

GOOD TASTE AND SWEET ORDERING: DINING WITH MRS BEETON

By Margaret Beetham

Man, it has been said, is a dining animal. Creatures of the inferior races eat and drink; man only dines. It has also been said that he is a cooking animal; but some races eat food without cooking it. . . . It is not a *dinner* at which sits the aboriginal Australian who gnaws his bone half bare and then flings it behind to his squaw. And the native of Tierra-del-Fuego does not dine when he gets his morsel of red clay. Dining is the privilege of civilization. The rank which a people occupy in the grand scale may be measured by their way of taking their meals, as well as by their way of treating their women.

—*Beeton's Book of Household Management* (1861)

The Menu

IN HIS BOOK *DISTINCTION: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argues that in order to understand the workings of culture “in the restricted, normative sense” we must not only relate our discussion to the broad anthropological meanings of the concept, we must also relate it to “taste” in the physical sense. We must, he argues, bring “the elaborated taste for the most refined objects . . . back into relation with the elementary taste for the flavours of food” (Bourdieu 99). Bourdieu is writing of twentieth-century France and not nineteenth-century Britain. It may seem anachronistic to juxtapose a quotation from his work with one from an 1861 volume of domestic advice. However, his argument that social distinctions can be understood through a discussion of the material and cultural values attached to food resonates with Beeton’s argument that “the rank which a people occupy . . . may be measured by their way of taking their meals.”

Of course, there are significant problems with simply relating Bourdieu’s analysis to a mid-Victorian text. Beeton rarely used the word “taste” in the general sense of culturally valued, preferring rather the term “elegant.” Taste became more widely used in the later part of the century and then in relation to house furnishing and aspects of household management other than dining. However, I would argue that the whole project of cookery books like Beeton’s was to link what Bourdieu calls the elaborated meaning of “taste” with the elementary sense of the flavours of food. As the quotation at the head of this article makes clear, *Beeton's Book of Household Management* articulated a clear understanding that what we eat and how we eat it are never simply physical and material.¹

The passage quoted above is typical of the whole volume in that it assumed the centrality to Victorian culture of the material and discursive practices involved in “dining.” This was made explicit in one of the extended philosophical passages inserted into the text in minute type. Here Beeton set out a teleology of human progress in which “cooking” marks the high point of human development:

As in the Fine Arts, the progress of mankind from barbarism to civilization is marked by a gradual succession of triumphs over the rude materialities of nature, so in the art of cooking is progress gradual from the earliest and simplest modes, to those of the most complicated and refined. . . . Man, in his primitive state, lives upon roots and the fruits of the earth, until, by degrees, he is driven to seek for new means by which his wants may be supplied and enlarged . . . [Beeton traces the various stages from hunter/gatherer to the beginning of trade and commerce.] Through these various phases, *only to live* has been the great object of mankind; but, by-and-by, comforts are multiplied, and accumulated riches create new wants. The object, then, is not only to *live*, but to live economically, agreeably, tastefully, and well. Accordingly, the art of cooking commences. (39; ch. 4)

Well before Lévi-Strauss, Beeton took the difference between the raw and the cooked as a marker of the transformation of nature into culture. But, for this author the distinction between simply living and living tastefully was the basis for a further and complex set of social distinctions. The way food was prepared, presented, and consumed became a marker of important social differences, for, as Bourdieu argues, social distinctions which relate to taste are always about hierarchy and above all about class hierarchy. He writes, “Taste, a class culture turned into nature, that is, *embodied*, helps to shape the class body. It is an incorporated principle of classification which governs all forms of incorporation, choosing and modifying everything that the body ingests and digests and assimilates, physiologically and psychologically” (190). Cooking books like Beeton’s were always implicitly and sometimes explicitly addressed to the middle class. Their project was to construct the natural body as a class body. In doing so they offered a taxonomy of foods, their preparation, and consumption. However, this taxonomy constructed an ordering of the world which extended well beyond class. Beeton’s text both expressed and sought to realise a hierarchy in which races and nations as well as classes of people were ranked. Fundamental to all these social hierarchies was the distinction between animal and human. Because cooking is about the transformation of the natural (eating) into the social (dining), Beeton’s text dealt with that central problem for mid-Victorians, the relation of the human to what she called “the rude materialities of nature.”

Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* came out in 1859 just as the part-issues of *Beeton’s Book of Household Management* began to be published, and from their very different perspectives both drew on shared understandings of the natural which circulated in their culture. Through the encyclopaedic entries which were embedded in the recipes in a minute font, Beeton invoked an ordering of the natural world of animals and plants, each of which was categorised and described in terms of their usefulness to the higher level order, that is to the human.

Thus, I would argue, that while Bourdieu is right to make class a crucial distinction in relation to taste, class is always implicated in other hierarchies. In particular it is deeply problematic that he ignores gender and the gendering of “taste” in its multiple meanings. Yet gender is a central factor in the creation of taste, particularly in relation to that elementary

meaning which is to do with food. In western European culture, the relationship of men and women to the preparation and consumption of food has been (and still is) different. In the mid-Victorian culture of food which Beeton both represented and tried to create, gender was crucial. When Beeton wrote that, “The rank which a people occupy in the grand scale may be measured by their way of taking their meals as well as by their way of treating their women,” she is not making a casual connection (905; ch. 40). By the 1860s it had become a truism that England’s cultural superiority was expressed in its domestic arrangements, and these depended on its women. Civilised homes and civilised treatment of women were coincident. Middle-class femininity was assumed to be natural yet always having to be recreated through the efforts of the woman (assisted by advice, such as that provided by manuals and magazines). So, too, dining was assumed to be both natural *and* always having to be redeemed into culture through the efforts of women as domestic managers. These were linked ideologies. Beeton’s book is explicitly addressed to “The Mistress” of the household and she assumed that women would have responsibility for creating the taste, both physical and cultural, which men enjoyed.

Nowhere were the complex relationships of class and gender more evident than in the middle-class kitchen and dining room. The relationship of the mistress to the woman servant who cooked and served the meals was crucial to Victorian domestic management and was addressed both obliquely and directly in Beeton’s text, as it was in most of the cookery books which came out in this period. However, whatever the differences between mistress and servant, in all but a tiny number of the richest households where male chefs were employed, it was women who were responsible for the planning and preparation of meals. Yet women, of whatever class, were expected to consume less of what was cooked than were their men. For middle-class women gross appetites of any kind were not deemed consonant with femininity, while for most working-class women, ensuring that men and children were fed took priority over their own needs. Moreover, the pattern of meals for men and women differed. As work away from home became the norm for the middle-class man and dinner slipped later and later into the day, middle-class women began to devise an extra meal in the middle of the day from which men were absent, as they usually were from afternoon tea (Hunter 66–68). Thus even meals became gendered just as cooking was.

Beeton’s stress on the importance of dining as a cultural marker could be seen as special pleading. After all, if you want the reading public to buy your books, you must convince that public of their importance. It is true that Samuel Beeton was an extremely sharp commercial operator with a talent for advertising and publicity. But this alone could not account for the extra-ordinary commercial success of *Beeton’s Book of Household Management* (1861) and the various part-issues, reprints, and later editions which continued well into the twentieth century (Beetham 2003, Driver 101–02, Howsam 33–36). Besides, this was only one of a vast array of books and articles which advised the Victorian reader on how to manage dining in the middle-class home. It was in this period that what Elizabeth Driver calls “the cookery book” moved into the important place in popular publishing where it has remained ever since. In her definitive bibliography, Driver takes 1875 to 1914 as the crucial period for the emergence of this publishing genre (13–14). She documents “a new mass market” in books and notes that beyond the bound volumes there was an even greater proliferation of pamphlets, part-issues, and magazine articles. Sharing some of the features of general household manuals and domestic reference books, such as *Enquire Within*, cookery books focused more specifically on dining (Philp). This involved recipes but also menu-planning,

table decoration, and the management of people – in particular servants. These popular texts both represented and sought to create the material and discursive practices around food which distinguished English middle-class homes.

In what follows I draw on a range of such cookery books, but I use Beeton's first volume of 1861 as a key text, since in its various manifestations it remained the bible of the Victorian domestic manager, even though challenged for supremacy by such popular works as *Cassell's Dictionary of Cookery* (1875, 1882). My argument, as I have already indicated, is that middle-class dining was about the creation and maintenance of distinctions or boundaries; crucially these were the boundary between the animal and the human, between nature and civilisation, between the aboriginal Australian gnawing on his bone and the English domestic woman at her well ordered meal. The middle-class home and the classed and gendered body were produced through the maintenance of these differences which constructed a hierarchy of value. The human was of more value than the animal, the Englishwoman of more value than the aboriginal Australian, and these values were enacted in and through the forms of dining.

These distinctions, therefore, created boundaries between the inside and the outside, between an implied "we" and an implied "other." However, such boundaries were always leaky and in danger of being breached. Indeed ironically the whole project of the advice book might be read as a breaching of class boundaries, as it taught class behaviours to those who had not acquired such knowledge by birth or upbringing. Because eating always involves a taking into the body of that which is foreign, the cookery book also dealt with that most dangerous of boundary-crossing, between the self and the not-self. We have to eat to live but it is a dangerous business, as the Victorians were well aware.

There were, therefore, intrinsic contradictions in the project of the Victorian cookery book as represented by *Beeton's Book of Household Management*. Beeton offered to help "manage" not just the household but also the anxieties which the whole project produced. It is significant that what Beeton identifies as the "great ordeal" for the mistress was the half hour before a dinner party. "The anxiety to receive her guests . . . her trust in the skill of her cook, and the attention of the other domestics, all tend to make those few minutes a trying time" (12; ch. 1). Of course, such anxiety must never be revealed, the mistress must "display no kind of agitation." Part of the contradiction of household management was precisely that the work which went into dining must never be evident.

Yet keeping in place those boundaries which distinguished the middle-class English home and its dining took a great deal of work. In what follows I argue that Beeton's volume was particularly successful not only because of the entrepreneurial skills of the publishers, though these were formidable, but also because the book offered a strategy for keeping things and bodies in their place. Beeton presented a model of order in which the untidiness of nature, the lower classes, and even the unruly self could all be contained.

Soup

Everything that is edible, and passes under the hands of the cook, is more or less changed, and assumes new forms.

—Beeton 39; ch. 1

I BEGIN FROM THE fact that *Beeton's Book of Household Management* was precisely that, a book, a product of the mid-Victorian publishing industry, a commodity produced for the

expanding middle class. It can be understood simply as part of the furniture of the tasteful middle-class home. Indeed the handsome leather-bound copy of the vast 1906 edition which I inherited from my grandmother looks as if it never went near the kitchen but sat on the shelf as a visible marker of class. There was a well established market for such gift books, especially as wedding presents for young brides. However, most versions of Beeton’s *Book* – especially the cheaper ones – did get read and used as practical manuals. I also have a battered 270-page copy of the 1897 edition of the one shilling *Mrs Beeton’s Cookery Book* with stained pages stuck together in places, which has clearly been in the kitchen. Popular books like Beeton’s signalled not only changes in publishing which still shape the market in books today, but also changes in the relationship of cooking and eating to print. The ingestion and digestion of printed texts in nineteenth and twentieth century capitalist culture were crucial mechanisms in the creation of taste.

The significance of the 1861 volume can, therefore, only be understood fully if we read it not just in terms of the history of household management and specifically of cooking and eating. It needs to be read also as a literary text whose structure and rhetorical strategies merit attention, and as an example of the way popular print developed through the invention and circulation of new forms of reading. All these aspects of the text should not be separated but should be understood as in dynamic relationship, for this volume brought together the gustatory, the economic, the ideological, and the practical.

As the existence of two very different version of Beeton on my shelves indicates, it is not always easy to know exactly what or who we are discussing here.² Even the 1861 volume is best understood not as a single text but as a node in a network of other texts, practices, and discourses. One could argue that this is true of any print text – particularly one which enjoyed the popularity of Beeton’s. However, her *Book* enacts the inter-relatedness of texts and practices in specific and dramatic ways.

Firstly, there are the numerous versions of the text itself. The 1861 volume had itself originally been issued in serial parts and another series appeared in 1863. It almost immediately began to be reissued in different formats, part-issues, spin-offs, and extracts published in smaller and cheaper versions. Most of these were recipe books, such as *Mrs Beeton’s Shilling Cookery Book* and *Mrs Beeton’s Penny Cookery Book*, but other sections of the volume, for example the sections on the laundry and the advice on servants, were also extracted and republished. This meant that the contents of the volume were constantly repackaged for slightly different markets (Driver 101-02). Isabella died in 1865 when she was 28 and in 1874 Samuel sold his titles and more importantly his name to Ward, Lock, and Tyler. Thereafter volumes bearing Mrs. Beeton’s name appeared at intervals throughout the next one hundred years but most of them bore little or no resemblance to the original volumes. “Mrs. Beeton” became a trade mark, a brand name, though the idea that a real person existed and wrote the books continued to be propagated.

Secondly, even the 1861 version is not a single, consistent publication. Beeton was described as “The Editor” rather than the author of her text and she openly acknowledged that her work was not original (Beeton, “Preface,” unnumbered page). Her claim that she had made “a diligent study of the works of the best modern writers” rather concealed her outright borrowings from earlier works (“Preface,” unnumbered page). She unashamedly copied recipes from Acton and Soyer into her book – often without acknowledgement – as well as plagiarising substantial chunks from other writers including Mrs. Parkes (Goodyear). The result of this is that the famous *Book* is a hybrid product, a mixture of genres and

voices visually represented in a range of fonts. At the beginning and end of the book discursive chapters of advice on the Mistress's Duties, on Servants, on the Sick Room, and on Legal Memoranda are completely different in tone and style from the chapters of recipes which make up the bulk of the 1112 pages.³ However, even the food chapters are a medley of different kinds of writing and of different kinds of type. The recipes are set out to a consistent and logical pattern, to which I return in a moment, but interspersed in the recipes in a minute font are short accounts of the history, geography, or mythology of the ingredients in question, making the book as much a compendium or general reference book as a recipe book.

All this makes for leaky boundaries. Not only was the text of the original 1861 volume constantly changed and rewritten through various editions, but even that text contains direct quotations from a range of earlier texts, all presented in a mixture of styles both verbal and visual. Perhaps it is appropriate that Isabella Beeton herself apparently believed that one of the most important contributions of her book to improving English cooking was the attention she gave to new and enticing ways of dishing up the left-over meat from the previous day. For Beeton, "everything that . . . passes under hands of the cook is . . . changed and assumes new forms" (39; ch. 1). So it was with the material she took from a range of sources and transformed into a dish of her own.

Thirdly, *Beeton's Book of Household Management* was conceived and brought to life in the context of a flourishing family publishing business. *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, founded by Samuel Beeton in 1852, had included advice on running the household along with the fiction, fashion, and correspondence columns (Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?* 59-88). After her marriage to him in 1857, Isabella contributed to this and other Beeton journals and even became the "Editress." Beeton wrote that she was indebted for some of her recipes to *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, the "correspondents [of which] have obligingly placed at my disposal their formulas for many original preparations" ("Preface," unnumbered page). The magazine also provided a vehicle for advertising. Beeton shamelessly puffed the book through direct advertisement and through narratives in which desperate housewives found it their salvation. Together the Beetons exploited the rapidly expanding market for popular print which was important in the capitalist economy of the mid-Victorian period. "Her" volume was part of a whole series of encyclopaedias, reference, and "how to" books which the house of Beeton published including such titles as *Beeton's Book of Birds*, and *Beeton's Book of Money*.

In this the Beeton volume was typical. The huge increase in household advice books and within that the rise and rise of "the cookery book" were intimately linked to the growth of Victorian popular journals. One of Beeton's most important rivals in the market for domestic advice books was Mrs. Eliza Warren. Her most popular book, *How I Managed my House on Two Hundred Pounds a Year*, came out in November 1864. The first reprint in February 1865 indicated in the preface a sale of twenty-thousand copies in these three months (Attar 214). Crucial to her success was that she, too, was the editor of a women's magazine, the long running *Ladies' Treasury*, and she was often identified as "the editress" on the title pages of her books. Her works all had a symbiotic relationship with the journal, including serialisation. Robert Philp's is an even more remarkable example of a highly successful journalistic career in which household manuals came out of and fed back into popular magazines. Philp's magazines included *The Family Friend*, *The Family Tutor*, and *The Family Treasury*. His immensely successful work, the encyclopaedic *Enquire Within* was, according to Dena Attar, almost entirely composed of "material already published in his various papers, from other

published sources and from readers’ contributions” (171). In its close links with magazine publishing, its recycling of other material, and the hybridity of its form, therefore, Beeton’s volume was typical.

As all this suggests, the extraordinary success of “Mrs. Beeton’s” book cannot be simply explained. It is part of the proliferation of new kinds of print genres which marked the Victorian period. It is not only the emerging genres of the domestic woman’s magazine or the popular reference book to which it must be related. It was part of a revolution in the way knowledge, including practical knowledge, was codified and circulated. Books like Beeton’s assumed a culture in which literacy was replacing oral training, though almost certainly the relationship between reading, oral transmission, and practical application were not simple. Indeed the question of who actually read this book and if the person who read it herself chose the cut of beef and made the stew is a crux which I return to below.

This uneasy relationship with traditions of oral transmission may have been instrumental in the association of many of the various printed texts with a real woman, often assumed to be a matronly figure. In Beeton’s case this was also a device and part of an inventive and, in its later manifestations, a fairly ruthless marketing policy which was begun by Beeton but carried on vigorously by Ward, Lock, and Tyler (later Ward and Lock). However, unless we operate with a model of the public – especially the female public – simply as dupes, we must accept that the success of the multiple versions of “Mrs. Beeton” lay in the way they spoke to the desires and needs of readers. At least in part that success must have depended on the way it addressed the complex and often contradictory demands of middle-class femininity and in particular the difficulties of knowing how to manage “dining” as it became a key marker of English middle-class womanhood. Beeton recognised that buying and preparing food, choosing menus, and even knowing how to set out dishes on the table were not trivial matters. Indeed they were at the pinnacle of that “progress from barbarism to civilisation” which had produced the English middle-class woman as its highest manifestation. As she put it, “The nation which knows how to dine has learnt the leading lesson of progress. It implies both the will and skill to reduce to order, and surround with idealisms and graces, the more material conditions of human existence; and wherever that will and that skill exist, life cannot be wholly ignoble” (Beeton 905; ch. 40). The achievement of this text, as I read it, was that it acknowledged the world as difficult and messy but held that with “will and skill” it could be ordered. Indeed, Beeton gave her readers that task of ordering. I turn to this in the next section.

Meat

“A place for everything, and everything in its place,” must be [the cook’s] rule.

—Beeton 42; ch. 1

SOME SUCH SAYING WAS a truism in advice books on cooking. *The New London Cookery and Complete Domestic Guide* by A Lady in 1836 had told the cook to “Do everything in its proper time; put everything in its proper place; keep everything in its proper use” (10). However, Beeton’s crisp formulation is, I argue, the key to her own strategy for how to deal with the hybrid genre of the cookery book and with the contradiction of keeping in their place those distinctions of class, gender, and race which were underpinned by dining. Despite its mix of voices, fonts, and borrowed material, the volume has a consistency of organisation

and of layout which was unusual at the time. Unlike Mrs. Warren, who structured her advice through semi-autobiographical narratives, or Philp, whose *Enquire Within* brought together a heterogeneous collection of information on everything connected with the household, Beeton developed a consistent structure of short didactic paragraphs focusing on “dining.” These paragraphs followed a set pattern for most of the book and produced the effect of consistency and order despite the heterogeneity of content and the variety of type.

“Dining” as Beeton understood it involved not only cooking individual dishes, but also the structure and order of meals. To this end she gave detailed accounts of how to design a meal for a range of occasions from a family weekday dinner to a large party. She even gave diagrams of the position of the dishes on the table for certain kinds of meals. However, the vast bulk of the volume was taken up with recipes, the element of dining which came to be associated with Beeton. It was here that Beeton’s organisational skills became apparent.

Firstly, Beeton consistently arranged the recipes in the same very logical order; ingredients, followed by method, time, season, and cost. This was not an original idea but she made it her own. The clarity this imparted is evident through a comparison with some other contemporary cookery books. The Chambers brothers, another publishing company famous for their affordable *Journal*, published their *Chambers’ Cookery and Domestic Economy for Young Housewives* in 1854 and, like Beeton, re-issued later editions with some alterations. Neither the 1854 nor the 1884 version set out recipes in a consistent fashion; ingredients were not listed clearly and have often to be deduced from the method. Neither Mrs. Rundell, whose work was important earlier in the century but was re-issued with additions, nor Mrs. Reeve who is credited with Longman’s contribution to the genre, adopted anything like Beeton’s consistency of layout, though her format has now become standard.

Again, Beeton’s volume was unusual in being divided into well marked sections, each organized on a similar plan with a general introduction followed by recipes arranged alphabetically. Though most (but not all) cookery books included an index, Beeton’s “Analytical Index” at the start of the book was a model; it was cross-referenced and comprehensive. “Hashed Mutton,” for example, could be found under “Mutton” but also under “Cold-Meats,” that comprehensive list of how to use left-overs of which Beeton was so proud. Numbering was by paragraph as well as page which meant that recipes could be found quickly.

Visually and in terms of layout, too, Beeton’s book demonstrated a consistent principle of organisation which made its heterogeneous contents look uniform and orderly. Whereas some comparable volumes used illustrations somewhat haphazardly, as did the Chambers’s volumes, Beeton used small woodcuts consistently and included a few large coloured illustrations. Within the text, different sizes, and types of font indicated different kinds of information. Titles of recipes were in bold capitals, with the word “ingredients” in slightly smaller capitals. “Mode,” “time,” “seasonable,” and “cost” were in italics with the rest in small roman type. The comments on the history, geography, or mythology of dishes and ingredients were in tiny font, to indicate to the busy cook that these were not essential reading. In these ways Beeton enacted in the very type and layout of the book, that order which she advocated as the first principle of the kitchen.

The crucial importance of order is related, I argue, to the instability of those fundamental distinctions which “dining” had to maintain. Beeton sometimes wrote of the progress from barbarism to civilisation, as though it were a continuum. Running counter to this, however, was that powerful ideology already discussed which understood the world as structured in

difference; between savage and civilized, between inside and outside, between the private domestic world of home and the public world of taverns and the street, and between the human and the natural world, consisting of “the fruits of the earth, the fowls of the air, the beasts of the field, and the fish of the sea” (39; ch. 1).

These categories are familiar to all students of nineteenth century history and have been mobilised in post-colonial theory. However, the slipperiness and instability of such oppositions has also, and rightly, been the subject of debate. The boundaries between inside and outside are fragile and in constant need of reinforcement, whether we are talking of the boundaries between home and the public world, civilization and savagery, or that important boundary between human and animal. Darwin’s much delayed publication of *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 precipitated only the most vociferous of these ideological border disputes.

Distinguishing between “dining” and “eating” in Beeton’s text was to draw a boundary on various fronts. In the quotation with which I began this article she argues that though Man has been said to be “a dining animal,” “[i]t is not a *dinner* at which sits the aboriginal Australian who gnaws his bone half bare and then flings it behind to his squaw. And the native of Terra-del-Fuego does not dine when he gets his morsel of red clay” (905; ch. 40). These two figures, the Aboriginal Australian and the native of Tierra del Fuego, are represented as types of an extreme savagery which makes them hardly human. In using these types Beeton was drawing on common images and ideas circulating in the culture. In his *Voyage of the Beagle*, Darwin had represented the inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego as at the extreme of the known world and in some respects lower than the animals. He compares them with other savage peoples, notably the Caffres and the natives of Australia (Chapter 10).

As this suggests, the distinction between the civilised and the savage resonates with that even more crucial difference between the animal and the human. This is the boundary which Donna Haraway has argued was felt to need the most urgent policing in nineteenth and early twentieth century modern societies – at least until the arrival of the robot (Haraway 163). In Beeton’s introductions to the sections, for example, that on “The Natural History of Fish,” and in those comments in tiny type interspersed in the recipes which I have already mentioned, nature is represented as simultaneously utterly necessary for civilization and the domestic, yet deeply inimical to their project. The natural world is characterised as unruly, profligate, and indecently fecund. “The fecundity of fishes has been the wonder of every natural philosopher whose attention has been attracted to the subject” she writes, while, in an almost identical formulation, “The Fecundity of the Rabbit” is such that “The fruitfulness of this animal has been the subject of wonder to all naturalists” (109; ch. 7; 489; ch. 21). However, as well as wonder, the animal world could create feelings of disgust and even fear. James Buzard, among others, has pointed out how for Beeton the pig with its “prolific powers,” general grossness, and slothful habits was the type of animality in its combination of the disgusting and the useful (Buzard 128). Such beastliness threatened the values of domesticity, a threat which occasionally seemed to take literal form, as in Beeton’s accounts of the fierceness of the wild hog and her “seaman’s tale” of the unfortunate sailor who fell out of his boat into a shoal of mackerel and was nibbled to death (281; ch. 8). If the natural world escapes its proper limits, the basic order of who eats and who gets eaten becomes disrupted. I cannot here go into the whole debate about cannibalism in relation to that other set of oppositions between the savage and the civilised. However, it is a ghostly presence in these parts of the text. Nature is not only extravagant and unruly but potentially lethal.

Yet mackerel are delicious and, despite his excesses and his “coarse and repulsive mode of feeding,” “there is no domestic animal so profitable or so useful to man” as the pig (362; ch. 16). It is the task of the woman reader of Beeton’s book to turn these disgusting creatures into a range of tasty and tasteful meals. (Beeton gives forty different recipes and procedures for dealing with the pig.) Everything that passes under the cook’s hands is more or less transformed, as Beeton says, and it is not simply that pig becomes leg of pork, sausages, or little raised pies. It is rather that nature is transformed into culture, the wild becomes domesticated.

“Domestic” is the key concept here, though like “taste,” it is not one Beeton uses extensively. Rather her terms are “household” and above all that key Victorian concept “home.” Home in this text is the place of transformation where animals and plants becomes useful, the potentially savage becomes civilised and “the more material conditions of human existence” are “reduce[d] to order and surround[ed] with idealisms and graces” (905; ch. 40). The boundary is drawn therefore between “the happy home” and the world, between inside and outside, whether that outside is seen as the public world of the streets and the market, untamed nature, or primitive and savage humanity. All these partake of similar qualities and it is the task of the woman to ensure that home is where the difference is maintained. The *English Woman’s Domestic Magazine* had as its declared aim to teach its readers how to make “home happy” (1), and in the “Preface” to her volume Beeton says she undertook the work of this book because of the competition which men’s “clubs, well-ordered taverns, and dining houses” present to the unskilled housewife (“Preface,” unnumbered page). The importance of ensuring that men were kept in the circle of the domestic rather than being seduced by the attractions of the club or tavern links Beeton back to an earlier and very different writer of advice to women, Mrs. Sarah Ellis. She had written a number of tracts and stories on “The Dangers of Dining Out.” Ellis was specifically concerned with temperance, Beeton with a more far-ranging interest in dining.

As James Buzard has pointed out, students of Victorian literature are used to seeing the traditional Angel in the House turned into the Madwoman in the Attic (121). Beeton’s domestic manager does not fit either stereotype. In her text what keeps madness and the threat of the primitive at bay is not a moral or even a religious spirit, but the will and above all “the skill” of the domestic woman. That will and skill in Beeton’s text are essentially to do with order, with making sure that objects, people, and practices are all kept in their appropriate place.

Disorder in the domestic sphere signals the worst kind of collapse, the failure of the woman to maintain civilization. The fear of this is demonstrated in a range of fictional households of which that of Mrs. Jellyby in Dickens’s *Bleak House* is perhaps the most memorable. Here everything is out of place. The fish, beef, and cutlets would have been excellent but they are served up uncooked and almost raw, the potatoes are mislaid and turn up in the coal scuttle, and the youngest child’s head gets stuck between the railings; nothing is in its place because the mistress has her eyes fixed on the natives of Borrioboola-Gha and not her own home (84-90; ch. 4). Esther Summerson, Dickens’s embodiment of true domestic womanhood, begins to put things into their right place and could make “a home out of even this house” (90; ch. 4). Again and again in mid-Victorian culture, the other is represented as wild and disordered, needing to be ordered by the domestic manager, the woman whom Beeton’s text both addresses and seeks to bring into being.

The trope of bringing order out of disorder is crucial but it does not completely address the anxiety generated by the ideological work of domestic management. The reason for this is, that – as I have already suggested – the neat oppositions do not work in an orderly way. The boundaries cannot be maintained because the self depends not just on the presence of the other but on an intimate relationship, indeed on taking the other into the self. In eating we take into ourselves the not-self, and transform it into the self. This transformation is preceded by the cultural transformation which makes the raw into the cooked, nature into culture. As Beeton said, everything that is edible and passes under the hands of the cook changes and assumes new forms. Though the forms it takes on are those of culture, the cook can only work with the fish, fruit, and fowl of the natural. In order to dine, the natural world has not only to be ordered, it has to be transformed *so that it can be* taken into the self. No wonder Beeton argues that the influence of the cook upon the happiness of the household is immense.

This process of taking the other into the self worked also in terms of those other cultures of the British Empire. The aboriginal might be beyond culture but India, the jewel in the Imperial crown, was a different matter. By 1861 Indian dishes were featuring regularly in English cooking (Zlotnick 80-82). “Mulligatawny” soup and “curry” were words and dishes from the Tamil-speaking part of south India which had become “domesticated,” both into the English language and into the diet advocated by Beeton. By the 1850s curry was a part of English diet. When the revised edition of Mrs. Rundell’s *Modern Domestic Cookery* was published in 1853 several of the new additions by “Miss Emma Roberts” were for curries ([A Lady], *passim*). However, some cookery writers like the anonymous author of the *Chambers’ Cookery* book were slower and it was not until the 1884 version that this writer included recipes for curry and one for kedgeree, another Indian dish which had become incorporated into upper-class English diet.

Just as those returning from India brought with them their brass lamps and their Indian shawls, so they brought their recipes for curry and their taste for spicy dishes. Of course, just as the words “curry” or “kedgeree” would have been unrecognisable to native speakers of Tamil or Hindi, so these curries were thoroughly anglicised. Some of these anglicisations look like culinary disasters. A recipe for Curry made with Australian Meat from a Tin included in Mrs H. Reeve’s *Cookery and Housekeeping* of 1883 looks particularly unpleasant (241). However, by the 1850s curry was safely domesticated and was no longer dangerously foreign.

For the British living in India the domestication of curry was a more complex matter. By the 1850s, the earlier more hybrid models of dress, manners, eating, and indeed of social relations which had characterised the “nabobs” of the East India Company had given way to what Collingham has described as a more anglicised way of living, one in which the British drew the boundaries more tightly between themselves and the Indians they ruled. Dining was a crucial marker of Britishness in the Raj. This meant importing china and glass ware from Britain rather than using readily available good quality local products, decorating the table in the manner recommended by the advice books, and eating the kind of food which might be eaten “back home” (Collingham 69). Of course this was an impossible task. The numerous cookery books and advice on how to manage households in India are testimony not only to the difficulty of holding the line – as it were – but also reveal the inevitable hybridisation of diet. *The Indian Domestic Economy and Receipt Book of 1849*, for example, which was printed at The Gentleman’s Gazette press in Bombay and sold throughout British India, gave sixty of five hundred and six pages to “Oriental” recipes and a further twenty to advice on growing “native” vegetables.

Because India was recognised as having an ancient civilisation and a highly developed culture and because of the huge numbers of British people who at some stage lived and worked there over two centuries, it was possible to incorporate Indian recipes more easily than those of other colonial territories. I have not so far found any nineteenth century recipes which are based on dishes from Africa or from the Australian aborigine culture.

Such work of domestication required constant effort on the part of the mistress but nowhere was that difficulty more important or more immediate than in relation to class and it is to this that I turn in the final section.

Pudding

The general servant, or maid-of-all work, is perhaps the only one of her class deserving of commiseration; her life is a solitary one and in, some places, her work is never done . . . the mistress's commands are the measure of the maid of all work's duties.

—Beeton 1001; ch. 41

IF, AS I HAVE SUGGESTED, the working class in mid-Victorian middle-class iconography shared many of the characteristics of “nature” and the primitive, being hog-like, dirty, omnivorous, and indecently fecund, they were also immensely useful – indeed utterly necessary – to the middle-class home and especially to dining.

For John Ruskin, among others, part of the task of “sweet ordering” associated with true home-making was the recognition of class difference through benevolent provision for the poor, that is the working class, outside the middle-class home. There is something in Beeton's text to support this view. The one recipe which the editress claimed to have made up herself, as against a general claim to have tried all the recipes, was a “Useful Soup for Benevolent Purposes” (Beeton 84-85; ch. 6). By making several gallons of this soup daily in her kitchen during the winter of 1858, she claimed not only to have provided “a dish of warm and comforting food” at little cost to about a dozen families but also to have taught these “cottagers” how “with a little more knowledge of the ‘cooking’ art, they might have . . . a warm dish every day” for less expense than their usual cold meal (85; ch. 6). Here, the housewife from her well-ordered home is able to teach the working class something of the domestic skills they lack. This is a familiar pattern of class relations, with the cottage quite removed in social geography from the household of the good manager.

However, what is remarkable about the middle-class household in Beeton's and every other comparable text is the central place of domestic servants. Members of the working class were not only incorporated into the body of the middle-class household, but they were also crucial to its workings. Nor is this a marginal issue in class relations. For working-class women domestic service was the biggest single occupation in the second half of the century, while middle classness was increasingly defined by the presence of at least one domestic, that is live-in, servant (Davidoff 24 and *passim*). The task of management set out in Beeton's text is, therefore, centrally concerned with the management of the working class *within* the home. No wonder that the recipes are buttressed with pages of instructions for servants; no wonder these were often reprinted separately; no wonder that contemporary middle-class magazines, including *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, were full of discussions about “the servant problem.” “It is the custom of ‘Society’ to abuse its servants,” wrote Beeton, but she goes on to argue that, “The sensible master and kind mistress know, that if

servants depend on them for their means of living, in turn they depend on their servants for many of the comforts of life.” Therefore servants should be treated “like reasonable beings” while “making slight excuses for the shortcomings of human nature” (961-62; ch. 41). But it was precisely the mutual dependence which made drawing the boundaries, not between outside and inside, but inside the home so difficult. Beeton gave the cook an absolutely crucial place in the creation of a civilised and happy home, yet the cook was working class. The working-class woman who lived in the home was not an insider. The maid-of-all work could be described as “solitary” even though she lived with the household.

It is not clear from the text, and scholars are still in disagreement about how far the middle-class woman actually went into the kitchen and cooked. Though the dominant assumption of the text is that the reader will use it to manage those who actually do the cooking, there are some slippages where the implied reader is addressed as though she did more than organise the store-cupboard. All the evidence is that most middle-class women did have to undertake at least some of the domestic labour which was in theory the task of the working-class woman inside the home (Davidoff 57). Despite Beeton’s pages of advice on footmen, housekeepers, and butlers, which suggested a large establishment, most households would rely on one, or at best two, female servants. Drawing the boundary between the mistress and the maid in circumstances where both might be involved in cooking or even cleaning was particularly difficult.

This difficulty was compounded by the dominant ideology which made domestic labour invisible, both materially and ideologically. The space of the middle-class house was organised so that domestic servants who performed the labour were physically kept in the margins as far as possible – usually sleeping in the attic and cooking in a basement kitchen or at the back of the house out of the way of the family. Time, too, was organised to ensure their invisibility. The servant, even more than the mistress, must rise early to ensure that tasks like cleaning the family rooms or laying fires were undertaken before the rest of the household got up in the morning (Beeton 988; ch. 41). If the mistress did take part in cooking, say for a dinner party, she must not betray this to guests (12; ch.1). Servants who waited at table must not speak or make their presence felt other than as a pair of hands (a term used for factory workers but equally applicable to servants) (968; ch. 41). It is one of the contradictions of Beeton’s text that it is an anatomy of the domestic labour involved in cooking and housework and yet it subscribes to the dominant view that the inner workings of the house should not be visible to anyone except those involved.

Within this cloak of invisibility certain clear lines were drawn to ensure that proper boundaries were maintained. Servants, like the working class in general, could not “dine”; they *ate*, before or after the family, or in some households perhaps with the children in the nursery, since children below a certain age were also not capable of the high arts of dining. In Winifred Foley’s account of her time as a servant in the early twentieth century, she describes working for an elderly woman who became so frail that in the end she ate at the table with her mistress. When this came to light it caused uproar in the family as it threatened to breach a line which must be maintained (229).

Similarly servants were not allowed to display “taste” in the sense of high art. Reading, for example, was to be undertaken and encouraged in the younger members of the family but was forbidden to servants who, if found reading, would be told to find something useful to do, such as darning or sewing – not, of course, the embroidery or fancy needlework of the young ladies (Davies 26). Beeton did not address the question of servants’ reading but some

instructions to mistresses did suggest what it was appropriate to give the cook to read. It was always a short list which usually included a Bible and a recipe book but not much else. Of course some servants did read, just as some mistresses cooked and cleaned. However, these breaches of the lines of difference only made the difficulties of managing the domestic more apparent and contributed, perhaps, to the harsh tone of the advice on domestic servants in some of the later volumes of *Beeton's Book of Household Management* itself as well as other advice books.

This opens up the crucial question of how such books were read and how they were used in the kitchen. In entering this unmappable, or perhaps more accurately unmapped, territory I would argue that another French sociologist provides a better guide than Bourdieu. Michel de Certeau is concerned with what he calls "the practice of everyday life"; by this he means all the creative ways in which those who are relatively powerless make and "make do." De Certeau does not underestimate the material and ideological controls which power exerts. What he calls the "strategies" of the powerful shape the lives of the powerless as the city's architecture shapes how and where they can walk. But he is interested in the ways in which the ordinary unremarked actors of history improvise and make their own the spaces and structures within which they have to live. Walking the streets, inhabiting the houses which they rent but have not built and do not own, reading books they have not written, these are activities which are constrained yet open to inventive forms of occupation and even at times subversion.

These "unrecognised producers" of meaning trace "'indeterminate trajectories' that are apparently meaningless, since they do not cohere with the constructed, written and prefabricated space through which they move" (34). Arguing that we do not yet have the theoretical tools to analyse these endlessly creative activities, he describes them as "tactics," while he uses the term "strategies" for the ways in which those with power work to maintain their power. Reading, for De Certeau, is the paradigmatic modern "tactic" and his work chimes with literary theorists who have stressed that texts only work when they are read. Cooking, however, for him comes not far behind reading as an everyday practice in which the creative deployment of "tactics" is evident (xix-xxii). In both activities the reader/cook works within a structure but takes what he or she needs, always creating a new understanding of the text or a dish which is not exactly the same as the last time.

In considering how Beeton's text was read and how it was used in cooking we might usefully deploy De Certeau's metaphor of "la perruque." This is a slang term for the practice whereby factory or office workers deploy the master's tools or the master's time for their own ends. So far I have argued that in order fully to understand Beeton's book we have to recognise the ideological and material power which the text represented and enforced. However, we should not underestimate the possibility of deviant and creative forms of occupying and using the text, of practising the art of "la perruque." Any account of the importance of dining in Victorian Britain must include those like Winifred Foley, a domestic servant who read books "borrowed" from her mistress while ostensibly working in the kitchen, or the possibility of cooks who, finding they did not have the two blades of mace Beeton specified for the Calf's Head Soup, substituted a cardamom seed, or of children who looked at the coloured frontispiece on the Beeton volume with its picture of an idealised harvest scene and dreamed of holidays in the country (Foley 231). Perhaps even the Mistress sometimes decided not to "dine" today and was content to eat with the children.

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NOTES

1. This article is based on a paper I gave at a conference in 2004. Kathryn Hughes’s long awaited *The Short Life and Long Times of Mrs. Beeton* (London: Fourth Estate, 2005) came out after I had finished writing it. She and I come to similar conclusions on some aspects of Beeton’s work. All who work on Beeton are indebted to Nicola Humble (2000), who also gave a paper at the 2004 conference. I am grateful to Leslie Howsam of Windsor University for allowing me to read her unpublished paper on Beeton’s publishing history and to Lynette Hunter for her personal and scholarly support in the early stages of this work.
2. Throughout this article I refer to the author/editor of the 1861 edition of *Beeton’s Book of Household Management* as Beeton. Any reference in quotation marks is to suggest that much of what is attributed to her, particularly in later editions, was not written by her and that “Mrs Beeton” became a publishing construct.
3. In fact, as Beeton made clear, the chapters on the doctor and on legal matters were contributed by gentlemen knowledgeable in these areas (Preface, unnumbered page).

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