

HEB

Scripting the Cuisine: Food and Writing in the Film *Julie & Julia*

CASS

Roshma V

CHRIST (Deemed to be University)

*Address for Correspondence: editojohp@gmail.com***ABSTRACT**

Food is an integral part of any culture and changes occurring in food culture can indicate changes in the societal culture. The human experience of culture begins in the womb as does experience of any cuisine. All space is experienced and codified culturally, and for the understanding of a cuisine, kitchen is a crucial cultural space which is to be focused. This paper is going to scrutinize and validate the role of food in different cultural sphere blogging and cookbook in the hollywood film *Julie & Julia*. In the film *Julie & Julia*, both characters share a common ground for their love for food but in a different space. The main purpose of the study is to understand what makes food and writing such a powerful and diffuse locus of culture and how both blend together. It utilizes the method of cultural analysis to explore common messages and themes within the text that express cultural ideologies. The paper concludes by the blending of food and writing with the characters in the movie like a batter of egg and cream for a delicious cake.

Scripting the Cuisine: Food and Writing in the Film *Julie & Julia*

Words can't do what bird bones can: stew to the stony essence of one small soul. ("Four Sonnets About Food")

Each human being inhabits the "food world"(Dieterie161). It encompasses the meanings that food and the activities surrounding food have for a person. These meanings are cognitive, emotional and sensory. They are constructed by writing and particular through the relationship between food and eating.

Food as an exquisite cultural reality forms the ways in which it is consumed and also the things surrounding it; things pertaining to it (Montanari 93). The language of food unlike the verbal language it is always intrinsic. As Roland Barth in the essay on *Towards a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumptions* states that food is the functional unit of a system of communication (food and culture 29) .It is not just an indicator of certain practices such as cooking, consumption and the aesthetics of serving but most importantly it transmits the situation around it, as it also constitutes certain informations and signals. More specifically, food becomes the means for coping with physical and psychological needs, which together compose a multidimensional concept.

The eaters, like speakers, learn through the cultural grammar of the language and make use of it manually in a host of contexts determined by the cuisine one engages in. In a whole, by when one lives, where one live, how much one can spend , what is appropriate to the occasion of consumption, one constructs a language to himself that is closely

<i>Access this Article Online</i>	
http://heb-nic.in/cass-studies	Quick Response Code:
Received on 20/02/2019 Accepted on 25/02/2019 © HEB All rights reserved	

entangled with ones food culture. Seeped in their own culture, native eaters learn the language through the syntax. They participate in the syntax that, as food historian Massimo Montanari explains, gives meaning to the lexicon

and to its morphological variants through cooking and eating meals. The dishes according to criteria determine the combinations and reciprocal relationships. Just as in verbal sentences, the principal foods, whether meat or grain dishes (equivalent to nouns), are in the centre of the action, accompanied in their syntactic place by appetizers, side dishes, desserts. Condiments serve as the meal's adjectives and adverbs. Thus food acquires full expressive capacity (Montario 101). The rhetoric that contains in every language is the necessary complement. Rhetoric, the adaptation of speech to the argument, makes verbal the effects one wants to arouse or create. If the discourse is food, that means the way it is prepared, served, and eaten is the rhetoric.

Food is the most important thing to sustain life. Likewise writing about something important is paramount. The writing will have different purpose according to the audience. The changing sphere of food can be seen in the contemporary era as ranging from cookbooks to blogs. In both, writing is an important tool. It communicates through people and coordinate every ideas and meanings. Michell Coghlan has in her essay about American cuisine written that M.F.K. Fisher, a cookbook writer, had discovered that in writing about food she could at the same time be writing about the human heart (Coghlan117).

Every writer possesses distinct food attitudes and every age has had its food writers who offer critique and commentary. However those facts do not mean that every writer is by definition a food writer. Those who do write about food can approach it from several perspectives. Waverly Root has written about food from the perspective of a culinary historian. Jean Anthelme and Brillat-Savarin's classic, *The Physiology of Taste* proceeds from the perspective of a gourmand, Ernest Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast* provides the personal perspective of an artist with narrative about the writing life and his own memorable restaurant meals in Paris. Likewise, each food writing has a different style. It is not just a message that is transferred, most importantly it is the culture. Current trends in food writing tend to link food with culture.

Blogging is the latest trend in food writing. Just about anyone who likes to cook and has an Internet connection can use free online software to create a weblog or blog. That allows them to publish stories, recipes, photographs and videos. Some blogs are edgy, some sassy and some like Julie Powell's *The Julie/Julia Project* - in which a young New Yorker cooked her way through Julia Child's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* are hilarious recordings of successes and mishaps. Later on the blog became a book.

Writing may approach the subject of food from the perspective of one who creates it, one who eats it or one who studies it. Ultimately, food writers are out to produce manuscripts, not meals. Beyond that, their level of effectiveness depends on being able to address the experience level, area of interest, and literary level of their readers. Their writing is more than a mere listing of ingredients and their intention is to provide more than cooking instructions. To produce such work, to put food into its cultural context an ample knowledge of writing is as important as the knowledge of food. In this sense it could be seen that the current trends in food is more than merely listing the ingredients and recipes.

The film *Julie & Julia* is a mash up of two books *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* and *My Life in France*. Julia Child migrates to France and a quest for purpose in her life leads her to a cooking school and an invite to help write a French cookbook for American women. Julie is an unhappy woman, living and working in modern day New York. Her job and life seems unfulfilling. She finds comfort in cooking and decides to blog her way through all 524 recipes in Julia Child's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. *Julie & Julia* alternates between two stories and follows both women as they bond through time and space over French cuisine.

This study explores the writing and language of food, particularly as they are expressed in the film. Throughout the film, food has been shown as the culture and thereby ways in which it determines the food ways. The interrelation between food and writing is recurrently addressed. In order to establish a connection between food and writing, this paper provides an insight to the writing of and on food and the discourse that surrounds the food writing. This discourse will be looked through the examples of food writing and included manuscripts.

In the very first scene of the film, the character Julia moves to France and the first thing she adores is the kitchen and the French cuisine. In a cultural context, the kitchen is not just a domestic space, it could be also seen as powerful space, where both the characters Julie and Julia transforms into a better person by finding meaning to their lives. In order to write about food, it should be practised first. In that sense, the kitchen is not just a space to cook but also a cultural space where different cuisines were prepared.

While cooking Julia Child's recipe Boeuf Bourguignon, Julie tells that, she feels like Julia was in the room and that she was in her control. This shows that food has the power to transform or communicate over space and time. Space is fundamental in any exercise of power (Foucault 84). The play with space and time happened not only just because of the food but most importantly through her recipes. In that sense writing the cuisine is also a powerful.

The struggle for mastery of space is a kind of alternative to the game of playing with time (Montanari 19). The kitchen is a place of transformation and empowerment and others look to it for inspiration. Julie's difficulties can be seen through the lack of ample space and inadequate vessels for completing the complex recipes of fine French cuisine. But the lack of experience in French cuisine or the lack of knowledge about it does not pose as a problem. It is a space where women like Julie have physical control to express themselves and their innermost desires. It defies monotony and goes beyond to the profound. Kitchen thus transcends cultural border as seen in the case of Julie.

When both the characters meltdown because of their depressed life they both find solace in food. In that sense food could be seen as therapy. Food serves as a means of self discovery for both of them when they felt low, empty and frustrated. Even though their achievements were made in different space or area the fundamental base for both of them is food and writing. In the case of Julia it was cookbook and Julie blog. Another crucial aspect in this is how these both medium – cookbook and blog scripted the cuisine. In cookbook, Julia Child gives a detailed section for each recipe and also gives culinary instructions. Whereas in blog, Julie gives more or less the way she cooked the recipes and her own criticism on the food. Also in an instance in the film, she puts question to her unknown people like How will I ever do this and few of them will give their opinion on that. Later on she will do according to Julia Child's instruction in the book. This indirectly symbolises how the cookbook is considered as a credible source whereas the blog is not. This incredibility if one can call it so is deeply rooted in her candid camaraderie with food and the emotional constraints she attaches to it. When she tastes food she savours every bite. When she prepares food she is delighted in every step of creation. The role emotion plays in food world has been examined empirically from a variety of perspectives.

The writing style that was employed in the Cookbook was formal in nature; main intention was to instruct to prepare through recipes. Whereas in Julie's blog the food writing doesn't serve that intention instead it was literary in nature. The artful merging of the writing and food could be seen through her intimate feeling of sharing her innermost thoughts in the blog. In blogging the use of food and cooking as metaphor shows her physical experiences with food convey both positive and negative reactions to events in her life.

In an instance in the film she tells that, she cooked artichokes with Hollandaise sauce, which is melted butter whipped into a frenzy with egg yolks, until it's died and gone to heaven. She also asks that Is there anything better than butter. This kind of metaphoric writing shows the innermost feeling or emotion towards food. Also connects with the reader easily. She gives her final word in her blog you can't have too much butter. Such kinds of writing in depth validate the role of food in a cultural sphere. It conveys to the reader the consciousness towards food, like what amount it should be consumed and its effect on human body. This kind of writing gives a new insight in cooking also most importantly food consumption. In that sense, it goes with Foucault's concept of power through knowledge.

Julie was driven by more than just the ambition to catch her dream rather desire to add meaning to her life that was suffering from passionlessness. In that sense food is seen as a driving force towards meaning. The writing has the power to transform one's life. In the case of Julie, she lived in Pizzeria Apartment with much less facilities, also her pathetic job during 9/11 war. Then later through blogging, she got fame and published a book. In that sense food also has the power to transform one's life. In several scenes like, fighting with her husband she will be depressed and does not know what to do,

she pours her thoughts on the blog and later he comes back and asks what's for dinner. This shows how a good cooking or food always has the power to colonise people's mind.

In the decades surrounding World War II in particular, most women who wrote about food to promote commercial products, to encourage patriotism, or to describe foodways from different cultures. This writing rarely considered the author's personal experiences to be relevant to the purpose of the writing, which almost always sought to influence its audience's consumption choices. For example, food conglomerate General Mills popularized the Betty Crocker. Betty Crocker became famous as a radio personality and as the author of a spate of cookbooks, all touting General Mills foods; many of these cookbooks topped nonfiction bestseller lists well into the 1960s. Other women, led by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, championed Victory Gardens and other home food production and preservation methods in order to save more food for the troops abroad. Still more women, such as journalist Clementine Paddleford and those women employed by the WPA project *America Eats* travelled the country collecting culinary lore and recipes, some of which was published in women's magazines or local newspapers.

Still, even this sort of writing, which approached food ways from a vaguely anthropological perspective, was not personal: the authors recorded and published what they observed, but they rarely described the actual embodied experience of eating or cooking. Instead, the role of the author as eater or taster was obscured by her role as a reporter. It is the same case happened with Julia Child, she became a famous personality in television, also a famous author of her cookbook. But she didn't complete her role as author or eater. She depicted the French cuisine in her cookbook as a reporter. Whereas in the case of Julie, the concentration was not only on the food, but also on the discourse that surrounds it. She valued experiential learning in that sense she is connected with Fisher. Fisher's idea that "gastronomical text" would bring with it "knowledge and perception of a hundred other things, but mainly of ourselves" (Coughlan 118). Thus learning about food and cooking was simply one part of identity formation and human interaction.

In the case of cookbooks, such publishing and marketing decisions could have a profound effect on public discourse. Houghton Mifflin and most women's magazines took a largely conservative view of the book's potential audience, essentially declaring it immutable and unreceptive to rhetorics. It suggests a different approach to or attitude about cooking. This view is at odds with Child's conviction that, with proper instruction and practice, even the most unschooled home cook could learn to make delicious food. Rather, the dominant view of publishers in food discourse is evident from the film. When Julia Child approaches the publishing company, they put forward their dominant views like; it should be intended to housewives, quick with a mix and asks her to alter her cookbook according to their ideologies. This shows how the cuisine itself constructed through writing. Foucault's concept of "body politics", "the strategies and mechanisms through which human life processes are managed under regimes of authority over power"(Foucault 124) shows that how the publishing house regulates bodies to read and write.

Molly Wizenberg, author of the blog *Orangette*, points out that cookbooks have a certain amount of prestige that blogs have yet to acquire. Cookbook recipes go through a unique and rigorous editorial and testing process which blogs don't have. The editor of Wizenberg's book insists that cookbooks serve a much different purpose than blogs. Blogs record what their authors are thinking in the moment, and they are wonderful for immediate inspiration. While blogs are most often fragmented and unpredictable a good cookbook offers a unified vision and allows the reader to expect a certain type of recipe. In that sense Julia Child's cookbook is appreciated by everyone and trusted whereas Julie's blog is not. The cookbooks include the culinary method such as a commonly shared culinary code or vocabulary as would seem to be the case in medieval and renaissance (Montanari 41). In that sense it is hardly comparable to food blogs.

Further, when Julie picks Child's cookbook and tells her husband that it weighs like two pounds, a year is not possible to complete the book. This indirectly shows that how a cookbook is seen as difficult. At the same if that same appears in the blog it was shown as easy. This shows the change in perceiving food itself.

The concept of publishing is always validated in the film .Even though the changes occurred from cookbook to

food blog. The concept of publishing and cookbook is considered as a valuable or it is the only platform that considers the author as writer. This is reflected when Julie tells her husband that “we are not a writer unless someone publishes you.” Even in contemporary society, whatever changes that were happened in digital space like eBooks, Instagram, the publication of a book is considered as prestigious one. Blogging is not just a space where Julie pours her thoughts and shares her recipes. It is a space where whole group of people who sort of connected with her through blogging. Thus she gets identity in that way.

Julia and Julie, both of them as a women, serve as representatives of their generations. One hand writing, such as letters by hand and typing with carbons on onionskin paper and the other dabbling in the novel art of blogging, still in its infancy. This shows not only the writing style most importantly, it conveys the socio cultural situations or cultural aspects in that era. The culinary metaphors ultimately reveal how food is symbolic of culture and personal taste. Barthes's "system of communication" as it signifies the symbiotic relationship between writing about food and writing style can be evoked here (Barth 24). To merge it all again with the very first verse from Adrienne Su, sometimes all one has to offer is food. The words that cook these foods are as essential as the ingredients that stew it. By looking into the intricacies of blogging and cookbook this paper concludes by mending a gap that was often ignored in the understanding of the relationship between writing and cooking.

References:

- Barthes, Roland. “Towards a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption”. Food and Culture, Edited by Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, Rotledge Publications, 1997.
- Coghlan, Michelle. “The Art of the Recipe : American Food Writing Avant la Lettre.” Food and Literature, Edited by Gianjali G Shahani, Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Crouch, Margaret. “Food, Film and Gender.” Just Food, edited by J.M.Dieterle, Rowman and Littlefield International Ltd, 2015.
- Horrocks, Chris and Zoran Jevtic, *Introucing Foucault*. Totem Books, 1997.
- Montanari, Massimo. *Food is Culture*. Columbia University Press, 2004.
- Julie & Julia . Directed by Nora Ephron, Columbia Pictures, 2009.
- Su, Adrienne. “Four Sonnets About Food.” www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/four-sonnets-about-food. Accessed 2 Jan. 2019.