb Stew*, and *Caribbean Pepperpot*.¹⁴⁸ More than a source of sustenance, these dishes allow McWatt to render “the different routes/roots of Victoria’s entangled heritage” (Rosenthal 14), as well as her travels and affiliations. They express Victoria’s encounters with France, China, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, Guyana. On the other hand, Victoria is often suspicious, troubled, cautious, and dissatisfied when it comes to “foreign” foods and “foreign bodies” in her food:

she could taste it in them, something foreign, something shot through the eggs to make the yolks bigger. Huge, bright yellow yolks. Or maybe it’s the hens that have been shot through with growth hormones—rBGH, or its equivalent for chickens. . . . That madness has a taste. So, no more supermarket eggs. (29-30)

¹⁴⁸ These are the five recipes included in the text.

Appadurai's point about the material and metaphorical slipperiness of food is an apt reading strategy for *This Body*. This novel is, partly, a critique of a global food system in which profit comes before food security,¹⁴⁹ traceability, and ethical responsibility. Its protagonist comments on, is highly critical of, and looks to change and/or circumvent, this system—even if it means giving up eggs. This moving food, as Caroline Rosenthal points out, also signifies Victoria's own displacement and all the fears, longings associated with it (11).

“*Dis-moi ce que tu manges; je te dirai ce que tu es*” wrote Jean-Anthème Brillat-Savarin in the much reprinted, widely circulated *Physiologie du Goût* (1826). Embedded in this oft-quoted aphorism is the idea that the eater is spoken for. The “je” (in this case lawyer and professional eater, food writer, or *gastronome*, Brillat-Savarin) does the talking. Or, food items themselves do the talking while the “je” obtains/reads and transmits this information. Food “*ce que tu manges*” and identity “*ce que tu es*” are closely connected, interchangeable even. One stands in for the other, or, as Wah, Goto, and McWatt would have it, one (food) stands in for the Other. Each writer I argue, explores this notion that food “carr[ies] the mark of social difference” (Morris 236)¹⁵⁰. They are preoccupied with food and foreign bodies and what each has to do with the other.

Tainted supermarket eggs are to McWatt what ginger and oranges are to Fred Wah and Hiromi Goto, respectively. Of ginger, Wah writes:

¹⁴⁹ i.e. availability, accessibility, affordability, safety.

¹⁵⁰ A question posed by Morris to Hiromi Goto in an interview, “Braiding race politics and Narrative Form: An Interview with Hiromi Goto,” (unpublished and included in the appendix of her dissertation).

Dad doesn't cook much with ginger but whenever I accidentally bite into a piece of ginger root in the beef and greens, I make a face and put it aside. This makes him mad, not because he doesn't think ginger is bitter but because I've offended his pride in the food he prepares for us. Ginger becomes the site of an implicit racial qualification. (11)

For Wah, ginger is initially something to avoid, pick out or push aside. For Wah's father, gingerroot represents his own roots and his son's perceived rejection of them. Oranges produce, or rather reveal, a similar generational dynamic in Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*. "If you eat too many oranges" Keiko and Muriel discover, "your skin turns yellow" (Goto 91). Yellow skin for Muriel is as entertaining as having "red shit from eating too many beets" (Goto 92). It is something to be marvelled at, laughed at, and shared. Muriel shares this phenomenon with her mother: "Look Mom! . . . Lookit my hands" (Goto 92). Keiko tries desperately to remove the yellow stains on her daughter's arms with an SOS pad, muttering, "Yellow, she's turning yellow she's turning yellow she's—" (92). For Keiko, the orange-induced stains are the site of an explicit racial qualification.¹⁵¹

Jap oranges and gingerroot. The culinary authenticity of the food item and the racial identity of the eater are in/at play here.¹⁵² By *in* play, I mean of significance to these scenes. By *at* play, I mean subject to questioning. First, the food item. Ever the wordsmith, Muriel enjoys her snack while critically considering its nomenclature: "Jap oranges – funny how they're called Jap oranges." she muses, "When they are technically called Mandarin

¹⁵¹ Yellow skin, in this case, stands in for Japaneseness that is accepted, as ginger stands in for Chineseness. See Lily Cho (149).

¹⁵² I draw from Lisa Harris here who, writing about Goto argues, "culinary authenticity, when tied to a particular place or racial identity, is always socially constructed and subject to change."

oranges and Mandarin isn't even a place but a Chinese Language. Funny how words and meaning twist beyond the dimensions of logic" (91). For Muriel, her snack is a delicious social construct. The effects of eating so many oranges (yellow skin) are the result of too much carotene in her system. For Keiko, who does not separate *Jap* from orange, this snack reveals the eater's inherent, essential difference. It is significant that this 'inherent, essential difference' as perceived by Keiko, is also a temporary physical condition. Muriel's carotene levels will eventually subside. Racial identity in this scene is a matter of perception and, as both Lisa Harris and Guy Beauregard observe in their readings of Goto, is subject to change. Race as perceptual/provisional? In this respect, Goto sounds a great deal like Wah, who makes this observation of his daughters: "For just a split second your body'll do something Asian – like poised over a dish of lo bok with your chopsticks." (133). The imposition and/or acceptance of race has real consequences, however, these authors insist. There are the administrative consequences of which Wah writes. In the classroom: declaring one's racial origins on a form. In government policy: excluding immigrants on the basis of race. There are the emotional consequences of which Goto writes: After fourteen years of "torrential" (92) chatter, Naoe is shocked into silence by her daughter's outburst, while Keiko takes to her bed for three days.

Taste—in many senses of the term—is also at play in these discussions and *dégustations* of oranges and ginger. That much is made clear in the final paragraph of Wah's prose poem: "This knurled suffix of gradated foreignicity, gyna gendered and warped up tighter than a Persian rug-knot, *hardly explains how ginger's almost nicer than*

being born – but that’s just taste” (Wah 11, emphasis added). To taste is to “perceive the flavour of the thing” (per OED), to identify, as Wah does, ginger’s “delicate pungency” (Wah 11) from within a dish of beef and greens, or beef and tomatoes. Taste refers to “enjoyment and pleasure, relish” (per OED), a sentiment explored by both Wah—ginger is “almost nicer than being born”—and Goto. “I was replete.” says Muriel, having emptied the Mandarin orange box of its contents. “I looked it up in the dictionary and that’s exactly how I felt” (Goto 91). Taste is a matter of judgement, discrimination (per OED), like knowing how much ginger to use—sparingly, gingerly—and what to pair it with: fish, or Chinese broccoli and oyster sauce. Taste is linked to memory. Lost tastes, for *foong cheng* and *lo bok*, trigger in Wah memories of those who prepared them, and those who ate them. As Wah writes, “taste remembers life” (74). In her monograph, *Eating Chinese: Culture on the Menu in Small Town Canada*, Lily Cho devotes a chapter to the connections Wah makes/explores between taste and memory in *Diamond Grill*. At the centre of this relationship, Cho insists, is the body. True memory, Cho quotes from Pierre Nora here, “is a form of remembering which has taken refuge in gestures and habits, in skills passed down by unspoken traditions ... in unstudied reflexes” (Nora qtd. in Cho 148). When Shu, the Diamond Grill’s short order cook, thinks about the meal he will prepare for the staff, “the memory of taste moves into his mind so that the first language behind his closed eyes is a dreamy play-by-play about making beef and lotus root soup” (Wah 174). There are echoes of Luce Giard in this passage; Shu is remembering a dish in terms of the techniques/gestures that accompany it. In Wah, however, there is the added dimension of

taste. The “nut-like ... pungency and smokiness of the lotus” (174) for Shu means modes of preparation. Taste triggers this learned choreography of everyday gestures.

Implicated in these various understandings of taste is, of course, the taster. We *are* our tastes, argues Bourdieu in *Distinction*. What we eat (or wear, or listen to, or put in our homes) “classifies” (6). Bourdieu’s taster however, as many critics have since pointed out, is static. His/her tastes,¹⁵³ as determined by his/her economic and symbolic capital, remain unchanged. A farm worker and his progeny (in France) crave *pot-au-feu* and *andouillettes*. Bourdieu’s findings suggest that such cravings are both inevitable and invariable. What then of the mushroom farmers’ daughter from Nanton Alberta, who alternately wolfs down and sucks oranges “like a thirsty man after crossing a desert of mashed potato” (Goto 91)? How do we explain Wah’s changing attitude toward, and taste for, ginger? On the one hand, Goto and Wah are talking about the palate, a changing appreciation for foodstuffs. Muriel is making up for her mother’s limited menu, her “vegetable blind spot” (91), while Wah revisits foods that, like ginger (and oxtail soup, deep fried cod, chicken with pineapple and lichee) that he did not initially “taste willingly” (Wah 46) but now craves. Wah and Goto are also talking about, and arguing for, changing subjectivities. “We eat what we are,” writes Probyn (thus reworking Bourdieu) “but instead of founding an ontological truth, eating and being become mutually interrogating categories” (23). Lean rump roast, eggs, and Victoria, Ginger and Fred Wah, *Jap* oranges and Muriel. For these writers, it’s about the kinds of questions these pairings provoke.

¹⁵³ For food and also clothes, furniture, music.

For each of these writers, eating is about chewing, crunching, munching, smacking, lapping, grinding, gulping, and swallowing food, or spitting it out. It is a physical activity, in other words. Eating is a means of communicating social positioning, social relationships, identity, community, commensality. These categories of being, these authors emphasize, are not static. Eating, then, is a means of expressing and measuring movement—moving bodies, moving food, both variously used and inhabited.

Conclusion

“Food studies . . . is not the study of food itself but rather the study of the relationships between food and the human experience”

—Miller and Deutsch, *Food Studies: An Introduction to Research Methods* (3)

Looking Back

At the centre of this dissertation are the writings of Austin Clarke, *Pig Tails 'n Breadfruit*; Hiromi Goto, *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *The Kappa Child*; Tessa McWatt, *This Body*, and Fred Wah, *Diamond Grill*. I call attention to the presence of food in these texts: mushroom production, egg procurement, cou-cou preparation, and cucumber consumption. I explore its function as trope, theme, structuring device, and indicator or element of setting and plot. And I look for ways in which these texts reflect and affect the world in which they were created. As argued in the introduction and demonstrated in the chapters that follow, these are foodbooks; they carefully and deliberately express/explore/theorize the relationship between food and word. “Language and food are a natural pairing” says Nathalie Cooke in her role as moderator for *The Taste of Words/ Le goût des mots* panel discussion:

both pass through our mouths, we prepare and consume both with our hands, we think of them both as having textures and finishes, either of them can be worn on our sleeves, and they fill our homes, our neighbourhoods, and a library’s worth of books, magazines, newspapers, and websites. The ways that we procure, produce, cook, consume, and think about food create our sense of cuisine. In turn, the ways that we write and talk about food contribute to the creation not only of our cultures, but also of who we are.

This bilingual event, organized by Professors Paul Yachnin and Frédéric Charbonneau, was hosted by McGill University’s French and English departments in February, 2011. Four panelists, James Chatto, Lesley Chesterman, Marcy Goldman, and Catherine Turgeon-

Gouin, were asked to talk about their work as “food makers and food writers.” My interest here has to do with three key questions around which the discussion took place. Answers to these questions, as given directly by the panelists and/or indirectly by Clarke, Goto, McWatt, and Wah will, I hope, serve two functions: to review some of the central preoccupations of my dissertation while situating it in relation to current critical discourse on the subject of food and word.

First question: how do you translate the myriad sensations associated with food and wine (visual, gustatory, olfactory, tactile, even auditory) into words?

Panelist Catherine Tourgeon-Gouin wonders whether or not words can adequately express food encounters (production, procurement, preparation, consumption). The challenge with food writing, she proposes, is “trying to come as close to the moment as we can.” In Tourgeon-Gouin’s rubric, the writer serves food. S/he describes it, and the activities that accompany it, and attempts to render it as palpable as is possible. A little digging into my corpus and I find evidence of **onomatopoeia**: “yum yum” (Wah 129); **epizeuxis**: “My mother does cook sweet-sweet-sweet” (Clarke 4); **hyperbole**: “Oh my God! When you survey the contents of that pot, after you have taken off the lid and open-she-up, such a waft of historical and cultural goodness going to blow up in your face!” (Clarke 65); **metonymy**: “Ginger becomes the site of an implicit racial qualification” (Wah 11); **and a keen attention to detail**:

“‘Ooooooh’, I admired, even as deep-fried, shrimp-stuffed crab claws were placed on our table. Rice noodles and tofu with Chinese mushrooms. Abalone and duck

covered in a crackling mahogany skin. Oysters on shells adorned with green onion and ginger, lobster coated in a creamy white sauce” (Goto, *The Kappa Child*, 86)

This figurative, and the often more literal, language certainly renders palpable the sensations, the range of emotions even—from delight to revulsion—and the physical gestures and processes, associated with food. And yet, the writers in my own corpus operate under a slightly different rubric than the one outlined by Tourgeon-Gouin. As far as they are concerned, food also serves the writer. They have created what James Brown describes as “an open boundary, an interactive dimension, a generative space” for food and word (4).¹⁵⁴ This is a space in which food is represented *by* language while also being used to talk *about language*. Goto, for instance, uses food to advocate for a particular kind of storytelling. For Goto, eating one’s words refers to an experiential and corporeal level of engagement with words and stories.

Second question: what genres, forms, and styles do you use in your writing about food? Do you adjust these features of your writing depending on the writing task or the food you’re writing about?

Panelist James Chatto’s weekly column for *Toronto Life* had to fit within the space allocated by his editors: 2750 words in continuous long-form prose. In spite of such restrictions, Chatto’s articles playfully demonstrate that a restaurant review can be both informative and imaginative. “Sometimes” recalls Chatto, “I’d write in iambic pentameter

¹⁵⁴ Introduction to the special edition of Dalhousie French Studies, *Littérature et Nourriture*.

disguised as prose, or else I wrote one of them in the style of Jorge Luis Borges on English afternoon tea.”¹⁵⁵

Similarly, food allows my chosen writers to play with, and push against, writing categories. For example, Tessa McWatt’s novel reads like a cookbook. It is full of recipes from which one can learn to make a variety of dishes. Interestingly, McWatt’s recipes are not consistent in terms of their form and structure. A recipe for *Pissaladière* has a list of ingredients and instructions. *Red Pesto Potatoes Aux Épinards* is presented as a list of instructions without the expected list of ingredients. *Matoke and Lamb Stew*: a list of ingredients, no instructions. These recipes are framed and are thus visually separate from the rest of the narrative.¹⁵⁶ And yet, they are always connected in some way to it. Victoria is making, or has just made, this dish. It is being eaten by Lenny, Derek, or the people at the shelter where Victoria volunteers. McWatt’s recipes remind us that there is no one way to express food preparation. It is an unstable, continually evolving form of communication.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ I include Chatto’s interpretation of a Shakespearean actor, ordering a Campari and soda from a waiter: “One thing alone can slake my summer thirst. Find you some water, and splashing from a virgin spring as unsuspecting caught by winter’s breath and clenched to crystal, transfixed by the cold. Tumble four cubes, like clumsy dice, into a glass: this is your Alpha. Then seek that red elixir that the Romans call “Campari,” scarlet as Satan’s tights and sweet as nectar, bitter as Iscariot’s kiss. Pour on and listen to the ice protest, cracking and squeaking in that thick embrace. Incarnadine the frozen water drowns, so swiftly reinforce the element, add other water, now, wherein the air itself doth seethe and fret its confinement. And thus in case the battle swings too surely to the wet, take thou thy knife and cut an orange slice to lie upon the top. This is your Omega. Can you do this? Uh, yes sir, one Campari soda.”

¹⁵⁶ Unlike Wah’s and Clarke’s recipes which are neither visually nor are they syntactically separate from the rest of the narrative.

¹⁵⁷ See Ruth Carroll, “The Visual Language of the Recipe: A Brief Historical Survey,” and Peter Hertzmann, “Recipe Structure—An Historical Survey” for histories of, and commentaries on, the evolution of the written recipe.

For McWatt, fictional narrative and cooking instruction are not mutually exclusive categories. Stories can contain recipes, just as recipes contain stories.¹⁵⁸

Food for these writers facilitates their writing strategies. Both Austin Clarke and Fred Wah engage in life writing, or “culinary memoir,” and “biotext.” They use food as a means of recuperating both personal and, particularly in Clarke’s case, public histories. Through food, they access the everyday—those minute and ordinary moments of daily life, like garlic breath on a date (Wah 47)—or more exceptional events, like New Year’s, marked by the making of *Juk* (with all that leftover turkey) (Wah 167). Clarke has written another memoir *Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack* within which food plays a less than prominent role. Clarke maps out his world through the writers he encounters at Combermere school—Julius Caesar, Vergil, Keats, Byron, Shelley, and Milton—and nightly BBC World News broadcasts. Food is discussed, but it is not a structuring device. It is not the lens through which Clarke recalls and inspects his world as it is in *Pig Tails*. In both *Pig Tails* and *Diamond Grill*, food is the linch-pin that holds these “autobiographical exercises”¹⁵⁹ together. It is the gastro in gastro-graphy.¹⁶⁰

Final question: how would you explain the relationship between the pleasures of eating and drinking and the pleasures of describing eating and drinking?

¹⁵⁸ See Janet Theophano’s *Eat My Words: Reading Women’s Lives through the Cookbooks They Wrote*, Janet Floyd and Laurel Foster’s *The Recipe Reader: Narratives, Contexts, Traditions*, and Diane Tye’s *Baking as Biography: A Life Story in Recipes*. These three texts demonstrate a trend in culinary scholarship: recognizing, and then analyzing recipes for their narrative text and subtext.

¹⁵⁹ I like Rosalia Baena’s term, “autobiographical exercise.” It emphasizes the processes (the writing) more than a product (an autobiography).

¹⁶⁰ Rosalia Baena’s term for these food-centered “biotexts” or memoirs.

Panelist and food critic for the *Montreal Gazette*, Lesley Chesterman replies: “It’s far more pleasurable to eat and drink than to write about it.” Consumption is certainly more immediate than composition. The former involves mastication, while the latter requires mediation: translating/transcribing the sights, the sounds, the smells, and the symbolic import of something as ephemeral as food into words. The writers of my corpus have expressed both the pleasures and the challenges of writing. “I hope to be writing when I’m 75!” says Goto. “Or painting. Or knitting. Or drawing. Making something. At the very least making out!” (hiromigoto.com). “I’m really most happy when I’m working” says McWatt, though “it feels like such hard work and it feels like torture sometimes” (*Literature Alive*). Sometimes food in these writings is a matter of pleasure, as an end in itself: in the beauty of a perfectly watered rice tambo (Goto, *The Kappa Child*, 231), at the sight of dried sausages, marbled with fat, hanging in the window of the butcher shop (Wah 9), in competently fileting a “brawny, glistening sea bass” (McWatt 170), and in that moment when “your teeth bite into that pork chop, and you taste the skin” (Clarke 146). Sometimes, as we have seen, food is about eating to live. As Goto writes, “[w]ithout it you’d starve to death” (*Chorus of Mushrooms*, 201). Mostly, however, food in this context matters for what it says, or can potentially say, about social structures, culture, language, and subjectivity. Clarke, Goto, McWatt, and Wah think very carefully about, and through, these pairings or groupings. They do not simply and uncritically replace one with the other: i.e. food = culture. They make connections between these categories without hesitating to interrogate both the categories and the connections. For Clarke then, privilege is a word meaning advantage or immunity (Clarke 55). It is a dish of rice, okra, pig tails and salt beef. It is an

opportunity to investigate cultural roots and rootedness. It is a catalyst for storytelling—a certain kind of storytelling: “Since it is Privilege we are talking about, the way of cooking it has to be narrated in the native language of the people who invented it: the Bajan language” (61). The connotative meanings, the communicative potential, of food then are what appear to give these writers pleasure.

Looking Forward

My proposed postdoctoral research remains within this area of inquiry—literary meals in Canada. I shift my focus, however, from individual literary and/or autobiographical texts about food to collections of writings about food. These are anthologies of food writing, literary cookbooks¹⁶¹ or both. These edited, often multi-authored collections contain a wide variety of genres: recipes submitted by Canadian writers, poems, short stories, as well as excerpts from novels and travelogues. I propose both a change in corpus and in criticism. I am interested in the anthologist/cookbook editor as critic, and the anthology/literary cookbook as critical commentary. Taken together, these editors are shaping a canon of Canadian food writing and I want to understand their motivations. What are they suggesting we read and why? What can we¹⁶² take, or have already inherited, from this corpus?

My interest in this corpus—consisting of *The Anne of Green Gables Cookbook* (Macdonald 1985), *The Canlit Foodbook: From pen to palate – a collection of tasty*

¹⁶¹ A ‘literary cookbook’ contains recipes submitted by poets, novelists, and/or includes excerpts from, or makes reference to, literary texts. These texts are marketed as cookbooks.

¹⁶² ‘we’ here refers to both an academic and non-academic audience.

literary fare (Atwood 1987), *Kitchen Talk: Contemporary Women's Prose and Poetry* (Harris and Alford 1992), *The Great Canadian Literary Cookbook* (Southin and Keller 1994), *Aunt Maud's Recipe Book: From the kitchen of L.M. Montgomery* (Crawford and Crawford, 1997)—is twofold. First, I want to know what these texts have to say about food and Canadian literature. What reasons do their editors / authors give for gathering together such diverse collections of writings? What are *their* choices and justifications? What is their *response* to this material? Second, what kind of work do these texts do? Taken both individually and collectively, these texts perform a number of functions, some more quantifiable than others. Both *The CanLit Foodbook* and *The Great Canadian Literary Cookbook* were initially conceived as fundraisers (for P.E.N. international, The Writers Development Trust and The Sechelt—now Sunshine Coast—Festival of the Written Arts, respectively). As such, they compare well with community fundraising cookbooks in general, for they serve similar purposes. I set out to trace the relationship between food, (writing) communities, and funds as articulated by editors Atwood, Southin, and Keller. There is also the matter of literary celebrity to consider. *The Great Canadian Literary Cookbook* offers “unexpected glimpses into the private lives—and personal tastes—of Canada's *literati*,” while *The Anne of Green Gables Cookbook*, and *Aunt Maud's Recipe Book: From the kitchen of L.M. Montgomery* are promoted on the basis of their having been inspired by the well-known series and their authors' family connection to L.M. Montgomery. I am interested in how these texts define, promote, and benefit from notions of literary celebrity.

This proposed project sits at the intersection of Canadian foodways, Canadian literary studies, and Canadian social and cultural history. To date, the texts that make up this corpus have received little critical attention. Some have been mentioned in passing, more as a point of interest than point of focus.¹⁶³ This project will consist of textual, peritextual, and epitextual analysis: I will examine the texts themselves, the communities of people who put together and distribute these texts (authors, editors, publishers), and those who read and use them (academics, non-academics, cooks).

¹⁶³ See Blodgett “Mimesis and Metaphor: Food Imagery in International Twentieth-Century Women’s Writing”; Cooke, “Cookbooks and Culture”; Parker, “You Are What you Eat: The Politics of Eating in the Novels of Margaret Atwood”; Sceats, “Sharp Appetites: Margaret Atwood’s consuming politics.”

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