

INTRODUCTION: COOKING CULTURE: SITUATING FOOD AND DRINK IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

By Suzanne Daly and Ross G. Forman

IN PERHAPS HER MOST famous comment, Isabella Beeton, the doyenne of Victorian cookery, proclaimed, “Dining is the privilege of civilization” (363). Dinner, she went on to explain, “is a matter of considerable importance; and a well-served table is a striking index of human ingenuity and resource” (363). That “much depends on dinner” has been widely recognized in a variety of contexts since Beeton made this pronouncement in her *Book of Household Management* in the mid-Victorian era. From Upton Sinclair’s exposé of the meat industry in *The Jungle* (1906) to the more recent fascination with Eric Schlosser’s *Fast Food Nation* (2001) and Michael Pollan’s *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* (2006), food – and particularly its mismanagement – has become a positive obsession with the public at large. Anthropologists, sociologists, historians, and psychologists – from Claude Lévi-Strauss to Mary Douglas to Sidney Mintz to Sigmund Freud himself – have long engaged in commenting on what Beeton asserts in her chapter on “Dinner and Dining”: that distinctions in food preparation, eating habits, and modes of dining are a crucial axis around which cultures and groups consolidate themselves. Similarly, organizations like Stanford University’s now defunct Food Research Institute have investigated food’s centrality to “human ingenuity,” in this case through the study of agricultural practice and policy.

Yet however much legitimacy “food studies” has acquired in these fields, in the camp of literary and cultural studies, it has remained – at least until recently – a devalued object of inquiry. There are many potential reasons for this, the most important of which may be food and cookery’s association with women and with popular culture – which therefore tied its study to polemical 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. This is not to say that valuable scholarship on food, cooking, and eating has not been done within English studies, but this pathbreaking work did not generate the level of response seen in other fields. Nor has it eliminated the stigma under which the study of food, at many institutions and in other academic settings, continues to operate.

When we first began to discuss the possibility of collecting current scholarship on the Victorians and food in 2002, we faced two problems. The first was this vexed position of

food studies within the profession. Although food was already a popular theme in many university courses in the humanities, “food studies” was barely a recognized term, and one with an uncertain status, particularly within English studies. Conferences on food had largely been addressed to food professionals, such as those organized over the last thirty years by the International Association of Culinary Professionals. Or they had had a distinctly historical or social science slant, like the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery, which began in the 1980s, or the New School for Social Research’s 1998 conference titled “Food: Nature and Culture” which published its proceedings in the journal *Social Research*.¹ Certainly, the key texts on which we drew in our own work on food were largely historical and anthropological, and we were concerned about doing something too easily categorizable as “thematic” or too easily dismissed as Victoriana rather than Victorian Studies. Our doubts were quickly dispelled not only by the quality of the papers we received in response to our call, but the sheer quantity – more than for any other special topic in the journal’s history.

The second problem was that many scholars held misconceptions about Victorian food and diet: that it was bland and boring, that it was insular, or simply that it didn’t exist at all – symbolized in all its blankness by the insipid and infamous “white soup”; subsumed in clubs and restaurants by more exciting French food that was more tasteful (in both senses of the word); or eaten without much zest by the agricultural and working classes. Yet as Matthew Sweet points out in *Inventing the Victorians*, the notion that nineteenth-century British food culture was stodgy and dull is simply another one of the myths of the post-Victorian period (106-07) – like socks on piano legs – that shrouds this bygone era in an unwelcome air of oppression and staidness. Indeed, a glance at a quintessential Victorian cookery book like Eliza Acton’s *Modern Cookery for Private Families* reveals just how inaccurate such impressions are. The 1887 edition, for instance, features recipes for Mauritian shrimp chutney, Jewish smoked beef, French salad, and Portuguese rice pudding, among other delicacies, and recommends that sauces be seasoned with soy, claret or port wine, and rasped coconut (95).

Moreover, given the historical developments of the period, how could the vision of the Victorians as undistinguished cooks and eaters ever have been true? While it is not necessary to enumerate what all of these developments were – to offer a “shopping list” of issues and events – it is nevertheless salient to signal what a few of these changes were, since they shape many of the preoccupations of the writers in this volume, and, indeed, of the field of Victorian studies as a whole. Thus they demonstrate that far from food (and its connection to related areas of aesthetics, economics, and literary production) being peripheral to our understanding of the “Victorian frame of mind” – to invoke Walter Houghton’s well-known phrase – the way to Victorian studies’ heart is through its stomach.

The great expansion of empire and the acceleration of global trade mean that during the Victorian period, foodstuffs (and, consequently, consumption patterns) were circulating to, from, and between the colonies and the extra-colonial world in ways they never had before. Tea became one of the world’s most heavily traded commodities, with far-reaching social and political consequences. The expansion of commodity culture – showcased by the Great Exhibition of 1851, which forms the subject of two of the essays collected here – led to fundamental changes in the ways that those inside of Britain saw their relationship to the world at large, not to mention the ways that those outside of Albion structured, or were forced to structure, their everyday lives.

Imperial expansion was also key to the cycles of famine and starvation that affected populations as distant from each other as Ireland and Bengal and prompted the waves of

immigration that would change the face of eating forever. In addition, the introduction of a large-scale movement of labor – the removal of Chinese and Indian “coolies” to plantations in Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean, for instance – produced some of the world’s first modern versions of “fusion” cuisine and placed food and drink at the center of cultural politics. At the same time, the rise of the middle classes and the expansion of literacy and publishing led to the birth of the cookbook in its modern form as a kind of text in many ways linked (as several of the authors in this issue show) to the preeminent object of Victorian studies, the novel. Food production and consumption also became a touchstone for emerging models of domesticity, both in gender and class terms, as well as for the scientific ordering of this brave new world, from kitchens to cultural hierarchies. Add to this the rise of the restaurant in Britain (and especially London) – a belated development when compared to that in Paris (and France as a whole), but an important one nevertheless – and you have a brew of elements that had enormous literary and cultural ramifications.

The study of food and drink in the Victorian period may be loosely categorized as having a number of (frequently intertwined) strands, and this issue takes up several of these: food as commodity, a significant aspect of the economic life of the period; the social history of food as part of Victorian domestic life, the burgeoning popularity of which may be judged by the number of cookbook studies produced in the past decade; restaurants and dining out, particularly in Victorian London; food and drink in law and politics; the politics of famine and starvation; and food as an international or imperial phenomenon.

From another perspective, the thread that connects many of the essays is a preoccupation with narrative. While this would seem on one level simply to be in keeping with the current configuration of the field, it is also immediately apparent that many of the most memorable scenes in mid-Victorian novels involve food: Becky Sharp’s encounter with a chili in *Vanity Fair* (1848), Charlotte Brontë’s description of the inedible meals and starving girls at Lowood in *Jane Eyre* (1847); Pip, in fear for his life, stealing Mrs. Joe’s pork pie for Magwitch in *Great Expectations* (1861); the young Oliver asking for more in *Oliver Twist* (1838). All of these moments, however iconic or even shopworn they may be, resonate with meanings at once different and the same: food is a sometimes-benign marker of social position, but it gestures at the grimmer reality that social status often determines who lives and dies. As Marx wrote in his inaugural address to the Working Men’s International Association:

In all countries of Europe it has now become a truth demonstrable to every unprejudiced mind, and only denied by those, whose interest it is to hedge other people in a fool’s paradise, that no improvement of machinery, no appliance of science to production, no contrivances of communication, no new colonies, no emigration, no opening of markets, no free trade, nor all these things put together, will do away with the miseries of the industrious masses; but that, on the present false base, every fresh development of the productive powers of labor must tend to deepen social contrasts and point social antagonisms. Death of starvation rose almost to the rank of an institution, during this intoxicating epoch of economical progress, in the metropolis of the British Empire. (516)

Here, Marx not only refuses the view of history that equates industrialization and imperialism with progress; he posits them as a cause of misery and starvation. Certainly, there is abundant evidence to support this view, and in this issue, Lana Dalley and Tara Moore investigate the cultural and political aspects of hunger and starvation. In “The Economics of ‘A Bit o’ Victual,’ or Malthus and Mothers in *Adam Bede*,” Dalley takes up the question of

Malthusian economics' Victorian afterlife through an examination of the ways in which George Eliot genders (and connects) food and economic self-interest in the novel as a whole, and particularly in Hetty Sorrel's narrative. In Dalley's reading of Eliot, Malthusian theory is no longer a man's world, but instead is intimately connected to motherhood and what Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall refer to as the marriage "trade" (273).

In "Starvation in Victorian Christmas Fiction," Moore approaches Malthus from a different direction, contrasting tropes of feasting and starvation in 1840s literature to argue that the middle-class benevolence prescribed in these works is predicated upon an idea of English national identity which depends on the unequal distribution of wealth and thus implicitly upholds the status quo, even as many of the stories surreptitiously attack the corn laws.

Moore's piece is grounded in a reading of *The Good Genius that Turned Everything into Gold*, an 1846 Christmas tale by the pre-*London Labour* Henry Mayhew, coauthored with his brother Augustus. In Thomas Prasch's essay "Eating the World: London in 1851," another side of Mayhew appears, one that merges his earlier fiction-writing self with a nascent journalistic curiosity regarding the fine-grained details of everyday life in London. Prasch analyzes what he terms Mayhew's "instant 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*, in the context of the Exhibition itself and the culinary developments it both reflected and helped to engender. In so doing, Prasch reveals how the ostensible exoticism of the Great Exhibition in fact reflects long-term trends in English patterns of immigration and food consumption: Southern and Eastern European immigrants not only brought with them new ways of cooking and eating, they also opened restaurants and shops that reconfigured London's culinary topography, while the French and Italian chefs in vogue with the wealthy changed British eating habits from within the home.

Paul Young, whose essay also centers on the Great Exhibition, takes a slightly different tack in his discussion of food consumption by focusing on Victorian super-chef Alexis Soyer's "Gastronomic Symposium of All Nations," held on the doorstep of the Exhibition in South Kensington and satirized by Mayhew. Like Prasch, Young argues that the production and consumption of food constituted a crucial plank in the Exhibition's representation of global trade as a positive force. Reading Soyer's intervention through Victorian economics, in specific the period's theorization of Homo Economicus, Young examines the conjunction of cooking and cosmopolitanism that the events of the early 1850s inspired. In Young's view, exhibition commentary – and Soyer's restaurant itself forms a part of this category – reveals the inconsistencies and incongruities which underpinned Victorian conceptions of global and capitalist expansion.

In particular, the Great Exhibition and the attention it inspired palpably demonstrated how problematic it was to "consider all mankind as one" – especially at the very time that the nineteenth century was giving birth to hierarchical conceptualizations of "race" and "civilization" – and to premise political economy's understanding of free trade on that assumption. In this regard, the much vaunted internationalism and expansive global order that the Exhibition was intended to showcase turn into what Young calls an "anthropological fantasy." Ultimately, such a fantasy sutured over what the Exhibition may really have signaled – the institutionalization of mass inequality, famine, and annihilation – by diverting attention away from Britain's complicity in trade policies that promoted a politics of hunger. For instance, Young points to the plaudits about "utility" received by a preserved pig on

display from Ireland at the very time when the potato blight and its shockwaves meant meat of any form was far beyond the reach of most of the Irish. Cosmopolitanism simply masked and masqueraded for extermination, in other words.² To extrapolate from Young’s article, it was, therefore, no accident that a few short years after the Crystal Palace opened, in the wake of the 1857 Indian Mutiny, the British crown would take over the direct governance of its prized possessions and pursue a similar model of globalization to the one that the Exhibition espoused.

Prasch and Young give us a vivid sense of the London culinary scene at mid-century and suggest the degree to which Soyer was implicated in its transformation. (Indeed, if Beeton’s books are better known today, Soyer’s publications of the 1840s and 1850s may have been just as influential and attempted to reach a larger client base, from the working poor to the well-to-do.) In her essay “A Common Complaint: Dining at the Reform Club,” Helen Day reads the archives of the Reform Club, where Soyer served as chef from 1837 until 1850, when he opened his restaurant to serve the masses attending the Exhibition. In analyzing the club’s complaint book and considering its relation to the advice given in widely-read books by such authors as Soyer and Beeton, Day reveals the deprecation of “domestic economy” on which clubs, and particularly their dining rooms, relied for their appeal. Day offers an example of history writ small of the most important kind; what emerges from between the lines of the Reform Club’s ledgers are significant tensions around the areas of class and social standing, public and private worlds, and the relations between men and women, tensions which speak volumes about Victorian society as a whole and which help us understand some of the changes that industrialization and urbanization sparked.

Because Day’s concern is with the complaints about service, pricing, and food quality, rather than with the bills of fare themselves, it is difficult to gauge how much Soyer put into practice the concerns with and interest in global foodways that would emerge in his Symposium outside the Great Exhibition and in his “culinary campaign” to feed British troops in the Crimea. But he certainly knew about curry, which – as Jos Sedley’s attachment to its preparation in *Vanity Fair* indicates – was one of the dishes which returned colonial officers and civil servants most missed, and which they demanded of the chefs of their clubs. In his book *The Modern Housewife, or Ménagère* (1849), dedicated to the “fair daughters of Albion,” Soyer claimed that curry sauce was something that he “generally [kept] ready made in the larder” (96), while he lamented the high price of curry powder “as it is one of those stimulating condiments which would be invaluable to the poor” (85). Indian curries also merit nearly a whole chapter in Acton’s *Modern Cookery*, first published in 1845. That curry already had such high visibility in the mid-Victorian period is a sign of just how imbricated the culinary and the colonial already were, even as Britain was rapidly reconceptualizing its sense of its place in the world and embracing new forms of imperialism.

Acton’s discussion succinctly identifies how curry served as a focal point for a variety of issues affecting India at this time. Near the start of her section on “Curries, Potted Meats, Etc.,” Acton extols the superiority of Indian curries over European and American versions, primarily because the freshness of ingredients cannot be replicated so far from India, but also because “The natives of the East compound and vary this class of dishes, we are told, with infinite ingenuity” (221). Acton’s words are reminiscent of Beeton’s claim that dining is an index of cultural difference, and they point out that curry as a dish serves as a metaphor for and definition of Indianness and thus the anxieties surrounding racial purity and questions

of assimilation. Curry, then, was the counterpoint to roast beef, with all its associations of Englishness and normality – and masculinity.

How the culinary is colonial is a concern central to Sharmila Sen's essay "The Saracen's Head," which takes as its subject George Francklin Atkinson's 1859 illustrated book *Curry & Rice*. Sen specifically reads *Curry & Rice* in the context of post-1857 India and the emerging genre of memoirs and novels about the "Sepoy Rebellion," which largely evoked tropes of horror and fear. Set in the fictitious town of Kabob, *Curry & Rice* juxtaposes a series of lithographs of the inhabitants of "Our Station" with comical descriptions of their behavior and antics. Sen's discussion of this work tempers recent critical interest in the representation of Indianness, and especially of Indian masculinity, as threatening in the aftermath of the Mutiny with a picture drawn not overseas (as successful plays like Dion Boucicault's 1858 *Jessie Brown, or the Relief of Lucknow* were), but on the ground in India. This picture envisages the subcontinent with far less anxiety and far more humor than might have seemed possible only two years after Britain suffered one of its most embarrassing colonial near-defeats, especially given the jingoistic sentiment that the Mutiny and its suppression aroused "at home." The story of the Mutiny on the whole may offer yet another indication of how the personal is political, but *Curry & Rice* also yields a more unusual narrative of how (and in what ways) the colonial can be seen as comic.

If Sen presents a reading of colonial space in which questions of borders and boundaries across race, class, and gender lines are less fraught and more humorous than might have been anticipated, Julie Fromer sheds light on the ways in which the colonial becomes English in her piece on nineteenth-century tea history. The connection between tea and teetotalism is well known, although Erika Rappaport has recently suggested that despite tea's iconic association with temperance, coffee was a more popular beverage at the movement's meetings. Fromer's essay, however, takes us in a different direction by tracing how tea's definition as a national symbol of "Englishness" prompted a reconceptualization of the colonial landscape, particularly once wild plants were found to be growing in the Himalayan region of Assam.

The discovery of tea within the Empire, she argues, not only provided an excuse for Britain to break China's stranglehold on tea production, but more importantly, yielded a mechanism through which parts of India could be naturalized as destined to be British. Indeed, her analysis of Robert Fortune's *Journey to the Tea Countries of China* (1852) suggests how tea had the rhetorical potential to fulfill Thomas Babington Macaulay's vision in his *Minute on Indian Education* (1835) of turning Indians into "brown-skinned Englishmen." Meanwhile, in a discussion of contemporary tea histories and advertisements, Fromer also shows how tea could, perhaps paradoxically, come to be defined as both a luxury and a necessity and to embody an idealized middle-class identity, in so far as that identity was premised on the ability to indulge in physical pleasures tempered by the will to resist excess.

While Fromer demonstrates how tea might consolidate or shore up middle-class identity, Margaret Beetham offers an image of domestic space where such questions are constantly in play. In her essay "Good Taste and Sweet Ordering: Dining with Mrs Beeton," Beetham reads both the rhetoric and structure of Mrs. Beeton's *Book of Household Management* as evincing a deep concern with "place" and boundaries – between the mistress and her servants, between dining and cooking, between savagery and civilization – even as it potentially confounds the boundaries of middle-class identity by giving instructions on "taste" to readers who presumably lacked the middle-class upbringings that would have rendered such lessons

unnecessary. In Beetham’s analysis, *Household Management* oscillates between seeing these distinctions as part of a continuum and as binary opposites; the wild animal may become domestic art in the cook’s hands, but the fragile structure of “civilization” must be upheld and reinforced by endless iterations of this domestic ritual even as the cook herself (if indeed there is one) must be managed and controlled by the mistress. Beetham thus implicitly demonstrates *Household Management*’s imbrication in a pattern of Victorian concerns with taxonomies, hierarchies, and social structure.

In a related vein, Paul Vlitos makes the case for *Household Management*’s continued significance to the literature of the end of the Victorian period through a reading of Joseph Conrad’s short work “Falk” that highlights how the narrative’s representation of survivor cannibalism is tied to discourses of dining. Vlitos builds on the work of previous critics of “Falk,” such as Tony Tanner, who see this example of Conrad’s Malay narratives in terms of the writer’s more general investment in clouding the difference between the primitive and the civilized. Yet whereas these critics see the limits of ingestion and the edible as the central issue for Conrad, Vlitos, by contrast, sees Falk’s dining choices as paramount. He argues that Conrad’s piece is propelled by the categorical distinction it draws between eating and dining and therefore directs his attention to Conrad’s representation of conviviality (or the lack thereof). This distinction can best be understood through reference to Beeton’s comments on “dinners and dining” in *Household Management* and through the introduction that Conrad subsequently wrote to his wife Jessie’s cookbook, the *Handbook of Cookery for a Small House* (1923). In this reading of Beeton, dining is fundamentally about groups and shared experience; where the protagonist of “Falk” crosses the line, therefore, is not so much by engaging in cannibalism per se but in the solitary nature of this act and in the lonely meals which precede and follow this event.

The specter of Mrs. Beeton also hangs over another essay about late Victorian fiction — Kate Thomas’s succinctly titled essay “Alimentary,” which takes Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories as its base. At first glance, it may seem surprising to read Doyle against Beeton, even once Thomas has elucidated a seemingly casual connection between the two that appears in a chapter in Doyle’s 1899 novel of manners, *A Duet*. Nevertheless, Thomas argues for a more causal connection, seeing the two as integrally linked “under the sign of consumption.” Unlike “The Saracen’s Head” of Sen’s title, the “sign of consumption” that Thomas sees as bringing together Beeton and Doyle did not visibly hang over the pubs of Victorian Britain. Indeed, it seems unlikely that Mrs. Beeton would ever have set foot in the kind of earthy establishments where Doyle’s detective often goes to gather clues for his investigations. But, as Thomas demonstrates, that is not to say that the two writers do not drink from the same well and do not treat the flow of information in similar ways.

What unites this unlikely pair is the idea that both Beeton and Doyle ground their texts in analogous models of taxonomy. Both writers concoct out of the quotidian, and both see what Fernand Braudel terms the “structure of everyday life” as of crucial importance to managing Victorian lives and livelihoods. In fact, both Doyle and Beeton share an investment in the idea that mastering (or making sense of) the common simply depends upon using the proper methodology, upon paying proper attention to that which might otherwise escape notice. In other words, both elevate the reading of the trifles into a science through which order can be built and maintained. Thomas goes on to argue that both authors share a similar relationship to the literary marketplace, a relationship that yields crucial insight into the state of publishing

in the second half of the nineteenth century and into the development of literary genres during this period. She pursues this analogy through an analysis of notions of mastication and potboiling, with all their implications of recycling, reiterating, and reformulating.

The *Book of Household Management* is nothing if not formulaic, and it has been much criticized in the 157 years since its serial publication began for its cribbing of recipes and techniques from other authorities, including Acton, even though Beeton herself made little claim to originality, and even though – as Nicola Humble notes in her introduction to the work – most of the recipes were contributed by readers of the *Englishwoman's Domestic Journal* (xii). Yet from another point of view, this lack of originality and the partly democratic nature of the text's constitution are precisely what make it such an important index of mid-Victorian and middle-class society. As such, the *Book of Household Management* is well placed to help us evaluate the role of drink in nineteenth-century Britain and the extent to which alcohol was and was not demonized at different rungs along the ladder of classes and occupations.

Beeton's recipes – particularly those for stews, sauces, and desserts – regularly list wine and brandy as ingredients, and in chapter one (“The Mistress”), she describes the serving of wine at dinner parties as follows:

It is not usual, where taking wine is *en régle*, for a gentleman to ask a lady to take wine until the fish is finished, and then the gentleman honoured by sitting on the right of the hostess, may politely inquire if she will do him the honour of taking wine with him. This will act as a signal to the rest of the company, the gentleman of the house most probably requesting the same pleasure of the ladies at his right and left. At many tables, however, the custom or fashion of drinking wine in this manner, is abolished, and the servant fills the glasses of the guests with the various wines suited to the course which is in progress. (23)

Later in her discussion of dinner parties, Beeton notes:

In former times, when the bottle circulated freely amongst the guests, it was necessary for the ladies to retire earlier than they do at present, for the gentlemen of the company soon became unfit to conduct themselves with [decorum]. . . . Thanks, however, to the improvements in modern society . . . temperance is, in these happy days, a striking feature in the character of a gentleman. Delicacy of conduct towards the female sex has increased with the esteem in which they are now universally held, and thus, the very early withdrawing of the ladies from the dining-room is to be deprecated. (23–24)

Despite the assurance with which Beeton makes these claims (women may drink; men never drink too much), she was frequently contradicted by her contemporaries both in conduct literature and in fiction. In her essay “‘An Infernal Fire in My Veins’: Gentlemanly Drinking in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*,” Gwen Hyman limns the class and religious issues related to the drinking of alcohol and traces the novel's embrace of abstinence through three intertwined cultural phenomena: the industrialists' desire to reform workers' bodies through the temperance movement, the rise of the middle-class striver as a desirable form of masculinity, and finally the rhetorical prowess of the teetotal movement, at once religious and revolutionary.

Turning to the late-Victorian period, Deborah Mutch, in “Intemperate Narratives: Tory Tiplers, Liberal Abstainers, and Victorian British Socialist Fiction,” reads serialized fiction

from four influential socialist periodicals to demonstrate that British socialists largely believed alcohol use among the working classes to be a social problem, related to such epiphenomena of industrial capitalism as difficult and dangerous labor, lack of sanitary housing, and inadequate pay, rather than being the mark of individual weakness or defect. Despite their rejection of the middle-class rhetoric of individual responsibility and self-help, however, Mutch argues that socialists differed widely in their views on the ethics and politics of alcohol consumption. The politics of virtue and upward mobility clashed with a reluctance to deny workers the pleasures still enjoyed by the ruling class.

No collection of essays about nineteenth-century food and drink could be complete without a mention of infantile eating. If the Victorians were among the first to recognize that children were not simply “little adults,” they also presided over the spectacular development of the genre of children’s literature, a genre often aimed at turning the little ones into “proper” middle-class citizens and permeated with the discourse of “separate spheres” for boys and girls. By the end of the century, this genre had burgeoned, but it was no longer simply a new form of conduct book, analogous in many ways to the cookbooks, which also sought to inculcate middle-class values among women and the working classes. Nor was it necessarily written by those who, like Beeton, averred that the knowledge of how to care infants, “like the mother’s love for her offspring, seems to be born with the child, and to be a direct intelligence of Nature” (478). Beatrix Potter, the subject of Heather Evans’s essay, was one of those feminists (whether or not she saw herself as one) who brought together children’s eating and children’s writing, using them as a platform to critique the legitimacy of masculine privilege in both arenas. Through the study of such works as *The Tale of Samuel Whiskers, or The Roly-Poly Pudding* (1908), Evans positions Potter as part of a movement, also evident in late nineteenth-century periodicals and gastronomical texts, to challenge popular assumptions about gender and authority and thereby validate women’s culinary and literary expertise. Potter’s choice of the roly-poly pudding – a dish associated with boys and with masculinity – is thus a deliberate calculation, aimed at turning conventional Victorian constructions of gender normativity on their head and at establishing a new order of household management in which little girls no longer need to be made of “sugar and spice and all that’s nice” to flourish.

As the essays in this volume clearly demonstrate, food is truly food for thought. Far from being a self-indulgent exercise in Victoriana, the study of food and the Victorians enriches our understanding both of the nineteenth century and of “the way we live now.” Food at once signifies private life – meals, recipes, family customs – and connects us to economic movements and events: bread riots, game laws, the Anti-Corn Law League, the Great Famine. Moreover, both family meals and edible commodities have trajectories homologous to that of narrative: beginnings, middles, and endings with varying degrees of closure. At once material and aesthetic, food works to delineate a range of categories: cultural, class, and gender difference, the boundaries between children and adults, savage and civilized, animal and human. Food is deeply intertwined with religious practice as well as social life, and throughout much of the Victorian period, even as new forms of luxury consumption spread rapidly, there existed a very real danger that many would go without it long enough to die from the lack.

In an age of diaspora, immigration, and global interconnectivity, when food is paradoxically becoming scarcer in many parts of the world and people compete with biofuels for access to essential oils and grains, the politics of food, agricultural labor, and uneven

distribution are ever more pressing. In *A Shilling Cookery for the People* (1854), a cookbook based on the study of working-class homes in the United Kingdom, Soyer comments that “the morals of a people greatly depend on their food; and wherever the home of an individual, in whatever class of society he may move, is made comfortable and happy, the more moral and religious will that person be” (2). Soyer goes on to make an appeal for greater respect and attention to be paid to “culinary science,” quoting famed researcher Justus von Liebig: “The table, supplied with dishes, appears to the observer like a machine, the parts of which are harmoniously fitted together, and so arranged that, when brought into action, a maximum effect may be obtained by the theory of them” (quoted in Soyer, *Shilling Cookery* 5).³ Soyer’s concern with raising the status of food studies remains salient today, while Liebig’s analogy of the table to the machine is further proof of food’s instrumentality to the development of modernity during the Victorian era. Both effectively demonstrate that the study of food and drink can – and should – take us anywhere in the Victorian period that we wish to go.

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NOTES

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1. For more on the expansion of food studies, see Avakian and Haber.
2. In *Hunger: A Modern History*, James Vernon notes that the category of hunger “becomes a critical locus for rethinking how forms of government and statecraft emerge and work” (3), adding, “it was in imperial Britain over the past two centuries that the story of modernity became partly organized around the conquest of hunger, or at least its banishment to lands still awaiting ‘development’” (4). Young’s examination of 1851 provides one instance of how Britain rhetorically avoided accepting responsibility in this crucial arena.
3. Soyer attributes this passage to Liebig’s *Researches on the Chemistry of Food* (1847); however, it actually appears in Liebig’s *Familiar Letters on Chemistry* (first published in 1843) and may be found on page 466 of the fourth (1859) edition of the work.

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