This volume examines food as subject, form, landscape, polemic, and aesthetic statement in literature. With chapters analyzing food and race, queer food, intoxicated poets, avant-garde food writing, vegetarianism, the recipe, the supermarket, food comics, and vampiric eating, this collection brings together fascinating work from leading scholars in the field. It is the first volume to offer an overview of literary food studies and reflect on its origins, developments, and applications. Taking up maxims such as “we are what we eat,” it traces the origins of literary food studies and examines key questions in cultural texts from different global literary traditions. It charts the trajectories of the field in relation to work in critical race studies, postcolonial studies, and children's literature, positing an omnivorous method for the field at large.

Gitanjali G. Shahani is Associate Professor of English at San Francisco State University. She has coedited Emissaries in Early Modern Literature and Culture (2009). Her articles have appeared in JEMCS, Shakespeare, Shakespeare Studies, and several edited collections. Her book, Tasting Difference, on food, race, and colonialism in the early modern period, is forthcoming in 2019.
Cambridge Critical Concepts focuses on the important ideas animating twentieth- and twenty-first-century literary studies. Each concept addressed in the series has had a profound impact on literary studies, as well as on other disciplines, and already has a substantial critical bibliography surrounding it. This series captures the dynamic critical energies transmitted across twentieth- and twenty-first-century literary landscapes: the concepts critics bring to reading, interpretation and criticism. By addressing the origins, development and application of these ideas, the books collate and clarify how these particular concepts have developed, while also featuring fresh insights and establishing new lines of enquiry.

Cambridge Critical Concepts shifts the focus from period- or genre-based literary studies of key terms to the history and development of the terms themselves. Broad and detailed contributions cumulatively identify and investigate the various historical and cultural catalysts that made these critical concepts emerge as established twenty-first-century landmarks in the discipline. The level will be suitable for advanced undergraduates, graduates and specialists, as well as to those teaching outside their own research areas, and will have cross-disciplinary relevance for subjects such as history and philosophy.

Published Titles

*Animals, Animality, and Literature*
*Edited by* Bruce Boehrer, Molly Hand and Brian Massumi
*Florida State University, University of Montreal*

*Food and Literature*
*Edited by* Gitanjali Shahani
*San Francisco State University*

*Time and Literature*
*Edited by* Thomas M. Allen
*University of Ottawa*

*The Global South and Literature*
*Edited by* Russell West-Pavlov
*University of Tübingen*

*Trauma and Literature*
*Edited by* Roger Kurtz
*The College at Brockport, State University of New York*

*Law and Literature*
*Edited by* Kieran Dolin
*University of Western Australia*

*Terrorism and Literature*
*Edited by* Peter Herman
*San Diego State University*

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Notes on Contributors

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Introduction
Writing on Food and Literature
Gitanjali G. Shahani

Books to Taste and Books to Chew
Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested.

Francis Bacon, “Of Studies”

I begin here with a quotation from Francis Bacon, which gives this section its title, but the possibilities for food epigraphs are endless. Indeed, it has become something of a critical convention to start a volume on food with one of many food aphorisms available to scholars in the field. We might start, as Terry Eagleton does, with the Bacon quotation above, on the process of devouring a book. Or we might start with Eagleton himself, whose pithy maxims about food and literary interpretation inaugurate several works: “If there is one sure thing about food, it is that it is never just food … Like the post-structuralist text, food is endlessly interpretable, as gift, threat, poison, recompense, barter, seduction, solidarity, suffocation.”¹ We might turn to the structuralists with Levi-Strauss’ formulation that food is good to think with.² Or to Roland Barthes on the semiotics of food: “For what is food? It is not only a collection of products … It is also, and at the same time, a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior.”³ We might begin with authors like Ben Jonson, whose character of the Cook in turn asks us to begin all thought and understanding in the kitchen, for “The art of poetry was learned and

found out ... the same day with the art of cookery.”

4 We could pay homage to the eighteenth-century gastronome, Brillat-Savarin, whose oft-quoted truism on food and identity – “tell me what you eat: I will tell you what you are” – is now what one scholar calls “a chestnut of food studies scholarship.” Or we might turn to more recent writers like Hemingway, as Sandra Gilbert does, in order to understand “why and how we read, write, work and play with food in the gastronomically obsessed twenty-first century.”

Hemingway, who reminisces about eating Chinese sea slugs and hundred-year-old eggs, might offer us a reason for our food studies endeavors: “there is romance in food when romance has disappeared from everywhere else.”

I offer these quotations not simply to continue the tradition of the food epigraph, but to suggest that the tradition itself speaks to an important relationship between food and word that literary scholars have identified in a range of recent works. These epigraphs point to an intricate relationship between eating and writing and the writing on eating. Their persistent appearance in volumes, whether in work on food and children’s literature, food and Asian American literature, or food and early modern literature, might be treated as a call for an overarching method for thinking about food in relation to the literary text. Implicit in each maxim at the outset of each work is a method. Thus, for instance, Bacon’s quotation in Eagleton’s work compels us to think about the process of consuming the book and the process of consuming in the book. It articulates ways in which we take in a book. And Eagleton, extrapolating on Bacon’s aphorism, in turn asks us to think of the process of creating the book as a process of cooking it up: “writing is a processing of raw speech just as cooking is a transformation of raw materials.”

This volume examines such moments of culinary transformation in literature. It turns to food as subject, as form, as landscape, as polemic, as political movement, as aesthetic statement, and as key ingredient in literature. It looks at food in the literary text, food text as literature, and literature as food for thought. It asks: what if we think of the tasting, chewing, and digesting of Bacon’s maxim as a kind of theme and method? Or even as a mandate – some books are to be tasted, others are to

6 Gilbert, Culinary Imagination, xv.
7 Quoted in ibid.
8 Eagleton, “Edible Ecriture.”
be chewed? How does eating work in the text and how do we, as readers and critics, consume the process of eating in the text?

After all, as Mervyn Nicholson noted in an early article on food and writing, literary characters do not need to eat to stay “alive.” Food in the literary text is not what Barthes has called a “first need.” And yet, characters do eat. Some of their most memorable words and scenes are gastronomic. Proust begins *Remembrance of Things Past* with a recollection of tea and cakes, a meditation on the “petites madeleines” of memory. Swift’s satire is most biting in his recommendation that his countrymen eat their babies. Titus Andronicus’ revenge is most gruesome when he serves Tamora her sons in a pie. Prufrock’s visions and revisions are most painful when he dares to eat a peach. Salman Rushdie’s historiographic metafiction rests on Saleem’s cooked up chutneys and his “chutnification of history,” with each chapter lined up as a label on a pickle jar at the end of *Midnight’s Children*. Food is memory, food is irony, food is drama, food is symbol, food is form. It is “endlessly interpretable.” It is good to think with. We return again to the food maxims.

But to ponder these maxims more carefully, we might ask if food is good to think with (and not simply good to eat), as Levi-Strauss suggests, how should we think of food in the literary text? What do food words and food scenes do for the literary text? How does food function as a formal device? Can we think in terms of a food ekphrasis in which we pause to read descriptions of feasts, banquets, kitchen scenes, and fictional dishes? What are characters really saying when they say things about food—food that they don’t need to eat and food that the reader cannot really share? In *Midnight’s Children*, for instance, Rushdie’s ever-digressing Tristram Shandy-like narrator interrupts his tale at a critical juncture in the final chapter to contemplate the process of pickling. “What is required for chutnification? Raw materials, obviously—fruit, vegetables, fish, vinegar, spices. Daily visits from Koli women with their saris hitched up between their legs. Cucumbers aubergines mint,” Saleem tells us. While expounding at length on chutneys, Saleem is also, of course, contemplating the form of the novel itself. His narrative, and by extension, Rushdie’s, is a pickling and preserving of history, with adequate masala thrown in for good measure. (And as subcontinental readers are well aware, “masala” is also exaggeration—spice that is arguably superfluous in any dish or tale.

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yet neither would be quite palatable without it.) As we approach the end, he is careful to leave one jar empty, “for the process of revision should be constant and endless,” as history will continue to seep into it long after his story ends. What we have here is food as form. As one of the earliest post-colonial novels to emerge from the Indian subcontinent, it is fitting that Rushdie turns to the trope of “chutnification” to elucidate his technique—a technique which Linda Hutcheon would later call historiographic metafiction. Rushdie’s work was among the earliest in this form and his pickling metaphors were, in fact, integral to it. Pickling was the form.

Scholarship in literary food studies is attuned to these culinary moments in a text. They are often to be found in digressions and asides, seemingly incidental to the text. Yet they are critical to the writer’s form and imaginative landscape. In the wonderfully titled *Aguecheek’s Beef, Belch’s Hiccup and Other Gastronomic Interjections*, Robert Appelbaum argues that “The writer interjects something about food in order to score a point regarding something else, yet the interjection is, finally, about food too—about what we do with it, what we want from it, what it means.” For Appelbaum, the interjection tells us something about the writer, the character, the writing, the culture, and ultimately about food in a given culture. To study the gastronomic interjection is then to study the literary, material, and cultural contexts in which it was uttered.

Hamlet’s wry remark to Horatio about his mother’s nuptials following so close at the heels of his father’s funeral, that “The funeral baked meats / Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables” is one such gastronomic interjection that has elicited interest from literary scholars and food historians alike (*Hamlet*, 1.2.179–80). While Stephen Greenblatt notes the “economy of calculation and equivalence” in Hamlet’s jest, Ken Albala notes that the jest itself draws from the fact that the pastry shells used to preserve such baked meats were often referred to as “coffins.” Encasing everything from dead bodies, to meat, to jewelry, coffins or coffers were variously meant to protect the contents from decay, theft, and corruption. In the absence of our modern-day distinction between “coffin” and “coffer,”

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Hamlet’s bitter interjection about the marriage banquet takes on a more gruesome meaning.

Early modernists would, in fact, be quick to note that the word “bitter” itself as describing character comes from a physiognomic understanding of character as constituted in large part through diet. Lady Macbeth’s liquid imagery in conceiving of her husband as “too full o’th’ milk of human kindness” and soon after, calling on the spirits to come to her “woman’s breast” and take her “milk for gall” is yet another macabre Shakespearean interjection that relies on an understanding of early modern humoral and dietary frameworks for its full effect (Macbeth 1.5.15, 45–46). To parse these lines is to reckon with the systems of meaning that food holds, as much in the dramatist’s imagination as in his audience’s. Such readings, while hitherto confined to the footnotes of authoritative Shakespearean editions, take center stage in recent work that draws on the methods of food studies, bringing new perspectives to the writings of the early moderns as revealed in their “gastronomic interjections.”

As a term, the “gastronomic interjection” also adds to what is part of a growing critical vocabulary that allows us to think with food. In her recent work, The Culinary Imagination, Sandra Gilbert offers us yet another term, what she calls the “eating words of novelists and memoirists, poets and polemicists.” Eating words emerge from a range of food texts and contexts. If we learn to think with food, we see that eating words pepper all kinds of works, even works that are not, strictly speaking, about food. As descriptors, eating words give us a way to trace the processes by which ingredients work together to create the literary text. Gilbert is especially interested in the imperative – “Add food and stir” – that informs so many works in which “We stir readers when we add food because we remind them of their place at the complicated buffet of self, family, culture.” (Perhaps another maxim to add to our list?)

Thus, for instance, in the opening pages of The Namesake, Jhumpa Lahiri’s homesick protagonist cobbles together a favorite Indian street snack in the kitchen of her Boston apartment, longing for the foods and flavors of the home she left behind in Calcutta.

On a sticky August evening two weeks before her due date, Ashima Ganguly stands in the kitchen of her Central Square apartment, combining Rice Krispies and Planter peanuts and chopped red onion in a bowl. She adds

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16 Norton Shakespeare.
17 Gilbert, Culinary Imagination, xv.
18 Ibid., 8.
salt, lemon juice, thin slices of green chili pepper, wishing there were mustard oil to pour into the mix. Ashima has been consuming this concoction throughout her pregnancy, a humble approximation of the snack sold for pennies on Calcutta sidewalks and railway platforms throughout India, spilling from newspaper cones … Tasting from cupped palms, she frowns; as usual, there’s something missing.  

The food scene of Lahiri’s novel invites readers to participate in the preparation of the snack, the partaking of it, and in the sense of cultural longing and loneliness associated with it. The synesthetic effect of the passage is evident. As Carolyn Daniel argues in her work *Voracious Children*, “Food descriptions in fiction, like menus in restaurants and television cookery programs, produce visceral pleasure, a pleasure which notably involves both intellect and material body working in synaesthetic communion.”

In crucial ways, this synesthetic function of food description accounts not only for the continuing preoccupation with food in the literary text but also with the food text – by which we might mean recipes, menus, foodoirs, food blogs – as literature. The food text, the food scene in the literary text, the “eating words” – all function in similar ways. They ask us, as Lynne Vallone puts it, to “taste the words with our eyes.” In Lahiri’s introductory passage too, we taste with our eyes, but interestingly we do so at two levels. We see Ashima cooking the first of many snacks in the novel, but we also scan her recipe for the snack. We note the food context in the literary text, but we also note the food text in the literary context. In reading about the preparation of *bhelpuri*, we follow a recipe of sorts – an itemized list of heuristic instructions that straddle the realm of the culinary and the literary. The narrative offers a recipe, but the recipe is also in and of itself a narrative.

Perhaps this point is most poignantly brought home in the collection of recipes that a group of women compiled from the constraints of the Czechoslovakian concentration camp of Terezin in the mid-twentieth century. As they neared their death, they fantasized about food, shared recipes from their bunks late at night, on occasion, even broke into arguments about the appropriate way to prepare dishes they would never eat again. “We called it ‘cooking with the mouth,’” writes one woman who survived Terezin and Auschwitz, “Everybody did it. And people got very upset if they thought you made a dish the wrong way or had the wrong recipe for

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With paper hard to come by, they put down their recipes on whatever scraps were available, including propaganda leaflets and photographs of Hitler. The recipes give instructions for making beloved dishes in the Czech tradition. But to whom were these instructions directed? What could these recipes mean to women who were dying of starvation and had little hope of entering a kitchen or partaking of the offerings they had dreamed up? Perhaps the cookbook, even in the absence of an audience that would benefit from its heuristic instructions, was a way of preserving traditions that they knew were soon to disappear. Perhaps the recipes therein constitute a collective narrative from what has been called “the darkest kitchen of the twentieth century.” As Cara De Silva observes in her edition of the Terezin recipes, In Memory’s Kitchen, “whatever its explicit or implicit functions, Mina’s cookbook – and the others – make it clear that half a century after the Holocaust, when we thought we were familiar with all the creative ways in which human beings expressed themselves during the long years of the horror, at least one small genre, the making of cookbooks, has gone largely unnoticed.” Whether as cookbook, memoir, or testimony, the manuscripts from Terezin defy the boundaries of conventional food genres. They create new vocabularies of hunger and new forms of expression to endure, even defy, it. If, as Primo Levi has argued, the Holocaust required a new language to signal “hunger,” “fear,” “pain” – these being mere words “created and used by free men who lived in comfort” – it might be in these memories of meals and recipes for them that we find such a language evolving.

Early work on the food text, work that did not necessarily identify itself as part of a well-defined field called food studies, pointed to the narrative function within food genres such as the recipe book. Of course, the recipe has for some years been the subject of several scholarly volumes, especially in early modern literary studies, which has turned to seventeenth-century receipt collections, such as those by Hannah Woolley, to find important evidence of women’s textual production in the period. But over twenty years ago, when Susan Leonardi began her essay in PMLA by sharing a recipe, such work was in a fledgling stage.

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23 Gilbert, Culinary Imagination, 23.
24 De Silva, In Memory’s Kitchen, xxxiii.
25 See Michael Berenbaum’s Foreword in ibid., xv.
26 For work on the early modern receipt collections see Michelle DiMeo and Sara Pennell, eds., Reading and Writing Recipe Books 1550–1800 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013); Robert Appelbaum, “Rhetoric and Epistemology in Early Printed Recipe Collections,” Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies 3.2 (Fall/Winter 2003): 1–35; David Goldstein, “Woolley’s Mouse: Early
Pasta, Lobster à la Riseholme, and Key Lime Pie,” Leonardi started by offering her readers a recipe for summer pasta and in the remainder of the article invited them to explore this act as one that brings the reading and writing mind together in an active relationship. Leonardi went on to examine the narratives embedded in a range of recipe books, looking at the literary and culinary techniques by which they were shared with audiences. She ended with an interesting reflection on the dissemination and reception of the recipe as text:

I want to return for a moment to the summer pasta. It was this process of thinking about the meaning of recipes and recipe giving that made me want to begin this text with a recipe, to embed a recipe in a text that mediates on the recipe as embedded discourse. I wanted to begin with a recipe in hopes … of creating a persona readers could identify and trust, in hopes of creating readers who would, therefore, willingly suspend for a few pages not so much disbelief as academic skepticism.27

What we see here are several foundational ideas for the field that we now call literary food studies. Leonardi gives us one of the earliest methods for thinking about food and text by sharing a method from a food text. She evokes a food scene, makes a case for the study of a food genre, and close reads the literary techniques at work in its dissemination. Importantly, Leonardi tests the limits and licenses of her method, even anticipating academic skepticism. Such skepticism would persist in the field for years to come.

In 1999 an op-ed piece in the Chronicle of Higher Education compared the trend for food studies to the new yuppie trend for humble kitchen fare: “Food studies is much like rice: once shunned as too ordinary, it’s now a hot commodity, available in countless varieties.” While the piece goes on to offer a balanced assessment of serious work in the field, along with some of the “half-baked” projects out there (the pun, we gather, is intentional), its lede sentence about food studies as “scholarship lite” has become something of a maxim in itself, plaguing the field much more than is warranted.28 Anita Mannur, in her work Culinary Fictions, tackles such criticism head on, arguing that the ambivalence about food studies as a discipline “speaks more to the anxiety about placing something as seemingly superficial as food into the center of critical analysis … than it does

to the seriousness of food per se.” But rather than mounting an elaborate defense against accusations of “scholarship lite,” Mannur suggests that “we would do well to attend instead to the contradictory perplexities which animate the doubts leveled against ‘food studies.’” To probe these anxieties is to reckon with long and mired disciplinary histories.

What accounts for these early reservations about food as a legitimate object of academic inquiry? Why have disciplines like anthropology and sociology been regarded as a more natural home for food studies than literature? What sort of assumptions have worked to implicitly apportion particular fields to particular genders, so that food studies is considered a natural fit with women’s studies? Perhaps, as one commentator in the Chronicle article suggests, it is the quotidian nature of food and its long association with women in the kitchen that results in the labeling of it as “scholarship lite.” “Real men don’t eat quiche, and real men certainly don’t write about quiche.” The objection is, no doubt, intentionally facetious. But as Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik point out in their landmark collection Food and Culture, scholars in women’s studies have had to do much work in changing such attitudes, by “legitimizing a domain of human behavior so heavily associated with women over time.” Equally, the increased politicization of food and the expansion of social movements associated with food have created an increased awareness of food consumption and food production, contributing to the respectability of scholarly endeavors on food. According to Counihan and Van Esterik, having gained such legitimacy as a topic of scholarly research, “its novelty, richness, and scope provided limitless grist for the scholarly mill – as food links body and soul, self and other, the personal and the political, the material and the symbolic.”

We might, of course, ask a different set of questions about this newfound legitimacy and popularity of the field. In recent years, why has the field gained such wide appeal? What are we to make of the ubiquity of food texts and food approaches and food discourses in general? Typical explanations tend to reiterate some version of the following: food is fundamental; we all have to eat it; we eat it together. More speculative explanations suggest that this popularity has something to do with what

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30 Ibid., 12.
31 Ruark, “Place at the Table.”
Michael Pollan has called “the decline and fall of home cooking,” while more existential explanations suggest that we have not much else left to speculate on.\textsuperscript{33} Perhaps, as Elspeth Probyn argues, food is “the last bastion of authenticity in our lives.”\textsuperscript{34} In the wake of postmodern tenets that our identities are fragmented and tenuous, food becomes the only remaining marker of selfhood. If we write about food on an unprecedented scale, it is to grapple with these changing identities and nostalgically hark back to lost ones. Thus it is that we have foodoirs, food wars, food flicks, food nets, food porn, food art, food for thought. Essentially, as Gilbert puts it, we have “food on the mind, everywhere.”\textsuperscript{35}

British celebrity food chef Nigella Lawson has claimed that gastroporn is our last allowable excess, that we are all, in effect, “gastropornographers.”\textsuperscript{36} The mingling of food and sex in literary and cultural forms such as the food show, the foodoir, and the coming of age food novel are all, in a sense, testament to Lawson’s claim. How might such an obsession look in terms of a larger historical perspective? How might it compare with the foodways and food words of other historical epochs? Certainly, our “\textit{fin de siècle} craze for food,” as Probyn notes, seems to echo Foucault’s description of the Greeks for whom “the question of foods … was a great deal more important than sexual activity.”\textsuperscript{37} Perhaps we can take recourse to yet another pithy maxim, from a \textit{New York Times} piece, which sums up this new trend by declaring, “Food Is the New Sex.” This nugget in the \textit{Times} is part of a larger piece that looks at the “transvaluation” of rules and taboos typically associated with sex onto food that is unique to our own historical moment, so that the morality accruing around the former now derives from the latter.\textsuperscript{38} But sensational headlines aside, it is worth asking how dietary regimes and sexual regimes intersect in literature and culture at large and how scholarly work in the field has mapped these intersections. “If much of cultural theory over the last decade has revolved around sex as that which secures identity,” writes Probyn in a work that is appropriately sub-titled \textit{FoodSexIdentities}, “it seems to me that the sensual nature of eating now constitutes a privileged optic through which to consider how identities and the relations between sex, gender and power are being

\textsuperscript{33} See Gilbert, \textit{Culinary Imagination}, 5–6. The existential explanation is posed by Joe-Anne McLaughlin in her poem “Existentially Speaking,” which Gilbert discusses on page 5.
\textsuperscript{34} Probyn, \textit{Carnal Appetites}, 12.
\textsuperscript{35} Gilbert, \textit{Culinary Imagination}, 4.
\textsuperscript{36} Probyn, \textit{Carnal Appetites}, 59.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 6.
renegotiated.” The eating body, the pleasures and taboos it endures, is thus an important focal point in recent work on literary food studies.

In Fannie Flagg’s American cult classic from the late eighties, *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café*, we partake of the pleasures that lie at the intersection of food and sex. Through the polyphony of narrative voices, we hear the stories of two generations of Southern women, their relationships with food and each other. The novel’s queering of food is most apparent in its narrative of Ruth and Idgie, whose intimacy emerges in the many food scenes of the novel. It is honey that allows the women to articulate their sexual longing for each other and it is in their shared rituals around food preparation at the Whistle Stop Café that their relationship unfolds. As Laura Lindenfeld points out, “By subverting the traditional model of the woman server and caretaker and turning the role of feeder into a means of overthrowing male dominance *Fried Green Tomatoes* challenges traditional concepts of power.” Rather than a form of female oppression, “Food and servitude thus become sources of strength throughout the Idgie/Ruth narrative.”

By contrast, Evelyn’s eating disorder in the frame tale depicts a more troubled relationship with food and sex. We see her approaching menopause, staring at cartons of ice cream or unwrapping candy bars in solitude. Food evidently takes the place of any kind of intimacy or community, which she cannot find with her husband, her Tupperware groups, or the Women’s Community Center, the last of which she abandons in a humorous episode when called upon to study her own vagina. Both the narrative strands of the novel are brought together around the rituals of “eating sex” – a term we might borrow from Probyn to describe the mingling of alimentary and sexual regimes in the novel.

Such readings of “eating sex” allow us to queer food studies, a move called for by Julia C. Ehrhardt and others, who examine the foodways that negotiate (variously reinforcing and resisting) heterosexual gender ideologies. The mouth, in particular, becomes an important locus in such an analysis of appetite and desire. For Kyla Wazana Tompkins, it is a site of “queer alimentarity” – “a space with a cultural and erotic history of its own, one that … offers glimpses of a presexological mapping of desire, appetite, and vice.” To take up forms of queer alimentarity is to focus on the ways

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in which the mouth and its acts of tasting, touching, and ingesting are constituted in particular literary and cultural texts. Through its incorporation of the external, the mouth also becomes one of the body’s most vulnerable orifices. Bakhtin, whom we will return to later in this introduction, notes that it is in the act of eating that the body most reveals its own openness, “Here man tastes the world, introduces it into his own body, makes it part of himself.”43 The mouth then marks the threshold through which the other becomes part of the self, transforming the self in the process. As Maggie Kilgour notes in *From Cannibalism to Communion*, “The basic model for all forms of incorporation is the physical act of eating, and food is the most important symbol for other external substances that are absorbed.”44 The mouth registers (both in the act of eating and speaking) the body’s exchange and communion with others.

Ingestion thus opens up the body to forms of contact and commerce with the other. It threatens bodily boundaries in ways that cultures have deliberated through the ages. Elsewhere, I have examined the disciplinary imperatives of seventeenth-century English conduct literature, domestic manuals, and dietaries that in the wake of the East India trade came to be preoccupied with the entry of foreign spices into the mouth and its perceived threat of racial contamination from “Blackamores” and “Bantamen.”45 Equally, this threat is projected on to the other, who in early colonial narratives is routinely conjured up as the cannibalistic figure that threatens to devour and annihilate the self. According to Kilgour, “To accuse a minority that resists assimilation into the body politic of that body’s own desire for total incorporation is a recurring tactic: during the Middle Ages the Jews were accused of cannibalism, after the Reformation the Catholics were.”46 In this tension between the eating body and the eaten body, the mouth marks the threshold between self and other.

It is also in the mouth’s craving of the other that we can register the intersections between food studies and critical race studies. In “Eating the Other” bell hooks contends that contemporary mass culture increasingly thrives on the idea that there is pleasure to be found in the fetishization of racial difference: “The commodification of Otherness has been

46 Kilgour, *From Communion to Cannibalism*, 5.
so successful because it is offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling.”

Tompkins turns to an earlier period in *Racial Indigestion*, examining the trope of the edible black body in nineteenth-century US literature. Opening with a description of a silent gag film from the 1900s in which a black child is eaten by an alligator, Tompkins proceeds to explore a rich archive of trading cards, children’s literature, advertisements, and other primary documents in which black and Asian bodies are inscribed “with the marks of race and food.” *Racial Indigestion* thus provides us with new critical paradigms for examining the consumption of otherness in discursive productions of the culinary and gastronomic.

The turn to food has also empowered scholars to write colonial histories anew through food. Work in postcolonial studies, for instance, has recognized ways in which particular foods and drugs like spices, sugar, tea, and opium – what Parama Roy has called the “psychopharmacopoeia of empire” – have shaped colonial encounters in different parts of the world. Marx’s image of vampire capitalism might be harnessed to an image of cannibal colonialism in order to understand the appetites that drove colonial regimes. For Roy, “Colonial politics often spoke in an indisputably visceral tongue: its experiments, engagements, and traumas were experienced in the mouth, belly, olfactory organs, and nerve endings, so that the stomach served as a kind of somatic political unconscious in which the phantasmagoria of colonialism came to be embodied.”

Thus it is that the colonial mouth as much as the colonial gaze has become the focus of recent work in food studies and postcolonial studies, most recently exemplified in Valérie Loichot’s *The Tropics Bite Back*. Equally, postcolonial studies has turned its attention to anti-colonial movements that have drawn on the symbolic power of food and abstinence. We might think of chapattis in the Mutiny, salt in the Satyagraha march, and fasts in Gandhi’s protest movements as important examples from the Indian context. To reckon with food and eating in these contexts is to reckon with long and complex histories of encounter and resistance in a kind of alimentary contact zone.

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50 Ibid.

Popular commodity histories have often chronicled the “rise” of commodities like chocolate and sugar, typically evacuating such narratives of their colonial underpinnings. Scholars like Bruce Robbins have extensively documented the commodity fetish at work in these popular histories, observing the rhetorical flourish in titles such as *Corn and Capitalism: How a Botanical Bastard Grew to Global Dominance* or *The World of Caffeine: The Science and Culture of the World’s Most Popular Drug*. The “hero” of every such story tends to be global capitalism itself. Its narrative arc is predictable. We typically begin with a commodity like coffee or chocolate, which is restricted to courtly circles for reasons that have to do with its price and rarity; along comes an underdog who valiantly fights to bring it to the masses; we then have villains fighting its spread for reasons that have to do with avarice or moral outrage, but they are ultimately vanquished. Capitalism triumphs and the consumer is rewarded. “What a wondrous system this is, you are told, that has brought to your doorstep or breakfast table all these things you would have never known existed, yet things without which you would not, you suddenly realize, be yourself,” Robbins sums up the moral of the story.\(^52\) By contrast, academic projects on food commodities have taken a more nuanced approach. Timothy Morton’s work on the poetics of spices and Kim F. Hall’s on the politics of sugar have refused the commodity fetishism of popular narratives.\(^53\) Hall’s work, for instance, has made important interventions in early modern food studies through her examination of race, gender, and material culture in the Anglo-Caribbean sugar trade.

The attention to changing ecologies that result from colonial and plantation economies has also resulted in a rich dialogue between postcolonial and ecocritical studies, which, in turn, has drawn new attention to local food practices, cultivation, and consumption. In the words of eco-theorist Pablo Mukherjee:

> Surely any field purporting to theorize the global conditions of imperialism and colonialism (let us call it postcolonial studies) cannot but consider the complex interplay of environmental categories such as water, land, energy, habitat, migration with political or cultural categories such as state, society, conflict, literature, theater, visual arts. Equally, any field purporting to attach interpretative importance to environment (let us call it eco/environmental


Introduction

studies) must be able to trace the social, historical and material coordinates of categories such as forests, rivers, bio-regions and species.\footnote{Quoted in Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, \textit{Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment} (London: Routledge, 2010), 2.}

To this we might add, any field purporting to mine these intersections might consider the colonial and environmental impact of imperial expansion on global and indigenous foodways and agricultural practices. It was, after all, Karl Marx who reminded us that two centuries ago “nature, which does not trouble herself about commerce, had planted neither sugar-cane nor coffee trees” in the West Indies.\footnote{David McLellan, ed., \textit{Karl Marx: Selected Writings} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 295.}

Chronicling the colonial and ecological histories of such commodities, we might turn to novellas like Julia Alvarez’s \textit{A Cafecito Story} and other work that addresses the environmental and political implications of food and tourism or food and agribusiness. In Alvarez’s eco fable, we travel with a Nebraskan farmer on his journey to discover fair trade coffee, after his own family farm has caved under the forces of agribusiness. When Joe’s land is eventually razed to make way for parking lots and strip malls, he ventures to the Dominican Republic, where he learns about the return to traditional methods of shade-grown coffee and stays to start his own cooperative. Critics have often pointed out that the novella, while ostensibly clearing space for a new future for Dominican coffee growers, “reinscribes the US expansion project of Manifest Destiny.”\footnote{See Trenton Hickman, “Coffee and Colonialism in Julia Alvarez’s \textit{A Cafecito Story},” in \textit{Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture}, edited by Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, Renée K. Gosson, and George B. Handley (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 70.}

Yet in the tensions that such a work provokes, we might find fertile territory for conversations about the global movements of people and foods in relation to one another. Particularly valuable here are the theoretical paradigms formulated by scholars such as Allison Carruth, whose \textit{Global Appetites: American Power and the Literature of Food} brings together work in food studies, food policy, agriculture history, social justice, and the environmental humanities.\footnote{Allison Carruth, \textit{Global Appetites: American Power and the Literature of Food} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).}

Eating is “an agricultural act” insists Wendell Berry, the American novelist, farmer, and environmental activist. Yet, as Berry points out, most eaters are at a remove from the cycle of food cultivation, thinking of themselves as consumers of an industrial product. Consequently, they ignore key questions: “How pure or clean is it, how free of dangerous chemicals? How far was it transported, and what did transportation add to the cost?
How much did manufacturing or packaging or advertising add to the cost? When the food product has been manufactured or ‘processed’ or ‘precooked,’ how has that affected its quality or price or nutritional value?”

Berry’s concerns are taken up in the work of several other food activists. Work on the ethics of eating right might constitute a field of inquiry in itself and lead us to a study of new food genres such as the polemics and manifestos of Carlo Petrini and Michael Pollan. Their incisive critiques of our foodways have spawned new food movements and food activism, particularly directed at the impact of the fast food industry. In *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*, Eric Schlosser paints a grim picture, imagining briefly how America’s foodways will appear to future civilizations:

> And should Armageddon come, should a foreign enemy someday shower the United States with nuclear warheads, laying waste to the whole continent, entombed within Cheyenne Mountain, along with the high-tech marvels, the pale blue jumpsuits, comic books, and Bibles, future archeologists may find other clues to the nature of our civilization – Big King wrappers, hardened crusts of Cheesy Bread, Barbeque Wing bones, and the red, white, and blue of a Domino’s pizza box.

In this foodscape of wrappers, cafeteria trays, and cardboard containers, food production is imagined as an industrial process and eating as an empty, transient activity. Petrini’s *Slow Food Manifesto* with its injunctions to resist the “fast life” and revive food traditions, as much as Berry’s pleas to participate in the cycles of food production and preparation suggest alternative relationships between food and the self in the industrialized West.

Such work will render hollow accusations that the scholarly turn to food is the result of a cynical, we-have-nothing-left-to-turn-to boredom. As a field, food studies reveals itself to be less concerned with food fetishes and food fads than it is with recovering important stories and histories that cannot be told without food. Recent work has also been more skeptical about the food fetishes of the field, resisting the more populist and problematic strains in work on food. Mannur, for instance, compels us to question why food is so often assumed to be an appropriate lens for the description of ethnicity, with food illustrations gracing the covers of Asian

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American fiction that is only loosely about food, and food metaphors appearing in reviews of South Asian fiction that isn’t even remotely about curry. She contends that the popularity of the culinary here is a way of rendering racial and ethnic difference “more palatable.” Others such as Tompkins have called for a shift from food studies to “critical eating studies,” in a move that seeks to resist the fetishization of the food commodity. Without lending credence to the “scholarship lite” accusation, we might do well to heed her call to “nudge food studies’ interests and methods away from an unreflective collaboration in the object-based fetishism of single-commodity histories and ideologically worrisome localist politics,” turning instead to critical eating studies and its intersections with feminist, queer, and gender studies as well as to critical race studies.

Such an approach allows literary food studies to formulate a theoretical framework in relation to other fields and critical approaches that have placed the body and its political, racial, and gendered economies at the crux of analysis. It allows us to recognize, as Mannur does, that literary food scholars will necessarily engage in what Brad Epps has called a kind of “promiscuity,” drawing from and deploying interdisciplinary methods. Of course, literary critics have and will continue to simultaneously create their own methodologically consistent ways to approach the culinary text. In the end, to use yet another eating word, we will have to be omnivorous in our methods, as we look at books to taste and books to chew, both in terms of approaches culled from our own field and others.

**Toward an Omnivorous Method**

The essays in *Food and Literature* aim to posit such an omnivorous method for the field at large. If we began the previous section with a more abstract consideration of food (as language, as metaphor, as form, as sex), with Eagleton’s stipulation that “it is that it is never just food,” we nevertheless found our way to a consideration of food as material substance (the stuff of colonial loot, of agricultural cycles, of industrial plants). We traced its intersections with work in critical race studies, queer theory, postcolonial studies, and other fields that have shaped its central concerns. Along the way, we examined the possibilities for the applications of its methods in different literary and cultural texts. What I have offered in the previous

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62 Ibid.
64 Mannur, *Culinary Fictions*, 18.
section, then, is a method and structuring principle for the volume as a whole that imagines the possibilities for different approaches and objects of inquiry in literary food studies.

As a collection, *Food and Literature* is well timed to reflect on the origins of the field, trace important developments, and suggest practical applications for future work. It is one of the first collections to take up food and literature as theme and method. Most early volumes in food studies have been either interdisciplinary in rationale and scope or quite specifically focused on work in the social sciences. Counihan and Van Esterik’s seminal work on *Food and Culture*, first printed in 1997 and then again in 2008, is quite explicit in its intent to offer “classic papers” in the social sciences. The editors agree upon the centrality of cultural anthropology to the field of food studies, thus anthologizing valuable foundational essays by Margaret Mead on changing food habits; Lévi Strauss on the culinary triangle; Sidney Mintz on sugar, slavery, and global trade; among others. With the exception of Jack Goody’s “The Recipe, the Prescription and the Experiment” and Arjun Appadurai’s “Cookbooks in Contemporary India,” observations about food texts and literary texts emerge only incidentally. Even though the introduction does note the “countless” new works on food in literature “from the study of eating and being eaten in children’s literature … to food symbols in early modern American fiction … to post-Freudian analysis of literary orality,” we sample very little fare along these lines in the anthologized essays. Likewise, *The Cultural Politics of Food and Eating*, published in 2005, clearly sets out to reach a “transdisciplinary” readership. The editors note that contributors to the volume are not anthropologists of “the card-carrying, degree-holding type,” but the literary text remains beyond the scope of the volume. As such, the foundational volumes in food studies have been valuable to literary scholars, but have not specifically taken up literary texts for analysis. Where the literary text is the focus of analysis, as in *The Table is Laid: The Oxford Anthology of South Asian Food Writing*, we have a collection of primary texts on food, with anthologized fiction and non-fiction from writers such as Sara Suleri and Kiran Desai, but the focus here remains on making primary texts in South Asian studies available to an audience, rather than theorizing the field at large.

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65 Counihan and Van Esterik, *Food and Culture*, 3.
Of course, this is not to suggest a dearth of monographs, edited volumes, and special issues on food in particular literary periods or in relation to particular authors. In Shakespeare studies alone, which I cite mainly since it has allowed for my own points of entry into food studies, one can produce a long list that includes Ken Albala’s *Eating Right in the Renaissance* (2002), Robert Appelbaum’s *Aguecheek’s Beef, Belch’s Hiccup, and Other Gastronomic Interjections* (2006), Joan Fitzpatrick’s *Food in Shakespeare: Early Modern Dietaries and the Plays* (2007), and David Goldstein’s *Eating and Ethics in Shakespeare’s England* (2013). Edited collections and special issues such as *Renaissance Food from Rabelais to Shakespeare* (2010), *Diet and Identity in Shakespeare’s England* (2014), and *Culinary Shakespeare* (2016) have been devoted to different aspects of food and eating in the plays and the period at large. Work on food genres (such as recipe books, household manuals, and dietaries) and foodstuffs (such as sugar, spice, and sack) has emerged in stand-alone essays and as parts of larger work on subjects as wide-ranging as Shakespeare and early modern domesticity, Shakespeare and early modern medicinal practice, as well as Shakespeare and early modern colonial ventures. Any foray into other areas of literary study would produce comparable bibliographies. Kara K. Keeling and Scott T. Pollard’s introduction in *Critical Approaches to Food in Children’s Literature*, for instance, offers an extensive list of citations that includes articles, single-work studies, and scholarly monographs that take up everything from eating disorders in *Mrs. Piggle Wiggle*, to psychoanalytic readings of Maurice Sendak, to the power relations in children’s texts on eating and being eaten.

This is all to say that there is a rich archive of work on food in particular subfields of literature, but a work that looks at the entire field systematically,

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comprehensively, and methodologically has yet to be published. *Food and Literature* seeks to fill this void. It does not limit itself to particular authors, genres, time periods, or regions in the way that earlier collections and monographs have had to. Coming as it does at this particular juncture in food studies scholarship, it is unhampered by justifications and defenses about food as a legitimate object of academic inquiry. It is able to look at the disciplinary and interdisciplinary moorings of literary food studies and offer new ways in which food can animate our field. It brings together scholars from a range of subfields in literary food studies to present an ongoing conversation about food as subject and food as method. It hopes to achieve for literary studies what earlier volumes such as *Food and Culture* achieved for anthropology and other disciplines in the social sciences, offering a collection that charts the origins, developments, and applications of methods in the field.

**Structure and Organization**

The structure for this volume follows the organizational framework of the Cambridge Critical Concepts series as a whole. It includes sections on the origins, developments, and applications of food studies in literary studies. Below is a brief description of each section and the ways in which it executes the objectives of the volume and the series as a whole.

**Origins**

It is hard to pinpoint originary moments even in a field as recent as literary food studies. The search for Ur-texts has variously led scholars to the earliest book-length studies on food in literature, such as James Brown’s *Fictional Meals and Their Function in the French Novel*, or to canonical work on the eating body, such as Mikhail Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and His World*. Several scholars cite Roland Barthes’ ideas on the semiotics of food as a starting point for thinking about food and language. Others turn to publication history, by looking at the founding of *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* as a key moment for the study of food in the humanities. Still others look to founding figures like Warren Belasco in tracing the trajectories of the field. This volume takes a well-known food maxim as its originary moment, turning to Brillat-Savarin’s “tell me what you

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The eighteenth-century gastronome’s quotation is by now, of course, something of a cliché. Watered down versions of it figure in advertisements, popular diets, and elementary school notice boards, all of which warn, “you are what you eat.” But it is the testing of this cliché that I find valuable as a starting point. Literary food studies has articulated some of its most important questions in the process of reevaluating it.

“So we eat what we are, or are we what we eat? Do we eat or are we eaten? … in eating do we confirm our identities, or are our identities reforged, and refracted by what and how we eat?” asks Probyn in a reworking of Brillat-Savarin’s aphorism that is grounded in questions of food and identity politics. Gilbert rewrites the aphorism to ask a set of questions about the gastronomic fantasies that are at the heart of our culinary imagination: “Tell me what you read and write about what you eat, and I shall tell you more about what you are. Tell me how you envision food in stories and poems, memoirs and biographies, films and pictures and fantasies, and we shall begin to understand how you think about your life.” Here is a method, indeed the raison d’être of literary food studies that emerges in the process of engaging with the quotation. Tompkins asks a new set of questions via the aphorism. It is not simply the “what” of what one eats that matters:

It is the “where” of where we eat and where food comes from; the “when” of historically specific economic conditions and political pressures; the “how” of how food is made; and the “who” of who makes and who gets to eat. Finally, and most important, it is the many “whys” of eating – the differing imperatives of hunger necessity, pleasure, nostalgia and protest – that most determine its meaning.

It is in these theoretical reformulations of Brillat-Savarin’s aphorism that we might find a manifesto of sorts for the field. And it is these questions and reformulations that guide Part 1 on “Origins.” The chapters in Part 1 take up the how, the why, the when, and the where of literary food studies. Collectively, they address central questions that have constituted the field, as we know it today. Rather than following a chronological format that moves from an examination of food in one literary time period to the next, this part of the book follows the key theoretical questions that animate the field of literary food studies. It eschews such linearity since the field of food

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73 Brillat-Savarin, Physiology of Taste, 3.
74 Probyn, Carnal Appetites, 11.
75 Gilbert, Culinary Imagination, 6.
76 Tompkins, Racial Indigestion, 4.
studies itself has grown in ways that aren’t necessarily linear or chronological. While it does take a historical overview of the field, it does so by probing the how, the what, and the when of food and eating in a range of literary traditions and time periods.

David B. Goldstein’s chapter opens Part I with an exploration of commensality – the “how” of eating. In “Commensality,” Goldstein contends that literary and historical studies have tended to focus primarily on what social scientists call the culinary, or the “what of eating” – the food on our plates, how it got there, and what it does to us. But of equal importance is the commensal, or the “how of eating” – how acts of sharing food help construct self–other relationships, group interactions, and indeed whole societies. His chapter considers the role of commensality in literature through several lenses, using illustrations from the works of the Greeks to the contemporary period. He argues that “Literature has always been exquisitely attuned to commensality, even if Western philosophy notably has not. This is because literature has always been concerned with social relationships and with larger webs of connection.” While literary criticism, “blinded by the biases of philosophy,” has only recently begun to explore the importance of the commensal, it is, Goldstein insists, “among the best equipped hermeneutics to uncover and articulate these conceptions.” He thereby articulates an important method for literary food studies.

From a consideration of the “how” in Goldstein’s work, we move to an examination of the “where” in Andrew Warnes’ analysis of literary foodscapes. In “The Drive-Thru Supermarket: Shopping Carts and the Foodscapes of American Literature,” Warnes analyzes the work of writers like Ginsberg, Jarrell, and others, who call attention not only to the gleaming and vibrant commodities to be chosen from the supermarket shelf, but also to the clattering functionality of the borrowed cart, which then holds these choices before presenting them to the checkout. They attribute to such carts a different mode of walking, quite unlike the leisurely strolling of earlier or fin de siècle modes of shopping. A new and anxious need to return home instead underpins their movement in the supermarket. This new compulsion becomes associated in their work with their failure to occupy the foodscape, and the world, they move through. While scholarship in the social sciences has for a while focused on the supermarket, Daniel Miller’s “Making Love in Supermarkets” and Frank Cochoy and Catherine Grandclément-Chaffy’s “Publicizing Goldilock’s Choice at the Supermarket” being important cases in point, Warnes’ chapter offers an important literary method for the study of foodspaces that might include restaurants, kitchens, or cafeterias in other literary
Immigrant writing, in particular, has dwelt on the tensions that arise as diasporic communities are compelled to negotiate spaces such as supermarkets and school cafeterias in their adopted land. Writing by Lahiri and Eddie Huang, both of whom address the loneliness of the immigrant in hostile foodscapes, is ripe for analysis in these terms. The next chapter approaches the “when,” “where,” and “what” of food in its consideration of early dietary injunctions that we now call “vegetarianism.” “In any global history of vegetarianism, most roads lead to the Indian subcontinent at some point or another,” Parama Roy begins her chapter, taking us first as far back as 326 BCE when Alexander first visited the Indian subcontinent. In “Gothic Vegetarianism,” Roy examines the travel accounts from the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of European travelers to the coastal cities of western India. To many of these European observers the “Gentiles” they saw were distinguished by a religiously mandated compassion toward nonhuman life that functioned as a rebuke to the ways of their putatively more bloodthirsty European compatriots. Such seemingly extreme or perverse forms of vegetarianism or nonviolence coexisted, as many noted, with unusual and perverse forms of cruelty, especially against widows and carnivores, and gave subcontinental vegetarianism a strikingly gothic character. Roy’s chapter enables us to think of originary moments when the foodways of the subcontinent permeated Western consciousness and shaped debates about food choices for centuries to come. She thus contributes to a growing body of work in literary food writing on vegetarianism that authors and activists like Tristram Stuart have taken as the subject of their work. Her chapter opens up interesting possibilities for future work at the intersection of food studies, animal studies, and work on the nonhuman.

Denise Gigante’s chapter, in formulating a theory of taste, takes us to the creation of the gastronome as a figure in literary discourse. In “Good Taste, Good Food, and the Gastronome,” Gigante reflects on the history of taste as a culinary preference and an aesthetic category. She chronicles how taste philosophers struggled with