

WHEN FOOD BECOMES A POLITICAL ACT – GEORGE ORWELL MASTERCHEF

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Abstract. The present study needs to be received (*savoured*, in the sense of combining the *ingredients* that make up the common *aroma* of *savoir* and *saveur*) as an integral commentary/analysis of the two books published by the Institute of Political Sciences and International Relations “Ion I. C. Brătianu”, Romanian Academy, Bucharest (and co-authored by Ian Browne) – *Orwell – The Anti-Intellectual Intellectual*, 2017, reprinted in 2020, and *Orwell – a socialist bestiary of capitalism*, 2020. And here [in the corpus of this presented *preparation/article*] one can *savour* and cultivate an *appetite* for preserving and managing a punctual research formula (included within an orderly *serving ritual*), completed inside a *text-product* whose meanings are tributary, as Roland Barthes stated (in *Le Grain de la voix*, 1981) to the *recipe* for a *stratified, multi-layered, pastrified creation*.

Keywords: *George Orwell; Taste and Food; Socio-political Valences; English Food*

Taste and Food – A (pre)text with Socio-Political Accents

Dedicating his research, conceived in/through an arrangement of *ingredients/layers of taste*, to George Orwell, Richard Lance Keeble¹ insists on the primacy of “food for thought”², placing George Orwell inside the *digesting* space he (re)masters through the very combinatorial techniques (*sheet-over-sheet*) of the act of *tasting* and *observing*³: “Food and drink occupy surprisingly

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¹ Richard Lance Keeble, “Food for Thought” (I-IV), in *The Orwell Society*, March 21 – April 25, 2021, <https://orwellsociety.com/articles/?s=food+for+thought&x=0&y=0>, accessed January 13, 2022.

² Alexandra Irimescu (“Savoir and flavour – Exercises in bibliophagy”, in *Literature and the arts. Comparative Explorations*, University of Bucharest Publishing House, 2017, pp. 159-166) operates with a double meaning/signification of the expression: “food as text” and/or “text as food”. The detente is anticipated by Michel Onfray, who places this approach inside the act of “matching the pieces according to reason” and inside the Kantian practice of “judgement of taste considered according to the satisfaction resulting from the object” (*Gourmet Reason*, Nemira Publishing House, Bucharest, 2001, p. 35).

³ Starting from the “issue of different tastes in writing”, Blake Perkins, “George Orwell and the defence of English cooking”, in *Petits Propos Culinaires*, no. 106, 2014, pp. 68-86) considers *Orwell’s analytical taste* as being sour/bitter/acid – “gloomy” – justifying the *Orwellian* attribute applicable even to the perspectives that Orwell delivers on food/eating.

obvious places in George Orwell's life and writings. His first published book, *Down and out in Paris and London* (1933), positions itself entirely in the thematic area of food and its absence⁴, while some of the most important scenes in his novels take place in cafes, canteens or restaurants. In *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) Orwell endeavours to highlight the impact of unemployment on the diet of the poor: in Marrakesh, just before the outbreak of the Second World War, the author – accompanied by his wife Eileen – writes in his *Journal* some notes about the types of vegetables grown there and the agricultural techniques used. Towards the end of his life, he writes not only a series of wonderful, easy and spiritual essays on extremely diverse topics, such as preparing tea, English cuisine, Christmas celebrations and the ideal pub, but also an extraordinary, unpublished and little-known essay dedicated to British cooking.”⁵

Using the mentioned *ingredients*, we will now accredit with plus-sense a triple reporting/*degustation* register.

The first will show the way in which Orwell is interested in food and drink⁶, to the (equally-balanced) extent of remaining deeply engaged in the analysis of the *cognitive* (cultural) and *physiological* (social and political) process that they involve by positioning himself, on the one hand, in the direction of an act of [exaggeration] of *tasting-more-than-trying* (*to taste/eat in order to survive* – see the experience of *Down and out in Paris and London*); and, on the other hand, valuing the gesture [*gaumen*] of *opening his mouth wide* (see *A mouthful of air*)/*tasting* (even with the *nose*), in an act similar to *paying attention, observing, knowing*.

The second will target the particular analysis of those famous “gastrofragments”⁷ that Orwell cultivates, by equating the *textual preparation* and the ritual of *meal preparation*⁸, in the same Barthesian sense, to the analogy between/in the overlapping of food/the approach to serving the meal, the “facts of language” and the “autonomous systems of significance”, through those narrative-illustratory sequences⁹ that hierarchize the “succession of flavours, juices and textures”¹⁰.

⁴ Among the eccentricities of Alexandre Balthasar Grimod, Michel Onfray also signals the scene in which his father's friends (the general tax collector) are received by a suite of *vagrants*. The attitude is obviously directed against the Old Regime that produced “an abundance of the poor and disinherited, defined, first of all, by the inability to eat according to their hunger (...) Neither the French monarchy nor the revolution of the same name were able to please (*Grimod*, we note) for the simple reason that they both starved people. The dinner table is, indeed, the metaphysical place, the space that reveals an ontology” (*quoted work*, p. 27).

⁵ Richard Lance Keeble, “Food for Thought: I”, *quoted article*, 21 March 2022.

⁶ Michel Onfray decrees gastronomic science as being “the first and highest of all the social sciences” (*quoted work*, p. 33).

⁷ The Sartrian exegete Michel Rybalka launched the concept of “gastrotext” as a term describing literary sequences that (re)ference the “gustatory imagination” of the reader (see Alexandra Irimia, *quoted work*).

⁸ See, in this regard, Francesca Rigotti, *Philosophy in the Kitchen. Small Criticism of Culinary Reason*, C. H. Beck, Munich, 2002 or Mădălina Diaconu, *De gustibus: breviar de gastrosofie – De gustibus: a breviary of gastrosophy*, “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University Publishing House, Iași, 2013.

⁹ In one of the texts included in the *As I please* column, published in the *Tribune*, Orwell summarizes the horizon in which he (re)places “literature about food”: “As for all the writers who liked to describe food, from Rabelais to Dickens and from Petronius to Mrs. Beeton, I do not remember any single passage that puts culinary considerations first. Food is always an end in itself” [in Peter Davison (ed. *The Collected Works of George Orwell*, 20 vols., XVIII, Secker & Warburg, London, 1998, p. 517].

¹⁰ Alexandra Irimia, *quoted work*.

The third recovers the direction of some current appeals and revisions – updat(ingly) dedicated to George Orwell’s texts/passages about food/taste. These exegeses concern, *on the one hand*, a corrective-recovery act. A first reference considers the *communiqué (explanatory essay)* issued by the British Council¹¹, through which (retro)active apologies are extended to George Orwell, seven decades later, for rejecting (*not publishing* – because of its being assessed as “unfit for the continental reader” – we note!) his *British Cookery* essay (April 1946)¹². The evaluation (*made at that time!*) considered the essay an “excellent” literary act, but offered “one or two minor – yet decisive – criticisms”¹³, including the fact that Orwell’s orange marmalade recipe contained, amid its ingredients, “too much sugar (3.6 kg. – we note) and too much water (4.5 l. – we note)” and the (*critical!*) statement that “the British are not great consumers of salads”¹⁴. George Orwell positions himself (con)textually in opposition to Voltaire’s¹⁵ statement (Great Britain has “a hundred religions and a single sauce”), which he considers inaccurate, but which has an obvious impact on the foreign tourist (and the way in which he references hotels and restaurants).¹⁵ In an initial general overflight Orwell labels British food as a simple, “quite heavy, maybe slightly barbaric” diet whose qualities (*virtues*) reside in the particularities of product excellence and local recipes, with an emphasis on sugar (see the famous orange marmalade recipe and the amount of sugar used!) and animal fats: “It is the diet of a wet country of the north, where butter is abundant and vegetable oils are scarce, where hot drinks are acceptable during most daylight hours and where all spices and most of the stronger tasting plants are exotic products (...). The British prefer sweet things to spicy things and combine sugar with meat in a way that is

¹¹ “George Orwell gets food essay apology from British Council after 70 years”, in *BBC News*, 7 February 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-47155257>, accessed on July 1, 2022.

¹² British Council analyst Alasdair Donaldson positioned the concerning (con)text in the political-social atmosphere of its epoch, considering that, at the time of the rejection of Orwell’s essay (1946), the institution (British Council) manifestly refrained from issuing any risky statement, avoiding texts that had food policy as their subject/object, against the background of the disastrous effects of the War, of the rationalization, food shortages and the 1945 winter of famine.

¹³ The argument is added to Orwell’s statement that British cooking “suffered from two *major* shortcomings (we note), these being the failure to give it due seriousness and an excessive use of sugar”. This evaluative finding is given extra relevance by a reference to the “gloominess of our Sundays and the difficulty to buy a drink”, the *two major drawbacks* that Orwell references out in the essay “In defence of English cooking”, published in the *Evening Standard*, December 15, 1945 – *Cum am împușcat un elefant – How I shot an elephant*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2018, p. 224.

Orwell will relate directly to the use of sugar, the last entry (out of 11) of his *personal recipe* for the preparation of *a nice cup of tea* insisting on *unsweetened* tea (“I am perfectly aware that I might be in the minority here”), *bitter tasting* (similar to beer), whose flavour is destroyed (by adding sugar – “you could prepare a very similar drink by dissolving some sugar in hot water”): “Try to drink sugar-free tea for two weeks, let’s say, and it is extremely unlikely that you will ever want to *spoil* your tea again by sweetening it” (“A Nice Cup of Tea”, in *The Evening Standard*, January 12, 1946 – *How I Shot an Elephant, quoted work.*, pp. 230-231).

¹⁴ The appeal to Voltaire is neither selective nor random: “(...) I recently read, in a book by a Frenchman, the observation: *the best English food is, purely and simply, French food*”. Orwell trenchantly counters such a hierarchical(ly)-subjective statement – “this is absolutely not true!” (p. 224).

¹⁵ George Orwell foreshadows cultural tourism and the valences of taste/gastronomy as essential criteria for the tourist’s opinion/decision. “In defence of English cooking” emphasises the aforementioned aspect – “In recent years I have heard a lot of talk about the opportunity of attracting foreign tourists to our country” – imbuing it with a *country strategy* (setting things right through “comprehensive legislation”) – p. 224.

seldom found elsewhere.”¹⁶ Orwell’s specifications demand to be read/ engaged with using a set of necessary precautions – the expression “British cooking” refers to the native diet of the British islands, and “not necessarily to the food that the average British citizen consumes”; the assessment is based on economic reasons, in the sense that “apart from the economic difference between various blocks of the population, there is a strict rationalization of food that has been in place for six years”; British cooking is linked to the past and the future, by mentioning both usual menus and those considered exotic.

On the other hand, the (retro)actively more-than-appreciated Orwell is invested with yet another (in the series of *cult markers*!) custom(izing) prerogative, that of “nutrition expert”¹⁷, through an *article-report* directly interested in nutritional projects (from Vitamin A supplements and the problem of added micronutrients to bio-fortification approaches and food for infants, etc.), a text that will appeal directly (*but selectively*!) to the arguments issued by Orwell himself in *The Road to Wigan Pier* ¹⁸. In this respect, the analyses and comments issued by Orwell in Chapter VI are still relevant as approaches dedicated to “the truly important aspect, *essential if we look towards the future* (we note), of food that ensures existence”¹⁹. Analysing the budget available to an unemployed miner and his wife, Orwell certifies the amount/income of approximately thirty shillings per week, detailing the expenses and including the three bags of powdered milk received for their child from the neonatal assistance clinic. In Orwell’s comments, the theoretical possibility that three people could feed themselves properly within the limit of the mentioned budget plays a fundamental role, drawing attention to topics of public discussion/dispute and including the debates of *nutritionist schools* which agreed on the necessary amount of either five shillings and nine pence or five shillings, nine pence and a half as minimum weekly income necessary for survival. Referring to the budgets published in the *New Statesman* and *News of the World*, Orwell’s finding is that the main allocated sum of three shillings, eleven and a half pence requires a social assistance type of concentration on basic foods only, without achieving any essential nutritional value. The diet of the unemployed is assessed as “a frightening one”, consisting of white bread with margarine, salted beef, tea with sugar and potatoes; “the common man would rather starve than live on whole wheat bread and raw carrots”. Hence the “greater evil” – “the less money you have, the less inclined you are to spend them on healthy food (...). When you are unemployed, meaning malnourished, harassed, bored and unhappy, you don’t want to eat healthy, dull food. You want the food to have a little taste (...) This is how your mind works when you are at the level of a socially assisted person (...) Unemployment is an endless mess that must be constantly sweetened,

¹⁶ George Orwell. *Commissioned by the British Council, 1946. Unpublished. British Cookery*, in British Council, <https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/insight-articles/defence-english-cooking>, April 1946.

¹⁷ “Quality, not quantity”, in *The Economist*, 24 March 2011, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2011/03/24/quality-not-quantity>, accessed on 1 July 2021.

¹⁸ George Orwell, *Drumul spre Wigan Pier – The Road to Wigan Pier*; Polirom, Iași, 2018.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 107.

especially with tea, the opium of the Englishman. A cup of tea or even an aspirin is much better as a temporary stimulant than a crust of wholemeal bread”²⁰ (in the long run, the effects of this diet are apparent in physical degradation, and especially in the loss of teeth).²¹

And, *last but not least*, all texts George Orwell dedicated to the issue of food/nutrition refer to a concept of cultural-gastronomic resurrection²² (back to the roots/culinary traditions!), “in defence of English cooking” not equating [*here*] with support for one side to the detriment of another (despite all the signalled specificities particularizing a British context), but advocating the reification of a reactivated hierarchy (by delimitation from any imitation of French cuisine), marked by the revival of originality and specificity.

Orwell MasterChef

Alex Massie²³ proposed a common (*MasterChef*-ian) register contextualizing Orwell in relation to Jamie Oliver, through a type of assertion that opens (other) two topics of debate.

The first concerns a narrative of the gastronomic perspective seen in relation to a socio-political status quo – “(...) I do not doubt Oliver’s sincerity in trying to help people cook better – and cheaper – but, most of the time, they eat poorly because this is the food they have at hand”²⁴ – the essence of which, however, does not emphasize the food but the *atmosphere*. Orwell’s preferred tavern – *The Moon Under Water*²⁵ – is individualized by its Victorian architecture and furniture and its out-of-the-way, and thus privileged, positioning in regard to its patrons (people who go there for food and beer); it is sufficiently quiet to allow dialogue (with the needed mention – no radio!), has a buffet with snacks, cigarettes and tobacco, aspirins and stamps, careful and helpful waitresses, a family-friendly garden (with children sneaking into the pub and bringing drinks to their parents, thus infringing on an interdiction that might be considered harmful – regarding children and women – and which transformed these kinds of places into glorified drunkard dens). Culinarily, the snack counter includes liver sausage sandwiches, the specialty of the house – mussels –, cheeses, pickles and large biscuits with

²⁰ Orwell’s exemplary appeal mentioning wholemeal bread is not a random one, as the working class refused this food, considering it dirty and mistaking it for the brown rye bread associated, on the one hand and on the confessional-religious level, with the Catholics; and on the other hand, with wooden clogs: “(...) the taste buds of the English – and especially of the working class – automatically reject good food” (*Ibidem*, p. 115). In the spirit of Voltaire’s statement Orwell insists on the ignorance of the working class and of the entire English nation regarding food and food waste: “(...) how civilized is the approach of the French worker toward food, compared to that of the Englishman – I cannot believe that in a French house you would ever see the waste you usually encounter in the houses of the English” – *Ibidem*, p. 114.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 111.

²² Sophie Mackenzie, “George Orwell’s hot and cold British menu”, in *The Guardian*, 9 November 2011.

²³ Alex Massie, “George Orwell’s lesson for Jamie Oliver”, in *The Spectator*, 27 August 2013, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/george-orwell-s-lesson-for-jamie-oliver>, accessed on 1 July 2022.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ George Orwell, “The Moon Under Water”, in *How I Shot an Elephant*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2018, pp. 232-236.

caraway seeds; upstairs, lunch consists of a cut of the joint, two vegetables and boiled jam roll (for about 3 shillings), with draught stout, light and sparkling, served in a pewter pot. The described place/space is itself integrated into an imaginary, projective narrative – “The Moon Under Water does not exist”!

The second relaunched an actually expanded theme of interest (*today*) – “Why do the poor classes in Britain not eat better food? If they can afford TVs, they can also afford mussels, right? (...) But instead (...) they choose ready-made meat dishes and fast food”.²⁶

The necessary mentions take into account the fact that the prevalence of food/nutrition in George Orwell’s work will not be accepted [*here* – in the present approach] as a daily-recorded custom, nor will it be seen as accompanying a gustatory state of exploration; but rather as an excellence-imbuing, textually founding *reason* and *resource*, a *product of the education he received* (“When I was young and I went to school, once a quarter there came a lecturer who gave some wonderful lectures about the famous battles of the past, such as Blenheim, Austerlitz, etc. He liked to quote Napoleon’s maxim *an army advances with its stomach* and at the end of the lecture he suddenly turned to us and asked: *What is the most important thing in the world?* We were supposed to yell *Food!* And if we did not answer in this way, he was disappointed”²⁷). It can also be seen as a *defining element of reference for the social, cultural and political context* (“A human being is, first of all, a bag in which you must pour food. Other functions and faculties may bring him closer to God but, chronologically, they come only later. Man dies, he is buried and all his words and actions are forgotten, but the food he has eaten lives on in the healthy or rotten bones of his children”²⁸); and as a *historically (re)levant act* (“I think it could be plausibly argued that changes in eating are more important than changes in dynasties or even religions. The Great War, for instance, could never have taken place if tinned food had not been invented. And the history of England’s last four hundred years would have been very different if the cultivation of root and green vegetables had not been adopted (...) and if alcohol-free (...) and distilled drinks, with which beer-drinking Englishmen were unfamiliar, had not been made available”²⁹).

Richard Lance Keeble³⁰ fills the landmarks of “food for thought” by highlighting a “food/nutrition policy”, pointing out a set of *textual realities* able to map/trace the coordinates of Orwell’s thinking.

Thus, food’s essential role is always taken into account; it is a vital element not only for going through the war experience (on the front line and in the trenches – with reference to the Spanish Civil War, where *firewood, food, tobacco*,

²⁶ Alex Massie, *quoted article*.

²⁷ George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, *quoted work*, p. 106.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 106-107.

³⁰ Richard Lance Keeble, “Food For Thought: II. Spain – and the Politics of Food”, 27 March 2021, <https://orwellsociety.com/food-for-thought-ii/>, accessed January 13, 2022.

candles and the enemy were considered relevant, but *exactly in the order* in which Orwell lists them (!) It also describes the post-War reality (Orwell notices the visible trend of closing cafes and restaurants in Barcelona, and the splitting/or “normal division of society into rich and poor”, with the first category interested in expensive menus and the second subject to the difficulties of increasing food prices and reduced wages, with endless queues for bread or olive oil and with an augmented discrepancy between social classes). There are two essential aspects that mark Orwell’s Spanish experience: the first concerns a weighting through empathy (“God forbid I claim any personal superiority!”) regarding the way of noting the reality of the moment – “I remember that I was walking along one of the fashionable streets and I came across a confectionery with a window full of pastries (...). And I remember feeling horror and amazement that money could be wasted on such things in a country starved by the war (...). After a few months of discomfort, I felt an acute desire for decent food and wine, cocktails, American cigarettes and so on (...)”³¹; the second considers the act of disguise as a way of survival – “At night we were criminals, but during the day we were prosperous English visitors (...) We went to expensive restaurants and we were *very English* with the waiters”³².

Personal experience is always imbued with plus-relevance (Eric Blair works in his sister Avril’s tea shop, *Copper Kettle*, in Southwold, “serving afternoon teas to fat women in large hats”³³); and this is invested with significance, either as a benchmark of “failure, commercialism and the hypocrisy of modern life in which workers are ruthlessly exploited”³⁴, or developed as a dotted symbol of a bankruptcy environment (in *Keep the aspidistra flying!* Julia takes a cooking course and works in a “small, ugly tea shop near Earl’s Court subway station”). Sometimes the signifier becomes a degenerat(ing) landmark – in *A breath of air*; in *Wendy’s Teashop* they were – *now* – serving coffee and homemade cakes, George Bowling ordering “tea from China, so weak that you might think it is just water until you put the milk in”; or even totally absent (the absence of tea in *1984*), as a landmark of the death of pre-revolutionary capitalist civilization.

But, more than that, in Orwell’s work tea is the pretext for practicing and cultivating an essayistic-journalistic manner of writing through a clear, colloquial style, seemingly easy to achieve on the surface and complex in its depth. Orwell highlights what was missing in/from the cookbooks (tea – the mainstay of civilization!), cultivating a particular formula of cultural essay through short and direct phrases that summarize the particular argument and lead (in)to subsequent arguments that he cautiously aligns to his personal point of view, often received with humour/irony. Not by any chance, and precisely in this sense, “In defence of English cooking” proves Orwell had an *impressive knowledge of kitchen matters!*

³¹ See, George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2009.

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ Gordon Bowker, *George Orwell*, Little Brown Book Group, 2004, p. 151.

³⁴ Richard Lance Keeble, *quoted article*.

Equivalence of Food with Politics, Poetry or Religion

Jeffrey Meyers³⁵ placed the “austere, ascetic and feeble Orwell” within an ideological horizon whose “surprising interest in food” is not hedonistic but, on the contrary, aligned to literary-autobiographical details projected through its characters who are often deprived of food, considering food an existential challenge and the act of eating/drinking a pretext for exposing their opinions, outlining a particular state of mind, critically referencing a place and at a time, and especially fixing the precise coordinates of reality: Orwell’s characters are not static, on the contrary, “they move a lot and you can tell where they are after what they eat (...) Food is associated by Orwell with economic status rather than pleasure”³⁶. Jeffrey Meyers insists on two autobiographical episodes with plus-sense in the construction of the present approach: the first highlights the cultivation of naturalness in Orwell’s relationship with food – after marrying Eileen O’Shaughnessy, the spouses live a Spartan life in Wallington, Hertfordshire, in a space reduced to necessarily-primitive elements, by producing their own food, raising chickens, milking the goats and gardening. Orwell knows the technique of producing bacon and ham, weighing a “kilogram of cheese”, making pickles or homemade butter – all is natural, but this does not exclude the knowledge of a cultivated ritual, elaborate and attentive to details and amphitronic nuances (serving jam in a bowl, Orwell insists that Eileen places it *correctly* on the table, in a special container). The second sums Orwell’s preferences (gardening, fishing, “English cooking and beer, French and Spanish wines, Indian tea”); these do not alienate him from the proletarian customs he imitates and reclaims – serving/pouring tea in a small saucer, cooling it by blowing on it and then slurping it up.³⁷ Orwell cooked, his circle of friends recommending his “cooking skills (*an excellent steak and a beer served in those tree-patterned cups he collected* – we note) and his knowledge about wine (in restaurants he requested wine at the ideal temperature for the variety, year and detail, all of which he knew very well – we note)”³⁸.

The comparison between food and politics is punctuated thrice by Jean-François Revel, through: an equivalence between the composition of the menu and a persuasive act, considering the style (“rhetorical exercise”) as a variable *practiced with pleasure*, of/with increased relevance, as is also the case with the selection of suitable ingredients; the menu (a textual approach in itself, with a “plethoric and ornamental terminology”) seen as corresponding to a semiotic system, in the sense that “gastronomic revolutions are, equally, revolutions of terminology”³⁹; or through the two *Prefaces* that open Alain Ducasse’s⁴⁰

³⁵ Jeffrey Meyers, “Orwell’s food journeys”, in *The Article*, 24 January 2021, <https://www.thearticle.com/orwells-food-journeys>, accessed February 26, 2022.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁹ Jean-François Revel, *Un Festin en paroles. Histoire littéraire de la sensibilité gastronomique de l’Antiquité à nos jours*, Ed. Jean-Jacques Pauvert, Paris, 1979, p. 15.

⁴⁰ See in this regard *Preface* to Jean-François Piège, Didier Elena, Franck Cerutti, Patrick Ogheard, Benoit Witz, *Grand Livre de Cuisine d’Alain Ducasse*, Les Éditions d’Alain Ducasse, Paris, 2003 and to Frédéric Robert, *Grand Livre de Cuisine d’Alain Ducasse. Desserts et Pâtisserie*, Éditeur LEC, 2009. Both *Prefaces* are signed by – Jean-François Revel, Member of the French Academy!

cookbooks, in the sense of sinking into the *mystery* of the kitchen, certifying that “great cookbooks are not only about the act of cooking. They are a testimony of the understanding of a civilization, of the art of living.”⁴¹

Close to the substances/ingredients of Orwell’s text dedicated to English cooking, Jean-François Revel restricts himself to a remark that he considers essential and which advocates returning to soup as an essential element of culinary art, to desserts that use a combination of fruits, and to the resurrection of vegetables by saving them from the status of simple garnishes. Moreover, Jean-François Revel *defends* – this time – *French cuisine*, reaffirming a series of basic notions – the relationship between popular and “court” cuisine, with the latter seen as imposing and opulent; or the art of recreating ingredients in/through “innovative syntheses” by appealing to “visionary successions”. The gastronomic reality⁴² that Revel tastes resides in harmonizing the natural with the cultivated art of the cuisine, both true to their unaltered form and thus able to generate a specific “gastronomic language”.

Everything that man eats and cooks has a meaning and food represents (also) a political act, decreed, in the alliance of culture with gastronomy, Linda Civitello⁴³, thus confirming what Orwell had presciently anticipated by the (indirect but decisive) *equivalence of food with politics, poetry or religion*: “(...) it is a wonder how seldom the immense importance of food is really recognized. Everywhere you can see statues that honour politicians, poets or bishops but never cooks, butchers or grocers. It is said that Emperor Charles V erected a statue in honour of the inventor of smoked fish, but this is the only case that comes to mind now.”⁴⁴

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⁴¹ Jean-François Revel, *Un Festin en paroles. Histoire littéraire de la sensibilité gastronomique de l’Antiquité à nos jours*, quoted work.

⁴² Moreover, Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (*The Physiology of Taste, or Meditations on Transcendental Gastronomy*, Everyman’s Library, A Knoff Book, New York, London, Toronto, 2009) anticipated the fact that, structurally, gastronomic knowledge is a necessary datum for any sum of predestined needs, for the hierarchy of class and social status, and is part of a political practice/protocol (*Ibidem*, p. 170).

⁴³ Linda Civitello, *Cuisine and Culture. A History of Food and People*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey, 2008, p. xiv.

Michel Onfray warned that “food is a microcosm of good taste understood as politics” (*quoted work*, p. 30), in the sense of the relatedness of the terms *political* and *polished* inside a *polis* which (in)sums civility and urbanity, or the science of governance integrated in the way of being of a hedonistic community. The meaning of *taste policy* is ascribed to Dandyism, as a *political will* (*Ibidem*, p. 32). Moreover, a common taxonomy is required – “Grimod invents the meaning of the term to *legitimize* in the gastronomic field” (*Ibidem*, p. 35).

⁴⁴ George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, quoted work, p. 107.

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