



Writing in Practice volume 9
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Writing in Practice
volume 9, 2023

CrossRef DOI: 10.62959-WIP-09-2023-04



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ABSTRACT:

Prose poetry may be understood as a literary form of amuse-bouche, the complimentary small bite served at the beginning of some meals. Like the amuse-bouche, the prose poem is generally a small work that gestures toward the large. Furthermore, many prose poems—and poems in general—treat the subject of food, often linking it with more general or problematic notions of sensory pleasure, bodily enjoyment, sexual expression, consumption and sexual politics. In this light, we consider the broader implications of prose poems by Peter Johnson, Harryette Mullen and Nin Andrews, as well as prose poems of our own, focusing on the way food is used by these writers to symbolize broader concepts. Such notions as the extraordinary within the ordinary, enjoyment and disgust, the gaze, consumption, and the large within the small are employed to provide insights into the ways prose poems about food, some of them subversive, are so often also works about significant social and political issues—and about ways of perceiving and understanding various forms of pleasure, inhibition, predation and constraint.

Keywords:

Food – prose poetry – amuse-bouche – quotidian – subversive – consumption – sexuality – women

Poetry and food are soul mates and share a long history. Whether we invoke William Carlos Williams's poem, "This Is Just To Say", about plums that are "sweet and so cold" (n.d.: n.p.); or Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market", ripe with "Pomegranates full and fine, / Dates and sharp bullaces, / Rare pears and greengages, / Damsons and bilberries" (n.d.: n.p.); or D. H. Lawrence's sensual appeal to the fig's "glittering, rosy, moist, honied, / heavy-petalled four-petalled flower" (2008: 7); or Maya Angelou's health-food diner who craves "Loins of pork and chicken thighs / And standing rib, so prime" (2014: n.p.), poets have always appealed to gustatory images. Poetry has even been identified as food for the soul in its ability to sustain, comfort and delight—and Jane Austen's Mr Darcy, in revising Shakespeare's famous observation in *Twelfth Night*, considers "poetry as the food of love" (1853: 38). There is also a sustained tradition of "poetic cookbooks", such as *Festin joyeux* (1738), which presents rhymed recipes for various dishes—including, for example, partridge with crawfish: "First you cook everything well, / And mix with a light ragoût, / Add sweetbreads and truffles too, / And let cockscombs and champignons swell" (Notaker 2017: 156).

The association between poetry, food and food writing continues in the work of many contemporary poets, as audiences and consumers engage with the poetry and poetics of cooking and eating, and also with the many issues that poets use food to symbolize or signify. We have already mentioned Maya Angelou's work, and other examples are Sylvia Plath's "Blackberrying", where the fruit are "fat / With blue-red juices" (n.d.: n.p.); Jean Toomer's "Harvest Song", which tropes on the idea of hunger (n.d.: n.p.); and Li-Young Lee's "From Blossoms", in which the notion of eating expands to

include "not only the skin, but the shade, / not only the sugar, but the days" (n.d.: n.p.). Importantly, both poetry and food rely on orality and mouthfeel, a reminder of their connections to the body. As Angelica Michelis argues, "the way we open our mouths and close, how words come into being by the movement of our tongues when reading poetry aloud ... keeps us alert to the fact that poetry works first and all on an oral level" (2005: 81). Importantly, too, a great deal of contemporary poetry casts food into rather acerbic or disjunctive forms of utterance. Gary Catalano's "Incident from a War", for instance, uses the imagery of food associated with religious ritual to create a subversive poignancy out of a potentially catastrophic moment:

When the enemy planes flew over our city they disgorged not bombs but loaves of bread. Can you imagine our surprise? We ventured outside after those planes had disappeared from the sky, and what did we find there but heaps of broken bread at which the pigeons were already feeding? (2002: n.p.)

In this paper we consider how prose poems are often like an amuse-bouche, or mouth amuser, in their connections to food. The amuse-bouche, a complimentary small bite served at the beginning of a meal, is often a surprise and delight to the diner when it is revealed. It is something that is supposed to be eaten in one mouthful and as Martin Teo, editor at *Lifestyle Asia*, explains, "These tiny morsels can be as whimsical and packed with drama in a small package or as clean and simply unpretentious. What the amuse-bouche lacks in size, it makes up for in flavour—big time" (2018: n.p.). The prose poem can be similarly read as a flavoursome—if sometimes sour or salty—literary morsel, both complete in itself and yet a part of something greater. Indeed, prose poems are frequently characterized by

brevity and compression, and they:

make use of literary techniques that suggest additional meanings beyond the literal, emphasizing the evocative and even the ambiguous, and creating resonances that move expansively outward. In prose poems the “poetic” inhabits language and, as it were, colors sentences and paragraphs to the extent that their denotative qualities are overwhelmed by the connotative. (Hetherington and Atherton 2020: 14)

In this way, prose poems signal that they partake of an expansive and flavoursome meal extending beyond their margins, as they play resonantly with metaphor and other literary figurations, and allude to larger worlds.

Furthermore, prose poetry as a literary form has a particular relationship with food due to its celebration of the quotidian. Its use of sentences and paragraphs, rather than poetic lines and stanzas, gives it a familiar appearance because, in our daily lives, most of what we read and write is expressed in similar-sized units of prose and is the vehicle for demotic expression. As a result, most people are generally comfortable with this mode of writing and its demands. These qualities mean that prose poetry has often been employed to express the points of view of marginalized groups, sometimes for political ends, emphasizing what one might think of as poetry’s daily meal rather than the traditional lyric’s elevated repast. The techniques of prose poets even include the use of slashes, highlighting how key features of the lineated lyric—its line and stanza breaks—have been eschewed.

Additionally, although prose poems employ narrative tropes and have an approachable outward appearance,

they do so in ways that defy the more conventional literary tactics of so many novels, stories and essays. Thus, the reader soon discovers that prose poetry—rather subversively—merely looks like conventional prose on the surface. It is soon outed as poetry, and often this is a poetry of considerable density, emphasizing bite-sized evocations and suggestiveness through tautly constructed, syntactically compressed single paragraphs situated in the surrounding white space of the page—much like an intensely flavoured tidbit on a white plate. In making these observations, we acknowledge that many prose poems are published as standalone works in journals or books, and may thus seem unlike amuse-bouches, which are usually part of a larger, planned meal. However, the metaphor holds true in the sense that many prose poems, even those that are single works, emphasize their involvement in the larger literary tradition—the full literary feast—intensifying, alluding to and skewing known literary tropes, sometimes as fragmentary utterances and sometimes as part of extended prose poetry sequences and collections.

Similarly, food may both be understood in more-or-less utilitarian terms as part of the fuel we consume every day—and, in this way, may be linked to the routines that revolve around it, from scheduled lunch breaks at work to the rituals of family dinners—and as having the capacity to be richly and elaborately suggestive. In many of its guises, food is utterly familiar and is linked to survival but, as we taste, internalize and reflect on it, food has the capacity to fuel a great deal more than our bodily existence. As Elspeth Probyn argues, “it seems that eating brings together a cacophony of feelings, hopes, pleasures and worries, as it orchestrates experiences that are at once intensely individual and social” (2005: 3)—and this is an assertion that

might apply equally well to the consumption of prose poetry.

Prose poetry and food are arguably similarly protean and surprising in their capacities to offer basic sustenance (communication is as important as food in sustaining human communities), thus fulfilling quotidian needs, while also having the potential to provide exquisite, sometimes unexpected and complex pleasures. Additionally, they both demonstrate the potential for the abject and the extraordinary—and sometimes reveal the extraordinary in the abject. Julia Kristeva writes of food and the abject that:

Food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection. When the eyes see or the lips touch that skin on the surface of milk—harmless, thin as a sheet of cigarette paper, pitiful as a nail paring—I experience a gagging sensation. (1982: 2-3)

For Kristeva, the experience of abjection is intimately concerned with boundaries and borders, and she observes that it is “not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (1982: 4). Following Kristeva’s insights, Deborah Lupton observes: “Food and eating ... are intensely emotional experiences that are intertwined with embodied sensations and strong feelings ... They are central to individuals’ subjectivity and their sense of distinction from others” (1998: 36).

In this light, and borrowing again from Michelis, we would suggest that prose poetry about food “combines the mundane with the sublime” (2005: 81), creating a tension that

speaks to the complex borderlines between insides and outsides. Both poetry and food are concerned with the processes of ingestion and excretion, gaining “interpretative meaning” during their “procession” through the body (Michelis 2005: 82). Such a “procession” may suggest the sordid or grotesque, but it may also evoke ideas about creativity and the production of something new. In these terms, prose poetry and food, as well as prose poetry about food, operate in spaces that are always at least doubly encoded—objects of devourment in which the quotidian is inextricable from the transformative. As a result, these artefacts are both concerned with the material and the bodily, while also conjuring the imaginative, the figurative and the spectral—even, for example, invoking memory and the ghostly.

Thus, prose poems about food often provide challenging and defamiliarizing visions and, in making use of figurative tropes, they allow food to speak eloquently, as it were, about numerous personal, social and political issues. Such works connect to a wide range of human experiences and responses, including feelings of discontent and dissatisfaction, political protest or disruptive and subversive points of view. Catalano’s prose poem quoted earlier, for example, offers an implicit criticism of warfare and the starvation it so often causes. Other prose poems address social and political issues by connecting the consumption of food with various positive and negative values along with the assumptions connected to interpersonal and broader social relationships. In such works, food often becomes a kind of touchstone to generate a range of complex associations connected to pleasure or disgust.

For example, the North American Peter Johnson's prose poem, "Snails" exploits such ideas with a compelling sense of irony and an almost casual tonality, even as it addresses significant social and political issues. The poem simultaneously conjures ideas of abjection and pleasure by presenting an image of eating snails—which some people find delicious, and others cannot stomach because of their association with dirt and slime. (And, furthermore, in some cultures, snails also symbolize prejudicial views about border-crossing sexual preferences (see Cordeiro-Rodrigues 2017: 240)). Johnson's prose poem begins:

I admire the brute dampness of snails. I ate them once in a little restaurant outside Toronto. A medium-sized war was going on, and I was dating a girl I skipped school for. We'd go to the zoo and watch the orangutans regurgitate. We'd toss peanuts to the elephants, or wave to giraffes, hoping for their approval.

The poem delights in its fast-moving associations as well as being deeply salutary, asking the reader to move from the idea of eating a creature characterized by "brute dampness"—the word "brute" foregrounding what is in opposition to the "human"—to the sight of orangutans regurgitating. This explicit foregrounding of the divide between the human and the nonhuman is reminiscent of Kristeva's acute observation that "Food becomes abject only if it is a border between two distinct entities or territories. A boundary between nature and culture, between the human and the

nonhuman" (1982: 75).

Orangutans, among other great apes, only practice regurgitation when in captivity, so the image emphasizes the discrepancies involved in keeping wild creatures in zoos, and it also connects subliminally back to the idea that the thought (or actuality) of eating snails may cause some people to retch. These troubling images of consumption, exploitation, gustatory pleasure and regurgitation—along with the almost throwaway reference to tossing peanuts to elephants in the rather ridiculous hope "for their approval"—further emphasizes the problematic nature of the human-animal relationships depicted and the equally problematic values associated with them.

Johnson's prose poem then briefly considers another kind of consumption—of "cubes of hash"—before ironically pondering the nature of "God the Forgetful", saying:

It had become hard to like God, or depend on Him for the simplest chores. Even now wars rage on, babies still exploding from wombs minus arms and legs. You can't even turn on the TV without hearing someone's daughter explain to a wide-eyed audience how she had sex with nine guys and one woman to earn money for a home entertainment center.

These almost satirical and confronting lines join the eating of snails and orangutan regurgitation to a larger consideration of arbitrary human misfortune and the way in which all kinds of bodily pleasures have been co-opted in a capitalist

world for the purposes of achieving fairly trivial consumerist satisfactions—and these ideas are all the more troubling because the tropes of consumption mentioned include potentially important matters, such as religious belief and sex, as well as watching television. As the poem concludes by returning to the image of eating snails, this signals a broad sense of general bewilderment, anxiety and absurdity, as well as some amusement: "Makes me wonder why I'm back in Toronto, outside a jazz club, eating snails, watching an unmarked aircraft descend upon the city."

In Johnson's prose poem, references to food invoke memory and an unresolved—and, in many respects, unsatisfactory—sense of a life lived in a society dedicated to various, sometimes gross or exploitative forms of consumption and display. The poem employs its image of eating snails as a prompt to travel back through time. It also exploits and expands the unappealing associations that snails have for many readers until these doubtful associations reach widely into a broad social and political critique. As a species of amuse-bouche, this work provides a taste of the larger feast contained in Johnson's numerous books of prose poetry, signalling the rather acidic flavours of much of his penetrating writing.

Hetherington's prose poem, "Apples" also links food and memory, but with a markedly different emphasis. The work opens by considering how a specific, quotidian image of food may not only suggest, through association, a journal, but also a range of related experiences:

Green apples in a large bowl and a journal in which you wrote

about Spain and its oranges. We unwrapped jamón, building an architecture of food. Gulls joined us, the air floating with their cries. Slow conversations wrapped our furniture and an astringency of perception clarified our eyes.

The emphasis in these lines is not only on memory but on ways of understanding the larger world, as well as on ways of understanding the meanings and feelings that attach to the human relationship at the centre of the work.

Monique Truong observes in an interview that food may be:

a way of time traveling. For example, from where we're now sitting, we can see the fig tree in my backyard. I always think when I'm standing underneath that fig tree, picking a ripe fig and eating it, that this is an act, a flavor, and an experience that people have had for centuries around many parts of the world. It makes me feel connected to history ... Your whole body responds, not just your tongue. (2016: 4)

Similarly, Hetherington's prose poem suggests that eating and travelling back through time is associated with a renewed clarity of thought—especially in its phrase 'an astringency of perception'—and perhaps also with a connected degree of disillusionment. In this context, food is not merely something to be consumed, but becomes symbolic of what connects people and enables them to converse. Probyn's statement about the way "eating brings together a cacophony of feelings,

hopes, pleasures and worries, as it orchestrates experiences" (2005: 3) is directly relevant. In presenting the idea of "an architecture of food" this prose poem suggests that food is part of the intricate structures of mind that help to organize and map—or "orchestrate"—human feeling and its idealisations.

This relatively short work proceeds to develop its emphasis on observation and perception:

You touched
watercolour to paper,
releasing the city's
light, as if tears were
seeing. We climbed a
monastery's long steps
and felt our bones as
voluted stone. The city
was a spread mosaic—
houses, multicolours—
and piquancy filled our
mouths; a stadium's
bowl plumped with fruits of light.

As art is made from the "astringent" perceptions mentioned earlier in the prose poem, the phrase "as if tears were seeing" conjures more fully the unspecified sadness that the word astringency first suggested. The couple has come to a realisation that is both salutary (as was Johnson's poem) and liberating. Their sense of connection to the past is affirmed by the image of bones as "voluted stone"—it is almost as if they are made of the same material as the old monastery—but they are also given an expansive vision of the city as a "spread mosaic", along with piquant flavours. Eating and tasting has by now become a symbol for different, and deeper, ways of experiencing and perceiving the world and of reassessing memory; and of engaging intimately with both the large and small. The poem's initial image of a bowl of apples has now become a lit stadium and, as the small becomes

large, so the large becomes part of the protagonists' intimate experiences of the world. This poem offers a way into a sizeable meal through providing a taste of what may be to come.

In the poems of Harryette Mullen, food and eating are mapped in different and distinctly bodily terms, conjuring a politics of consumption in which the female self is marketed for devourment. Susie Campbell notes that "Mullen chooses ... an active subversion of language, working through it to activate its gaps, overlaps, wrinkles, and obvious seams" (2022: 73) and in an untitled prose poem in *S*PeRM*K*T*, for example, specific attention is given to the ways in which, as Deborah M. Mix notes, "women's bodies and desires are only tools for (usually male) gawker's pleasure" (2007: 47). This work is premised on a vision of "pink and white femininity" (49) that is not only erotically charged, but also racially encoded:

It must be
white, a
picture of
health, the
spongy napkin
made to blot
blood. Dainty
paper soaks up
leaks that
steaks splayed
on trays are
oozing. Lights
replace the
blush red flesh
is losing.
Cutlets leak.
Tenderloins
bleed pink
light. Plastic
wrap bandages
marbled slabs
in sanitary
packaging
made to be

stained. A
three-hanky
picture of
feminine
hygiene. (Mullen 2007: 71)

The emphasis on purity demarcates a "softened and virginal space" (Mix 2007: 38) that seeks to contain the unruly female body, which requires strict controls in order to protect society from its abject messiness. The chaos of the body threatens to overwhelm: it oozes and seeps, escaping the proper limits of the self to leave unsightly blots and stains that must be cleansed from public display.

It is a vision of disruption that echoes Holly Iglesias's description of women's prose poetry, in which "distinctions of genre dissolve ... the thin membrane between inside and outside melts ... volatile as a quivering lip, excess threatens to spill over the rim" (2004: 57). Indeed, Nina Budabin McQuown observes how in a "device mimetic of the discharges of child birth and sexual arousal", women in literary works "drip and leak as a sign of their excessive consumption of food and sex", evoking a fear of a sexuality that "cannot be disciplined to desire only within the boundaries of designated social institutions such as marriage" (2014: 1340). To return to Rossetti's "Goblin Market", for example, Laura trades a lock of hair for the chance to eat the fruit of the goblin men, arousing an insatiable appetite. After it is left unfulfilled, she trudges home, "her pitcher dripping all the way": "She suck'd and suck'd and suck'd the more/ Fruits which that unknown orchard bore;/ She suck'd until her lips were sore;/ Then flung the emptied rinds away" (n.d.: n.p.).

While the leaking, porous female body might be read in terms of its subversive potential—for its

voracious hungers, for example—the boundaries of the proper feminine self are persistently reasserted within patriarchal society. Susan Bordo observes how the body is both a medium and a text of culture, "a surface on which the central rules, hierarchies, and even metaphysical commitments" are inscribed via the fabrication of aesthetic ideals (1995: 65). These tensions result in a contradiction—in which the female body must be "both lusciously inviting and hygienically sealed, lubricious and virginal at once" (Mix 2007: 55); or, as Mullen describes, a "three-hanky picture of feminine hygiene" (71), a hermetic space that might only be accessed by the yearning of the male consumer. In line with Bordo, these dual demands function to try to ensure the docility of an "other" understood in terms of the need for management, containment and control.

Designated as flesh, the female body is also transformed into an object of devourment, trapped within a gendered (and racialized) economics of possession and consumption. Budabin McQuown observes how women have always been "identified with the materiality of meat", linked to the notion of edibility and therefore also animality (2014: 1340). Mullen exposes how the imbrication of women and food is not only depersonalising in terms of rejecting subjectivity, but is also annihilating, as the body is broken into its constituent parts—"Cutlets" and "tenderloins"—and designated a value according to the delectations of the consumer (2007: 71). Moreover, the exhibition of flesh is portrayed in pornographic terms, "splayed on trays", for instance, the "blush" of the meat amplified under strategically placed lights (2007: 71).

Similarly, in Miller's "Butcher" (2019: 7), the carcass of a suckling pig is

figured as titillation, its “naked body” stretching “along the counter like a pornographic invitation, its stomach zippered open to expose crisp ribs through creamy layers of porcelain white fat”. The shop window also offers a bodily display, “frocked with oily rows of goose-bumped ducks, thick straps of stripped tender pink lamb, grey intestinal worms of sausage” (7), a voyeuristic and gastronomic delight in which insides and outsides collide. Importantly, the gaze here is inverted, rejecting the masculine longing for meat and attending, instead, to the horrors of the body-as-flesh, in which women and animals are positioned as both property and product.

The protagonist recognizes this connection, and its placement within an erotics of the marketplace:

a counter of glass and steel so bright she cannot help but stare into the red spaces of her face, like something gynaecological—the startle of a beaked speculum, the surprise of gloved hands searching inwards (2019: 7).

Both Mullen and Miller emphasize how bodies for devourment are predicated on youthfulness; on a disturbing desire for childishness that reveals a cultural grotesquerie: devouring the young. For Mullen, that the flesh bleeds indicates its freshness, the “spongy napkin” implying menstruation, while in “Butcher”, it is the child-prey that is craved, such as “tender” lamb and the suckling pig, its face “as round and full as a boy’s” and possessing “wet baby eyes” (2019: 7). The child is traditionally regarded as a symbol of futurity, but in these instances, it signifies an economy of power obsessed with (masculine) control. The rendering of these bodies as flesh

for consumption parallels the training of unruliness into docility, as women, children and animals—“others” associated with revulsion and the potential for disorder—need to be “eaten up”, and thus controlled, by patriarchal norms.

The violation of the body is imagined as inseparable from the sexual, a suggestion of punishment and the urge to discipline the transgressive, chaotic other, depicted as both female and animal. The decapitation of the pig is described as “resignation, or a kiss” (2019: 7), for example, implying a disturbed politics of consent. Furthermore, the reference to vaginal penetration—the “beaked speculum”, the “gynaecological” examination—plays upon psychoanalytic theories of the female body as an abyss, “the cannibalising black hole from which all life comes and to which all life returns ... as a source of deepest terror” (Creed 1993: 25). Associated with annihilation and the “obliteration of self” (28), it must be destroyed in order to retain the borderlines of social order.

The body that is eaten is not only entirely overcome but is also now transformed, forced to feed the system that produced the conditions of its destruction. In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Carol Adams argues that masculinity is associated with meat eating, observing how “eating animals acts as a mirror and representation of patriarchal values” because the male gaze sees “not the fragmented flesh of dead animals but appetizing food” (2011: 241). Likewise, Western culture relies on fragmentation and “forgetting” to exploit the female body, demanding it adhere to the demands of male appetites. In this dynamic, the female subject is consistently denied autonomy, forced to look acquiescently at, or be victim of, the conditions of her oppression.

Nonetheless, the signs of violence remain, in the soiled napkins and dirtied “dainty paper” (Mullen 2007: 71) and in the “tang of bleach” that cannot quite disguise the smell of blood (Miller 2019: 7). In this way, Mullen’s and Miller’s amuse-bouches critique the very meals they portend.

Nin Andrews’ “Mashed Potatoes” and Atherton’s “Eggs” use “staple” food items to convey post-feminist anger at patriarchal stereotypes of female happiness. Mashed potatoes are a comfort food but, in Andrews’ prose poem, there is no comfort for the wife and daughter in this space:

They were my father’s favorite—with craters of butter, and sometimes a dollop of sour cream. It was the way he ate them I remember, his whole body bent over, his face close to the plate like his boxer at the dog bowl. My mother watched and then didn’t watch, her eyes glazing into the distance that was always there between them like a sacred room no one entered. I pictured it as one of those paperweights full of snow—a tiny foreign land where princes and princesses fell asleep in fairy tales but never woke. No one ever kissed or rescued them. There was no waking up in our childhood home—only the dirty glossy surface of something that once must have looked like hope. (2020: n.p.)

The father is described “like his boxer dog”, an aggressive metaphor that, coupled with the image of his “whole body bent over, his face close to the plate”, dominates the meal. There is no mention of the mother’s or daughter’s plates or meal—they are unfulfilled. Indeed, in the first part of this poem, rather than eat, the

oppression eats away at them, so that they become the prose poem’s negative space. This is also reflected in the prose poem form which squeezes the family members together and acts as a visual metaphor for a dining table.

Importantly, Andrews subversively undercuts the growing tension and the father’s menace in her use of this form. The tight space of the prose poem, which is overrun by patriarchal animalism, is disrupted or challenged by the form’s rejection of conventional lines of poetry. In an extension of Luce Irigaray’s discussions on female sexual pleasure, Joy Fehr argues that the prose poem is subversively able to voice women’s experience: “The tension that results from the conflation of prose and poetry, from the challenge of the line(s) [in prose poetry], presents even more opportunities for women to disrupt conventional forms and to resist the patriarchal containment that often is implicit in those [separate] forms” (2001: 2). In this way, in Andrews’ prose poem, the father’s power is limited by being hemmed in by the form and ultimately restricted from conventional progression and satisfaction.

Importantly, the mother’s gaze becomes subverted as she “watched and then didn’t watch”. This moment, where she rejects the power inherent in the gaze and instead, prioritizes the “glaze” triggers a kind of fugue state or inner life of escapism. If, as John Berger argues, “Women watch themselves being looked at” (1972: 46), the gendered dynamics of the gaze are problematized when the mother turns this gaze inward. It is at this turning point—where the daughter foregrounds her mother’s distance from her husband—that the prose poem’s tight, claustrophobic space

opens out in broadly resonating ways. This illustrates Holly Iglesias's identification of the prose poem as a pressure cooker and explores her argument that, "women articulat[e] the constraints of gender in prose poems, battling against confinement, boxing inside the box" (2004: 29).

However, when the distance across the table metamorphoses into "a sacred room no one entered", the cramped space becomes roomy but also vacant. This suggests the mother's subjectivity has, in a crucial way, been hollowed out and that one of the daughter's imperatives must be to escape the same fate. The daughter is to some extent transported away from this menacing domesticity and the associated threat of her father, along with the disappointment and servitude of her mother, when the room takes on the magic of the snow globe. Her quotidian existence becomes extraordinary as it changes into a dream of living happily ever after—but the image of the snow globe is powerfully ambiguous, simultaneously challenging this dream through a post-feminist lens. In the stilled fantasy world, "No one ever kissed or rescued them". Cassandra Stover argues that "The post-feminist princess embodies ideals of feminism while representing the pressures and entrapment of pre-feminist culture" (2012: 4), and the jeopardy of this situation is brilliantly realized by Andrews' prose poem. It is implied that the daughter's fantasy is one of autonomy and escape, of never returning to the family home. In such a scenario, the snow globe or "paperweight" becomes her weapon, even as the world inside it is weirdly static and inaccessible.

In Atherton's "Eggs", the narrator challenges her lover's sexualization and infantilization of her, signalled in his gift of a Bunnykins eggcup. As

Probyn argues, "Practices of preparing and eating food are, of course, highly sensual and sometimes sexual" (2005: 62), so when her lover encourages her to "dip in the tip of ... toast soldiers" to the soft egg, the imagined breakfast has explicitly sexual connotations. The columns of toast are phallic symbols and the egg represents a vagina—and there is also a play on oral sex and eating:

You buy me a Royal Doulton
Bunnykins eggcup for Easter;
on its side, a picture of
anthropomorphic field rabbits
sheltering under a red
umbrella. Your card says it's to
hold my boiled egg upright;
for when I dip in the tip of
buttery toast soldiers. But I'm
not ready to eat your eggs; I
don't want to be another of
your lovers, served deli-style at
your kitchen bench. Instead I
imagine that when my egg has
cooked for four minutes in
your saucepan; you turn and
tell me I'm as perfect as that
egg. But all I hear is 'First
Murderer: What, you egg!
Ovum. Zygote. On Good
Friday it rains and you take me
to bed; my ovaries greet you,
sunny side up. (2018: 12)

The casualness of the speaker's lover treating women as unremarkable sex objects—signalled by them being "served deli style" to him—is superbly impugned even as the prose poem both suggests and problematizes the idea that there may be other, more pleasurable ways of eating and sharing pleasure.

The narrator's initial fantasy is that her lover sees her as a unique and independent woman, "as perfect as an egg", but this is disrupted by her image of him and the toast soldiers as Macbeth and his murderers.

Referring to the brutal murder of Lady Macduff's young son—who is referred to as an egg in Shakespeare's play—the narrator gives priority to her ovaries, womanhood and, implicitly, motherhood as she overtakes the egg motif towards the end of the prose poem. The humorous last line, where the protagonist's "ovaries greet" her lover, "sunny side up", invokes the "amuse" of the amuse-bouche. Rachel Trousdale posits that "Humor is a rare means to intimacy in the poet's world, a form of communication at once private and public" (2012: 121). Humorous poetry can capture and disclose the politicisation of the poet's private space by voicing the otherwise unvoiced. For women, humour can provide an opportunity to critique dominant culture by "disrupting and asserting authority and often, [provides] a means by which women poets discuss social and sexual mores" (Darlington 2009: 330). Invoking the narrator's ova becomes a postfeminist moment of agency and power.

Overall, both Andrews's "Mashed Potatoes" and Atherton's "Eggs" can be said, metaphorically, to offer small bites that open out into hefty meals. Where the former explores domestic violence and escaping an oppressive future via a father's meal of soft, buttery mashed potatoes, the latter lobbies for women's sexual and reproductive rights via a boiled egg. Mullen's untitled prose poem and Miller's "Butcher" also lobby for a different and more clear-sighted view of women and the way that they have been constructed by often predatory patriarchal norms. These prose poems challenge the reader to understand the way the female body has been misrepresented, violated and problematized by patriarchy and its attitudes and assumptions. Johnson's "Snails" and

Hetherington's "Apples" use specific images of food as portals into considering larger issues associated with memory and knowledge, and in order to explore the salutary nature of much human experience, a good deal of it tied to unsatisfactory notions of eating and consumption in general. All of these prose poems foreground the persistent power and importance of the connections between food and poetry, and demonstrate aspects of poetry's consideration of food to surprise, delight, horrify, subvert or appal—employing images of food and eating to draw the reader into considering broader existential issues.

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