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Food and literature

An overview

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Food has recently emerged as a topic for serious literary study. This chapter traces important developments in the field of literary criticism on food, considering the texts, authors, genres, and themes that have been the focus of attention, and the theoretical trajectory of such criticism. Since most critics tend to specialize in a particular historical period, the approach is broadly chronological but also considers those critical works tracing the development in literature across the centuries of food-related philosophical and psychological phenomena such as eating disorders. The chapter also considers where the study of food might take us in the future.

Until relatively recently the subject of food has been somewhat neglected by literary scholars, many of whom considered it rather too ordinary an area for investigation; it is notable, for example, that the first serious monograph on Shakespeare and food appeared only in 2007 (Fitzpatrick, 2007). Yet literary critics have begun to notice that much of what they research and teach involves food and the rituals surrounding its consumption. Literary critics who write about food understand that the use of food in novels, plays, poems, and other works of literature can help explain the complex relationship between the body, subjectivity, and social structures regulating consumption. When authors refer to food they are usually telling the reader something important about narrative, plot, characterization, motives, and so on. Many critics interested in food in literature are alert to the historical specificity of references to food, and this is especially true of literature written before the last century: explaining obscure foodstuffs and attitudes toward feeding that a modern reader might not grasp is an important part of the critic's job, and most literary critics have been influenced by food historians who have led the way in explicating esoteric foodstuffs and practices surrounding food. The literary canon is an important consideration here: critics writing about food in literature are conscious of ploughing new furrows and thus shaping what kinds of literary texts are worth exploring in terms of food. Food critics are making an important case for the serious study of food in respected literary texts: They are writing about food in nineteenth-century literature commonly studied in schools and universities, for example the work of Dickens (Hyman, 2009; Cozzi, 2010) and arguing for the centrality of food to phenomena hitherto thought beyond the remit of such analysis, for example the Romantic imagination (Morton, 2004; Gigante, 2005). Food critics are also drawing attention to literature currently at the edges of the canon, for example by exploring food and consumption in texts traditionally surveyed by historians: cookbooks, dietary literature, and so

on, as well as literature by contemporary women writers (Sceats, 2000; Heller and Moran, 2003). They are thus making a strong statement about what deserves our attention and thus shaping future studies in this newly burgeoning area. The main aim of this chapter is to guide the reader toward some of the most important and original work done so far on literature and food, indicate the kinds of approaches critics tend to take, and consider which areas might well benefit from further exploration.

The historical background of literary criticism on food and major theoretical approaches in use

This section will trace important developments in the field of literary criticism on food; it will consider the texts, authors, genres, and themes that have been explored, as well as the theoretical trajectory of the criticism. Many literary critics specialize in a particular historical period, which means that those who are interested in food tend to write about food in the period they know best, and for this reason my approach is broadly period-based in scope. Although food has only recently emerged as a topic for serious literary study a lot has been written on the topic and so, although intended as a survey of key approaches to important literary texts and the issues they raise, this section should not be regarded as definitive.

Although Caroline Spurgeon did original work tracing conscious and unconscious images on food in Shakespeare's plays (Spurgeon, 1935: 83–84, 188–89), it is only relatively lately that early modernists have become interested in food in literature. An important monograph by Chris Meads, which traces the phenomenon of the banquet in non-Shakespearean drama, is typical of the debt to historical analysis in much of the work that has been produced by early modernists (Meads, 2002). Meads does not mention Ben Jonson at length but this dramatist's preoccupations with food and eating have been discussed in historically inflected criticism by others, although many works tend to focus more on the body, specifically Jonson's own large body, than food per se (Pearlman, 1979; Schoenfeldt, 1988; Boehrer, 1990). Other dramatists, and usually a specific play written by them, have been approached from the perspective of the symbolism of food whereby food stands for other things, for example nationalism and virtue (Williamson, 1979), sexual desire (Bryan, 1974; Anderson, 1962: 211; 1964), class difference, and social and religious observance (Cole, 1984: 86). Not much work has been done on non-dramatic literature, but some has focused on how certain texts have been described in terms of food, specifically sweet foods associated with excess (Hall, 1996; Craik, 2004) and explored the process of digestion and waste management in Spenser, Herbert, and Milton (Schoenfeldt, 1999). Robert Appelbaum (2006) invoked the work of the social historian Norbert Elias, specifically his reference to "the civilizing process," a phenomenon tied to (usually French) fashion. This eclectic study considers a range of genres from about 1450 to the early eighteenth century, from the first printed cookbook, dietary literature, and Shakespeare to John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*, always with an eye to explaining what contemporary readers and audiences would have understood by references to food. Other critics have focused on food, especially eating, in Milton's poetry and prose (Gigante, 2000; Arvind, 2006); the significance of food, specifically bread and banquets in *Paradise Regained* (Cox, 1961; Franson, 1976); and books-as-food imagery in his *Areopagitica* (Smith, 1990; Cable, 1995; Schaeffer, 2000).

The first monograph on food in Shakespeare (Fitzpatrick, 2007) was especially interested in how the drama engaged with early modern dietary theories. Before this publication, influential articles on food in Shakespeare tended to consider individual plays (Charney, 1960; Candido, 1990) or unusual feeding, for example the animalistic, cannibalistic, or aggressive (Morse, 1983; Adelman, 1992); it is specifically medicinal cannibalism in Renaissance literature that is dealt

with in Noble (2003; and further explored in Noble 2011) and the refusal of women to feed in Gutierrez 2003. That the subject of early modern food is gaining respectability amongst literary scholars, and increasingly discussed at academic conferences, is clear from the fact that in 2009 the journal *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* published a volume devoted to Shakespeare and food, containing essays on staging food in Shakespeare (Holland, 2009; Dobson, 2009), sugar in Shakespeare (Hall, 2009), and three representative foods (apricots, butter, and capons) in Shakespeare and early modern dietary literature (Fitzpatrick, 2009). Also published in 2009 was a special issue of the new journal *Early English Studies* with essays tracing early modern attitudes to vegetarianism (Borlik, 2009); food shortages (Knowles, 2009); the sexual dimension to food references (Lipscomb, 2009); gluttony and nationalistic foods (Fisher, 2009). A year later came a collection of international and interdisciplinary essays on food in the Renaissance, including Shakespeare, across drama, poetry, and prose from the late medieval period to the mid-seventeenth century (Fitzpatrick, 2010a), and a dictionary on Shakespeare and the language of food was published (Fitzpatrick, 2010b).

Although the early modern period has proved especially attractive to food critics, earlier and later periods have not been neglected. The collection of essays *Food and Eating in Medieval Europe* is typical of much of the scholarship that has emerged on food with its crossover between historical and literary analysis (Carlin and Rosenthal, 1998). As the editors of the volume point out: "The essays that can be categorized as falling within the realms of historical inquiry and historical methods go far beyond the 'what happened' menu of historical inquiry" (ix) while the essays on literature "serve to carry us from some of the hard realities of food production and consumption patterns into what we can think of as extra-nutritional aspects of this basic human endeavour" (x). The first essay in the volume, by Marjorie A. Brown, is a good example of historically inflected literary analysis since it offers a study of heroic poems from Old English literature, such as *Beowulf*, in an effort to illuminate further the evidence that has emerged from archeological excavations of feast halls (Brown, 1998). Another essay, by Elizabeth M. Biebel, considers what the food Chaucer's pilgrims eat can tell us about medieval attitudes to physical and spiritual nourishment (Biebel, 1998). The volume is alert throughout to the slippery nature of genre, and so texts that might traditionally have fallen under the category of historical document, for example English chronicles and the songs performed at feasts, are ripe for literary analysis (Marvin, 1998; Weiss, 1998). Another example of the interdisciplinary nature of much food writing is Caroline Walker Bynum's *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, a study mainly historical in its trajectory but providing also a valuable discussion of food in the writings, including poetry, of women mystics (Bynum, 1987). Building upon Bynum's work primarily from the point of view of a literary critic, and focusing on writings by religious women on food from the medieval period to the nineteenth century, is Mazzoni (2005).

Collections of essays across periods have also emerged, for example *The Pleasures and Horrors of Eating*, which considers literature from the early modern period, through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and right up to the twenty-first century (Gymnich and Lennartz, 2010). The focus here is on tracing an important shift in attitudes towards food and its consumption whereby we get "early modern ideas of the pleasures of eating, of the carnivalesque abundance of food changing into visions of horror, cannibalism and bulimia" (19) in eighteenth-century literature; later, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the literature reveals "a conjunction between eating and disease … or between eating and ontological pessimism which reveals that it is no longer the pleasure of food, but the horror of eating that provides modern culture with one of its prevalent semantic fields" (14).

The Romantics are the subject of an important collection of essays that, as the preface makes clear, presents studies that embrace phenomena from a variety of perspectives: literary,

philosophical, and cultural (Morton, 2004). The more clearly "cultural" essays engage with eating in Hegel and what various foods tell us about the Romantic imagination but of particular interest to literary critics are essays that are "literary theoretical and cultural-historical" (xv) discussing milk and blood in Byron's poetry (Stabler, 2004); excessive consumption in late poetry by Keats and Shelley (Plotnitsky, 2004); the figure of disgust in Romantic literature, especially Keats (Gigante, 2004); the influence of views about digestion from John Locke onwards on writing by Mary Wollstonecraft (Youngquist, 2004). Gigante's later monograph explores the Romantic debt to Milton's *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, specifically the notion that taste involves pleasure (Gigante, 2005).

The work of a number of female writers from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are explored in Moss 2009. This study of food in literature includes children's fiction by Maria Edgeworth, better known for her historical novel *Castle Rackrent*; novels by the Scottish author Susan Ferrier and Frances Burney and writings aimed at mothers by Mary Wollstonecraft. The focus throughout is on women's issues, specifically women's appetites and maternal feeding. Moss does not discuss Jane Austen at any length but Austen comes under book-length scrutiny in Lane 1995. Here we get a comprehensive analysis of Austen's own domestic arrangements, including the various times and types of meals with which she would be familiar and that appear in her letters and novels, before an exploration, in detail, of the role food, dining, and hospitality plays in the Austen *oeuvre*. Lane is interested in what Austen's use of food tells us about her characters, especially their moral status, for example pointing out that in Austen's novels "all the gluttons are men and all the (near-) anorexics women" (Lane, 1995: xiv). Important information is provided about the foods that were served in Georgian England and are mentioned by Austen, and explanations given of those dishes unfamiliar to a modern reader, for example white soup and route-cakes, as well as food-related words and phrases that have changed their meaning since Austen's time, for example that "mutton" could be a generic word for meat or dinner. Lane provides a fabulously useful index to all the foods mentioned in Austen's novels so that, for example, we can tell at a glance that coffee is mentioned lots of times, and olives only once, in *Sense and Sensibility*.

In 2008 a special section of the journal *Victorian Literature and Culture* devoted itself to the study of food and drink in the period. As its editors pointed out, although food studies has long been considered a legitimate field of enquiry amongst anthropologists, sociologists, historians, and psychologists, "in the camp of literary and cultural studies, it has remained – at least until recently – a devalued object of inquiry," which they suggest is due to food and cookery being associated with women and popular culture and thus raising "debates about the merits of feminist studies; the importance of maintaining the canon; and the value of the 'cultural turn' as a whole – as well as the field's broader lack of interest in the aesthetics of the quotidian" (Daly and Forman, 2008: 363). The editors tell us that their doubts about the validity of scholarship on Victorians and food disappeared when they saw the calibre of work submitted in response to their call for submissions to the journal.

A number of essays in *Victorian Literature* focus on the role of food and drink in nineteenth-century cultural history. Margaret Beetham applies the analysis of taste by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to Mrs Beeton's *Book of Household Management* (1861) specifically in relation to Beeton's argument that the way in which one dines indicates a person's rank (Beetham, 2008). Helen Day considers a complaints book from the archives of the Reform Club, a London dining establishment where Alexis Soyer, French chef and author of *The Modern Housewife* (1849) presided over the kitchen (Day, 2008). Day compares the complaints about cost, quality, and service that are detailed in the book with issues dealt with by Mrs Beeton in her advice to ladies on how best to run their household. Julie E. Fromer reveals what histories of tea can tell us

about English national identity and the relationship between England and empire (Fromer, 2008); as Fromer notes, the tea history is "a slightly peculiar genre that blurs the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, advertisement and travelogue, personal account and scientific treatise" (531). The same might be said of much of the writings that are of interest to food critics where the clear division between literary text and other categories can be unclear. For example, Thomas Prasch's essay on Alexis Soyer's new restaurant, the opening of which coincided with the Great Exhibition of 1851, engages with contemporary guide books, cookbooks, writings by Thackeray, and Henry Mayhew's novel *1851, or the Adventures of Mr. and Mrs. Sandboys and Family, Who Came Up to London to "Enjoy Themselves," and to See the Great Exhibition*; all these texts provide a way into exploring nineteenth-century English attitudes – specifically the attitudes of Londoners – towards foreign food (Prasch, 2008). The Great Exhibition itself is the focus of Paul Young's essay, which also mentions Mayhew's novel, and looks specifically at the role food and cooking played in the globalization that was central to the Exhibition (Young, 2008).

Those essays in *Victorian Literature* that are specifically literary in trajectory also tell us about nineteenth-century attitudes towards food and drink, and although they consider a range of texts from various perspectives a number of issues common to food critics recur including the political significance of eating certain types of food and instances of plenty and lack. Mrs Beeton provides the context for many nineteenth-century literary critics, evidence again of the cross-over between what we traditionally regard as "literature" and other kinds of texts. Kate Thomas compares Beeton and Arthur Conan-Doyle, concluding that both are preoccupied with methods whereby, via ordinary routes, the middle class can acquire discernment (Thomas, 2008). Beeton also comes up in an essay by Heather A. Evans exploring the role of food in a children's tale by Beatrix Potter (Evans, 2008) and she is mentioned by Sharmila Sen on the national and ethnic significance of food in the little-known work *Curry & Rice (on Forty Plates); or, The Ingredients of Social Life at "Our" Station in India* by George Francklin Atkinson, a British captain in the Bengal Engineers (Sen, 2008). Potter is also one of many authors included in a collection of essays on food in children's literature from the nineteenth century to the modern day (Keeling and Pollard, 2009). *Victorian Literature* contains an essay on *Falk*, Joseph Conrad's short story featuring cannibalism, Paul Viltos explores Beeton's view on dining as an indicative of civility, revealing that Conrad problematizes simplistic notions regarding primitive savagery; in *Falk* joyless over-eating by the non-savage also indicates a lack of civility (Viltos, 2008). Cannibalism is a recurring feature of Conrad's writing and its significance in *Heart of Darkness* is considered in Collins (1998). Tara Moore shows that literature of all kinds (novels as well as periodicals) published around Christmas and featuring Christmas scenes, traditionally displays of plenty, are imbued with "national fears of famine" (Moore, 2008: 489); she argues that feminist critics who have focused mainly on female self-imposed starvation in Victorian literature have missed the rhetoric of social reform that many texts contain. Nineteenth-century literature was interested in the moral implications of eating the wrong thing or eating too much but also in other kinds of excess such as alcoholism, a condition that, like anorexia, was first recognized as a disease during the Victorian period. Yet, as Gwen Hymen points out in her discussion of alcohol abuse in Anne Brontë's novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* it was not until the 1860s or 1870s that the addiction was considered anything other than a moral or social failing (Hyman, 2008). Noting that most critics of the novel have provided a feminist analysis of Helen Huntington, the wife of the drunkard Arthur, Hymen is more interested in what Arthur's drinking habits suggest about Brontë's political and moral views: Helen represents the views of the teetotal movement, Arthur the leisured class that is destroying itself and Gilbert, Helen's new love interest, the emerging and productive middle class that will destroy aristocratic entitlement.

Food and drink feature in a number of novels by the Brontë sisters and its cultural significance is also dealt with in Mergenthal 2010. Another work suggesting that food and drink is about more than simply sustenance is Deborah Mutch's essay, which explains the social significance of port, brandy, ale, and beer within the context of fiction serialized in socialist periodicals, which emphasized the social reasons for drunkenness amongst the working class whilst highlighting the hypocrisy of a heavy-drinking ruling class (Mutch, 2008).

More recently two monographs have made food the focus of their approach to nineteenth-century fiction (Hyman, 2009; Cozzi, 2010). Hyman continues her valuable work considering the neglected figure of the gentleman in Victorian literature, focusing on important male figures in a number of significant novels from the period including Jane Austen's *Emma*, Charles Dickens's *Little Dorrit* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. In her analysis of "class, gender, culture and the rhetorical construction of identity" (3) Hyman explores relevant socio-economic issues such as unhealthy consumptions, for example the commonplace adulteration of foodstuffs – a topic previously considered in the context of Dickens's novels and prose in Long 1988 – and the manner in which certain foods, for example gruel in *Emma* and the truffle in Wilkie Collins's *Law and the Lady*, signal the gentleman's status. Cozzi argues that food is "one of the most fundamental signifiers of national identity" (Cozzi, 2010: 5) and that novels reveal the construction of an English identity, one that emerges in the context of imperialism and industrialism and is created by and confirmed through food. Cozzi considers the significance of grain in the construction of England's rural past, especially in Hardy's *Mayor of Casterbridge*, the role of food in the construction of the middle-class gentleman in a number of novels by Dickens – a topic previously explored in relation to *David Copperfield* in Lewis 2009 – and how women and the foreigner figure in the construction of national identity in other important nineteenth-century novels. Monstrous appetites and what they indicate about Victorian attitudes to civility and savagery, specifically in the context of ethnicity, come up in the books by Hyman and Cozzi, both of whom engage with imperial anxieties about cannibalism in the work of Dickens, something also dealt with by James E. Marlow in an essay that explores Dickens's interest in ogres as evidence of a personal and professional anxiety not only of being eaten (re Freud) but of being present at the cannibalistic feast (Marlow, 1983). Eating to excess, and what that reveals, specifically in Dickens's *Martin Chuzzlewit* is dealt with in Paroissien (2010).

Amongst early twentieth-century fiction James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and D. H. Lawrence have attracted the attention of food critics. Lindsey Tucker traces food and digestion in Joyce's great novel *Ulysses*, especially in relation to the movements of Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus through the city of Dublin (Tucker, 1984) and Miriam O'Kane Mara takes the view that food refusal in a number of works by Joyce is worth exploring, not surprising perhaps given that famine is a recurring theme in Ireland's history (Mara, 2009). Virginia Woolf's difficult relationship with food, and what meals indicate about the process of existence, death, and mourning in her experimental novel *The Waves*, is explored in Utell (2008), whilst D. H. Lawrence, and other modernists including Woolf and Joyce, are discussed in the context of modernist food revulsion in Hollington (2010). Much of the literary criticism concerned with food in later twentieth-century women's fiction, written mainly by female, feminist critics, focuses on women's problematic relationships with food, for example not eating enough, eating too much, the preparation of food as a feminine endeavor, and the kitchen as a feminine space – criticism clearly influenced by Orbach (1978). In many of these studies the psychology of eating has taken the place of historical analysis, presumably because the reader is already familiar with the foods under discussion and so it is the manner in which they are consumed or avoided that is of most interest to these scholars. Typical of much feminist criticism of modern women's writing is

Sceats (2000), which considers the feeding mother and the starving female body. Sceats also considers what psychoanalytic theory can tell us about the cannibal motifs in Angela Carter's fiction and the wealth of food references in Margaret Atwood's fiction, writers who also come under close analysis respectively in Adolph (2009: 105–50) and Parker (1995). Although the collection of essays *Scenes of the Apple* deals with nineteenth- and twentieth-century women's writing, those essays on women's fiction, as opposed to their engagement in cultural politics, focus on the treatment of food in more recent material such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (Stanford, 2003) and the novels by Jeanette Winterson (Keen, 2003), the former emphasizing the interface between food and race, the latter between food and sexuality.

Research methodologies

Literary criticism on food has taken a variety of approaches, for example studies of food in the work of a particular author (Tucker, 1984; Lane, 1995; Fitzpatrick, 2007) and studies incorporating the work of a number of authors with critics taking a particular theoretical approach to their writing, for example feminism (Sceats, 2000; Adolph, 2009; Moss, 2009). Since most professional critics specialize in a particular historical period, most critical works also explore the workings of food in literature from a particular historical period but there are those that focus on the development in literature across the centuries of food-related philosophical and psychological phenomena such as eating disorders (Mazzoni, 2005; Gymnich and Lennartz, 2010). Not eating food, in the context of famine and food refusal, has also focused the attention of many critics (Gutierrez, 2003; Moore, 2008; Mara, 2009) as has unusual eating, specifically cannibalism (Marlow, 1983; Marvin, 1998; Noble, 2011). The interdisciplinary nature of much of the critical work done on literature that concerns itself with food is important: literary critics tend to focus not only on the usual suspects when it come to "lit crit" such as plays, novels, poems, but also other texts that have traditionally been beyond the remit of the literary scholar, such as dietary literature and cookery books (Appelbaum, 2006; Fitzpatrick, 2007; Thomas, 2008). The early modern period has witnessed a wealth of literary criticism on food in recent years, which reflects the empirical nature of much of the best literary criticism on food: explicating ingredients, dishes, and attitudes to feeding unfamiliar to a modern reader so as to facilitate their comprehension of the literary text in question. Historians have tended to lead the way and some of the best literary criticism takes a historical approach to writing about food, asking pertinent questions about the whys and wherefores of food consumption and how it relates to such issues as rank, gender, bodily health, national, and ethnic identity. Many of these works are keen to highlight the ways in which literature can inform us about the historical period in which it was written and vice versa.

Scholarship on Victorian literature has sought to interrogate nineteenth-century attitudes towards national identity, class, imperialism, and various problems surrounding food, including anxieties about food shortages, excess, and the adulteration of food (Cozzi, 2010; Hyman, 2009; Moore, 2008; Long, 1988) whilst critics on the Romantics have considered the role of the stomach in the context of the intellect (Morton, 2004; Gigante, 2005). Criticism on literature written in the twentieth century is more likely to be concerned with the psychology of eating (Tucker, 1984; Utell, 2008; Mara, 2009; Hollington, 2010), and female authors have attracted feminist critics concerned with body image and the gender politics of food and eating (Parker, 1995; Sceats, 2000; Adolph, 2009). In her essay on food in novels by the Brontë sisters Silvia Mergenthal notes that "food discourses revolve around a set of questions"; these questions are pertinent to all literary critics dealing with food across all periods and are worth repeating here:

> What is considered edible?
>
> How, and by whom, is food prepared and served?
>
> When and how is food consumed?
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> How is the selection, preparation and consumption of food related to other discursive practices, for instance, to religious discourses which designate certain foodstuffs as sacred, others as profane, or to discourses of social distinction?
>
> Finally, what, between the extremes of gluttony and self-starvation, is regarded as deviant with regard to consumption of food, and how should individuals who do not eat 'properly' be treated?
>
> *(Mergenthal, 2010: 206)*

We might add more questions to the above, for example regarding gender, ethnicity, and so on, but this list works well as the basis for an interrogation by literary critics keen to probe what attitudes to food and diet might reveal about the literature itself, the historical period in which it was written, and human concerns about food.

Avenues for future research

There are no monographs devoted to Ben Jonson and food nor, aside from Meads's work on the banquet (2002), on the wealth of references to food and consumption in Jacobean drama generally; further work in these areas is needed. More work might also be done on early modern non-dramatic texts, specifically poetry and prose, which have received some attention (Hall, 1996; Schoenfeldt, 1999; Craik, 2004; Appelbaum, 2006) but require more; further study of Milton and Spenser would prove especially interesting. Although Shakespeare's plays have received some analysis in the first book-length study on the playwright and food (Fitzpatrick, 2007), much remains to be said and there is little critical material available on food in the sonnets and narrative poetry. Important inroads have been made in the study of the Romantics and the Victorians but there is little on eighteenth-century literature and it is surprising that, given the wealth of food references in Dickens, there is no monograph devoted to his engagement with food. Lane's monograph on Jane Austen is an important contribution to literary criticism and ought to provide the foundation for future work on Austen and food (Lane, 1995). Similarly, although fine work has been done so far on Margaret Atwood's detailed attention to food in her writing (Parker, 1995; Sceats, 2000: 94–124), a monograph could usefully broaden this body of knowledge.

Literary critics interested in food require good editions of literary and dietary texts, both canonical and marginal, so that the food references in these texts are made comprehensible to a wider readership, yet there is a clear gap in the market for editions upon which further research may be based. For example, dietary literature received some attention in the context of early modern literary culture in Appelbaum (2006) and Fitzpatrick (2007), but deserves fuller analysis in the context of early modern drama by Shakespeare and his contemporaries and other early modern writings. Most importantly, we need to be using modern critical editions based on the best early editions purged, where possible, of their errors. An edition of three important early modern dietaries is forthcoming (Fitzpatrick, 2013) but many more texts, dietaries, and other food-related books and pamphlets, languish unread because they are difficult to negotiate in

their original editions. Another gap is the lack of reference works that might aid anyone interested in exploring literature and food. There are lots of good reference materials on the history of food, for example Davidson and Jaine 2006, but more works focusing specifically on literary references would facilitate research in this area. There is a dictionary on Shakespeare and the language of food (Fitzpatrick, 2010b) and similar works on the wealth of food reference by writers from other periods would be useful.

Critics tend to focus on one or two texts by an author where food most obviously features, for example Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* or Austen's *Emma*, when more interrogation of references across an author's *oeuvre*, in the spirit of Lane (1995), might prove fruitful, as might more cross-period work on a particular theme or group of themes, such as Gymnich and Lennartz (2010). Additionally, work remains to be done on the relationship between gender and food; although much of the material on masculinity has constituted an original engagement with the literature under discussion, that on femininity, especially when focusing on the work of modern female authors, tends to focus specifically on what are perceived as female issues, such as problematic eating.

Ecocriticism might also prove a useful way into thinking about food for literary critics, illuminating how food consumption affects our fragile ecosystem, for example the destruction of rural landscapes and natural habitats in which plants and herbs thrive; the overproduction of beef to make fast food; the potential demise of bee colonies, and thus honey, which some experts claim is due to the use of pesticides. Victorian concerns about the adulteration of food speaks to our modern concerns about the dangerous substances regularly added to our food by the food industry and their genetic modification of natural foodstuffs. Eating disorders are not new – anorexia and gluttony have always been an issue – but obesity has become ubiquitous, at least in the developed world. Once the preserve of the rich gout-ridden gentleman, and thus, to some extent, a symbol of wealth, a fat body is no longer simply a feminist issue but has become undesirable for men and women and, along with alcohol abuse, constitutes a prominent concern for health professionals.

Practical considerations for getting started

There are a growing number of Masters programs in the US and UK offering courses on literature and food. The best way to locate which institutions have courses specializing in literature and food is to search the internet to find out where those scholars currently researching and publishing in this area are based, since many university departments encourage scholars to offer a course focusing on their specific area of specialism. The avenues for future research, noted above, might well take the form of PhD study under the supervision of a scholar who has published on food, and most will welcome informal queries regarding the viability of such a project. Many institutions offer funding in the form of bursaries or scholarships to pursue study in the humanities and it is worth consulting the websites of universities and research libraries to see what they have to offer, for example the Wellcome Trust in London will provide personal awards to undertake study in medical history and humanities (wellcome.ac.uk). External funding programs are also available to US and UK students who wish to study abroad (in the US or UK) and the Fulbright Commission offers valuable advice on opportunities available not only from Fulbright but other funding bodies, for example the British Council (fulbright.co.uk).

Keeping up to date on this growing area of scholarship will allow anyone interested in pursuing a career in food and literature to know what new publications they ought to be familiar with and what still remains relatively unexplored terrain. An important online resource for literary texts and criticism from all periods of English Literature is Chadwyck-Healey's

Literature Online (LION), access to which is via subscription. Other useful databases that require subscription include Early English Books Online (EEBO) and Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO). The latest research on literary subjects including food is published in journal articles, and the definitive aid for discovering where articles on certain topics have been published is the Modern Language Association's International Bibliography (MLA-IB), sold by online subscription and included in LION, amongst other products. Online resources freely available on the web that are worth consulting for resources relating to literature and food include the following websites on culinary history:

www.historicfood.com
www.culinaryhistoriansboston.com/about.htm
www.culinaryhistoriansny.org

A good way to know who is working on what is to attend conferences where the cultural history of food comes up for discussion, for example the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery that takes place each year in England (www.oxfordsymposium.org.uk). Due to the burgeoning nature of interest in food and literature a number of large international meetings of scholars, for example the Renaissance Society of America, often include panel presentations and seminars especially devoted to the topic of food in literature; calls for papers for international conferences can be found at cfp.english.upenn.edu.

Key reading

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Adolph, Andrea (2009) *Food and Femininity in Twentieth-century British Women's Fiction*. Farnham: Ashgate.

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——(1964) "The Banquet of Love in English Drama (1595–1642)." *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 63: 422–32.

Appelbaum, Robert (2006) *Aguecheek's Beef, Belch's Hiccup, and Other Gastronomic Interjections: Literature, Culture, and Food Among the Early Moderns*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

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12

Philosophy and food

Lisa Heldke

Philosophy has only recently begun the formal study of food, although philosophers have been discussing food since Plato. The philosophical study of food can be understood to take up four separate but related tasks ranging from least to most transformative. They are: (1) applying received philosophical categories to new or uncustomary topics in food; (2) reconceptualizing an existing philosophical discussion as a discussion in the philosophy of food; (3) reclaiming or recovering previous philosophical work relevant to the study of food; and (4) recasting familiar philosophical problems by way of analyses of food, thereby revealing new categories of philosophical understanding.

Philosophy has come to the food studies table rather more reluctantly than some other humanities disciplines. But while it has been slow to embrace the formal study of food, Western philosophy has always been concerned, in peripheral ways, with matters of eating and drinking. From Plato to Hume to Nietzsche, philosophers have reflected upon humans' relationships to food and drink, even if only to dismiss these concerns as inconsequential or base. As contemporary philosophers have begun to make food a topic of serious and concentrated study, they have also begun to revisit these earlier thinkers, in order to ask: how does our understanding of historic philosophers deepen when we consider their discussions of food as something more or other than casually chosen illustrations, examples and metaphors? Some contemporary philosophers of food believe that such work can fundamentally reshape the discipline; that beginning philosophy with questions about humans' relations to food not only will bring us to new understandings of historic figures, but also will invite us to reconsider the most fundamental, perennial problems of philosophy. What does it mean to be a person? What does it mean to know? What are our obligations to others? If we begin with the unavoidable fact of our being as *eaters,* and not just as *thinkers,* such fundamental rethinking inevitably follows.

Contemporary philosophers have come to study food for reasons both internal and external to the discipline. Internally, questions of humans' relations to food have arisen quite naturally, even necessarily, for theorists challenging a certain historical prejudice against the body, practice, ordinary everydayness, and temporality. It has come to seem odd, even unthinkable, that philosophy—the discipline that, more than any other, concerns itself with questions of meaning and value in human life—would be silent about food, a primary source of meaning and value. Philosophers working in this framework have, for instance, explored the aesthetic significance