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12. Food for Thought: An Introduction to Contemporary Issues in Food Studies

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Abstract

This article invites its readers to engage with the growing interest in food studies as an academic discipline. In the first place, it examines the rather strange phenomenon in which the importance of food and its consumption in world history is not corresponded by scholarly inquiry. In fact, historically, practically no one wrote on the subject. This requires us to return to the Bible, to the very roots of western civilisation, where food and pleasure appear sinful. A vivid contrast is provided by the contemporary world, where the presence of food programmes, celebrity chefs and similar has become global. Once we have an historical perspective, we can reach an understanding of what comprises food studies. The second half of the article examines our current interest in if not obsession with healthy diets. We also scrutinize the counterargument that proposes that we tend to understate the role science, in the form of convenience, has played in recent food history. The article concludes with suggestions as to how food studies can enrich our understanding of the arts.

Keywords

Food studies, global economy and culture, foodie, foodways, food systems

In a volume dedicated to diversity, whether encountered in linguistics, literature, or other cultural manifestations, it is only right that food studies finds its just place in the discussion. This emergent and expanding discipline examines the diversity and interconnectedness of the global economy and culture, questioning many common assertions about the way we eat, drink, and live. Food studies is both an eclectic and potentially limitless field of studies.

Such a grand assertion might read to some as convincing but to others hollow. Consequently, I intend to avoid assessments of what is right and wrong. Instead, I will lead us down another path, namely, to try and make sense of a large subject in a few pages or so, hopefully inspiring some to pursue their own research as a result. I have therefore organized this paper into two sections. In the first, I briefly trace the role food has played historically, prior to attempting to tackle the arguably impossible task of concisely defining what food studies is. In the second, I will outline three contemporary issues. These comprise our common concern for a healthy diet, the opposing argument for convenience, and, finally, I will make a few suggestions as to how food studies can enrich our understanding of the arts. These ambitious tasks require rigorous selection, undertaken, I believe, without cherry-picking the

evidence. Rather than overload readers with a voluminous bibliography, I will refer often but not exclusively to two classic introductions to food studies: Warren Belasco's *Food: The Key Aspects* (2008) and a more recent publication, Willa Zehn's *Food Studies, a Hands-on Guide* (2019). For those wishing to find out more, these are good places to begin. Pointing out the paradoxical nature of beliefs always forms an integral part of my methodology.

Belasco's opening page informs us that "[f]ood is the first of the essentials of life, the world's largest industry, our most frequently indulged pleasure, the core of our most intimate social relationships. Despite its importance, food is often taken for granted, especially by academics, who have long considered food matters to be too coarse for scholarly attention" (1). His grand assertion invites us to see not only the fundamental role food plays in our lives, but how many disciplines that hypothesis implicates. If we accept that food is indeed "the world's largest industry", then we enter the realm of economics and globalization that runs along that lengthy chain from producer to consumer across seas and continents. If it is "our most frequently indulged pleasure" located at the core of social relationships, then sociology, psychology, and culture must be examined, too.

Zehn's opening chapter promotes two intertwined ideas. First, that our culture is much more foodie than, say, twenty or thirty years ago, and second, that contemporary students are likely to be foodies themselves (12). The first point is difficult to repudiate. For instance, the *OED* provides five examples of the term "celebrity chef", one from 1941, while the others date from this millennium ("Celebrity Chef, *N.*"). That said, it must be pointed out that the first use refers to a chef who cooks for celebrities rather than the contemporary meaning of a chef who has become a celebrity due to public recognition of their consummate skill. In some instances, which the future might clarify, it is not always clear in day-to-day discourse whether a wedge is being driven between a professional chef, like Ferran Adrià, Alain Ducasse, René Redzepi, or Thomas Keller, and those whose career is based primarily on media presence, such as the notorious Salt Bae or the much more likeable Julia Child, as well as that host of TV chefs, such as Jamie Oliver, whose programmes and franchises are so popular.

Zehn's emphasis on media presence bases itself on two important premises, which may help clarify her second proposal, students as foodies. Reporting events such as the *S. Pellegrino's* "The World's 50 Best Restaurants" is constant if not growing. Coverage extends to issues such as why this restaurant has risen or fallen in the list, the increasing geographical spread of prize-winners, and the individual awards, such as "The World's Best Female Chef", "Champions of Change", or "Estrella Damm's Chef's Choice Award". Expansion into diversity reflects not only a growing interest on behalf of the first world, but also the expanding market for food culture aimed at new consumers in developing countries themselves, South America being

the prime example. The Michelin Guide Award Ceremonies attract even more media attention to the extent that it is difficult to avoid *not* hearing about the latest three-star establishment, though we rarely hear about those chefs who turn down such awards. In short, the awards themselves and the literature about them both contribute to the extensive presence of elite food culture in the media. And it is perhaps the connection between “foodie” and “elite” that created controversy amongst people in general and students in particular. If “foodie” had clearer associations with other food issues such as food security, perhaps they would have accepted the term more readily.

The question that now has to be answered is why food studies has taken so long to materialize as a discipline, as all this emphasis on the contemporary scene lacks historical perspective. Belasco’s pronouncement looks paradoxical: he stresses both ubiquity and absence in the same breath. After all, the Bible is full of references to food. We all know that Adam and Eve ate a very special fruit. If we look at the story of Jacob and Esau in Genesis 25 and 27, a classic account of pastoral life, Esau gives away his birthright for a meal. In the New Testament, in John 2, we witness the miracle of transforming water into wine at the marriage at Cana, later to become the subject of Paolo Veronese’s huge canvas hung in the Louvre. Less to do with celebration than necessity, we would turn to Matthew 14, where five loaves and two fish feed five thousand people, additionally leaving twelve baskets of leftovers. Other examples abound elsewhere; let me just mention a couple: the Dutch Golden Age still-life pictures of food; Marcel Proust’s trigger for his vast remembrance that derives from a humble cup of tea and madeleine.

It seems bewildering therefore that on the one hand food has a considerable presence in culture but at the same time it has received little or scarce attention in academia until recent times. How has this come about? As a contrast to the marriage at Cana, we should observe a different scenario of celebration, Belshazzar’s feast, as narrated in Daniel 5. Like at Cana, we find wine, but the scene does not represent the celebration of a legitimate event but the ostentation of wealth and earthly power in Babylon, something that will be evident when Daniel explains the writing on the wall; Belshazzar will be murdered that same night. Enjoyment is legitimate at Cana but it is excessive and ungodly in Babylon. The difficulty that arises in separating the moral from the immoral partly explains why food studies has had a low profile. It is specifically the association of pleasures of the body with sin that has prevailed for centuries, despite the counterculture provided by, amongst many others, the writings of François Rabelais or the rustic paintings of Pieter Breughel, where the pleasures of the table take on a central role.

The idea that pleasure of eating at celebrations forms part of a culture or even a civilization will always be an awkward point to prove, as for almost all of humankind’s history, we have struggled to survive on a diet that is highly dependent on one

cereal alone, in other words, we have eaten not to live but to survive. This has been the lot of most of the world's population for most of our history down to current times. As an extreme example, the historian Frank Dikötter points out in *Mao's Great Famine* (2010) that 45 million Chinese citizens perished as a result of failed agricultural reform in the guise of collectivisation during "The Great Leap Forward", between 1958 and 1962. In George Orwell's *1984* (1949), it is debatable whether enjoying sex or food is the greater crime though, as Belasco advises, "[t]he connections between food and sex are primal. Both are central to biological reproduction and to the establishment of strong social ties" (35). But if food is the real culprit here, that simply begs the question of whether for the enforcers of totalitarianism the act of eating or forming "strong social ties" weighs more as an indication of guilt. In other words, austerity has two clearly identifiable constituents: the extent to which it is necessary for the physical survival of others; and the extent to which the act of eating together is potentially transgressive, not for what is put in the mouth but for the potential threatening discourse that might issue forth.

This symbiosis, Zehn points out, has a long history in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. In contrast, in the classical tradition, I am thinking of Plato in particular, rationality is located in social gatherings. Arguably the most influential of all, *The Symposium*, evolves not only from togetherness but from the conviviality of a social meal. This simply does not work for Christianity. As Zehn points out, the pleasures of eating are inseparable from gluttony, one of the seven deadly sins. She examines the various types of excess articulated by Thomas Aquinas, of which I would highlight two: *nimis*, eating too much, and *ardenter*, with too much enthusiasm or eagerness. Zehn argues that the latter is the worst form of gluttony. The adulterations and simplification of Aquinas's thought, evident in the countless websites run by many Christian organisations, promote the idea that gluttony is nothing more than excess.

This might sound like hair-splitting, but there is more to the picture than that. If we return to *Summa Theologica*, 2:2 148, we will see that Aquinas himself is well aware of the fluctuating status that gluttony has in the ranking of the worst sins one can commit. His emphasis on the link to sex, or concupiscence, a much closer translation, would suggest that the more libidinous the effects of eating are, the worse the sin, which would seem to underline precisely what *ardenter* infers. Hence, that typical British caricature of the bloated eighteenth-century curate, so stuffed with capons and port that he is unable to move from his seat, is a tad less sinful than the rake, whose eagerness for good food is matched by his desire for the youthful maidservant serving at table. The articulation of these differences leaves unanswered a problem raised in the Bible. The case of Jacob and Esau suggests the meals have a deep social relevance in early patriarchal societies, both in law and ritual, hence, the birthright (Genesis 25) and the patriarch's blessing (Genesis 27). But what about the miracle performed at Cana? We could argue that moderation is the antidote to gluttony, but

that runs up against two obstacles: the prohibition of drinking alcohol prescribed most emphatically by Islam, and second, that excess is likely to occur in legitimising celebrations such as marriages.

Instead of trying to unravel an extremely knotty problem, a satisfactory answer might propose that the role of gluttony and excess remains controversial because there is a distinctly grey area between “enough” and “too much” that becomes even greyer when celebrations become raucous. The Christian emphasis on frugality as the right path to follow, that we should eat to live rather than enjoy food, is eloquently expounded in Karen Blixen/Isak Dinesen’s 1957 novella *Babette’s Feast*, turned into a highly successful film by Gabriel Axel in 1987, an adaptation that transfers the action from Norway to Denmark. Good food and wine animate the otherwise abstemious and incommunicative neighbours. As the dinner progresses, they become more sociable, a situation that might have been produced by the products themselves, a view that is, I suggest, a simplification. We are not witnessing a watertight case of *in vino veritas*. Zehn, Belasco, and countless other scholars emphasize that a communal meal is a social event, and it is the coming-together that stimulates conversation and neighbourliness, aided and abetted by excellent food, and wine. Blixen’s tale shows how well things have turned out, whereas the Christmas dinner narrated by James Joyce at the end of the first chapter of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1914-15) illustrates how social meals can have the reverse effect, bringing to the surface the problems of nutrition, religion, gender, history, politics, and so on that riddle turn-of-the-century Dublin. Both accounts share a common platform: a social meal stimulates communication.

We are now close to understanding if not defining food studies. It certainly deals with food but, as Belasco states, “[i]t is not only a collection of products that can be used for statistical or nutritional studies. It is also and at the same time, a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior” (15). In other words, it involves a study of one or various products both in their most elemental form and/or the semiotics of that product. To take one example, which we will return to later: quinoa. We could and should study its cultivation, its role in the diet of the indigents who consume it, its exportation to the first world, its place in the western diet, its availability in different social locations, and so on. These are all material subjects. Yet we could move to a different level, though neither a superior nor inferior one, simply something different. We come on to the significance of its consumption, what quinoa communicates beyond its nutritional value. Why do we eat it? Why do some people prefer it over kilometre-zero products? If we ordered a dish in a restaurant, what does that say about us and the establishment? And so on.

Zehn gives the following working definition, distinguishing between food systems and foodways. The former focuses on “production and distribution issues” (19), the latter “consider[s] how food events impact consumption habits, as well as the foods

themselves [...] this term grows out of its connections with folklore and folkways” (20). I would add that *Food and Foodways* is also the name of one of the major academic journals dealing with the anthropology of food. Zehn also pleads with us not to lose sight of the fact that the distinction between the two concepts is not clear-cut.

Yet, the briefest survey of university courses round the world will show how deeply rooted this division is. For example, the European Master in Food Studies offered by Wageningen University & Research, The Netherlands, University College Cork, Ireland, AgroParisTech, France, and Lund University, Sweden, is designed primarily for students with a BSc in Food Technology; lab practice in their curriculum is required. Partner companies include Tetra Pak, Mondeléz, Unilever, and Nestlé. A rather different angle is taken by the University of Toronto, where a Minor programme in food studies is offered by Liberal Arts, concentrating on the historical and social aspects. Similar programmes in arts and social sciences are being offered more frequently. Perhaps in your own institution that is already the case, and if not, will soon be.

Foodways might then appear to be a bandwagon on which everyone wants to jump, as predicted by Zehn’s remarks on the presence of food in the media in such places as the Food Channel and YouTube. Similarly, the nexus between science, and social science and arts confirms the contemporary belief that borders should be crossed and interdisciplinarity fostered. To use an epistemological metaphor, it is precisely the separation between mind and body, so deeply entrenched in our culture, that has held back food studies for generations. Belasco puts it more eloquently: “Such issues require that we think about matters political, historical, economic, sociocultural, and scientific *all at once*. As generalists, we study food as a *system*. Such holistic thinking actually restores our sense of power and humanity, for when it comes to eating, humans *are* generalists, i.e. omnivores” (7).

There are few more powerful words amongst educators nowadays than “holistic”. We cannot understand the role of snacking, or grazing as it is sometime called, without considering the declining role of the formal meal in our culture (foodways). At the same time, snacking increases our sugar intake, so questions of health and economics enter the scene (food systems). In short, this is a real chicken-and-egg puzzle, as the two concepts are inextricable. Perhaps, behind Belasco’s joyful assertiveness of the role of the humanities in food studies lies the belief that the “partner companies” do not want us to know that much about the science that lies behind their products, so it becomes our duty to find out. Whatever the right or wrong of the matter, food studies is essentially multi- and interdisciplinary.

In the second part of this paper, three issues will be analysed: our concern for a healthy diet; the sceptical riposte formulated by Rachel Laudan; and finally, how food studies can contribute to our understanding of the arts. Let us begin with the first subject.

One of the world's top restaurants is Eleven Madison Park in New York, run by the Swiss-born Chef, Daniel Humm. Its ten to eleven course tasting menu currently costs \$365 per person. It is expensive but not very different from similar establishments in the USA or Europe. Indeed, it would not take much effort to find a more expensive establishment. What makes Eleven Madison Park unique is that, unlike its competitors, its offerings are completely plant-based.⁴² Humm's decision has been a recent one, the revamped Eleven Madison Park opened in 2021, abandoning the previous practice of serving dishes based on the ingredients and preparation of *haute cuisine*.⁴³ What motivated the change?

The date is significant; this new policy came into being during the second year of Covid. Catering, due to its labour-intensive structure, suffered tremendously during that time. It is certainly not an occupation that lends itself to telecommuting! During the pandemic, Humm and his team had not been idle, serving, as the restaurant's website informs us, over 1,000,000 meals "for frontline workers and underserved communities and distributed them to churches, shelters, and food banks" ("Eleven Madison Park"). Humm's charitable activities have not received as much publicity as, say, José Andrés and his World Central Kitchen, but the point here is not to emphasize the relative contribution of two individuals as much as to indicate that the world of fine-dining and charity work may go hand-in-hand.

This prepares us for tackling the thorny question of why Humm dropped caviar for kale. Humm, in numerous interviews available in print and online, states that reverting to the formula of his previous model was not an option; he felt the need to reinvent himself and fine dining. In other words, in financial terms, this change became nothing less than a huge gamble. He also plays the health card, as his most recent book illustrates through its title, *Eat More Plants* (2024). In addition, he emphasizes that the previous format was not sustainable, and here the stress lies not simply on the economics of managing a restaurant, but sustainability in its widest, most ecological meaning. In short, a plant-based restaurant represents a complete change of ideology in order to bring it in line with contemporary concerns about the survival of the planet, a trend which has a relatively short but nevertheless impactful history, particularly in Scandinavian cuisine. Those who might find Humm's reasoning suspect propose that he has astutely found a very successful new business formula long before any possible rival has done so. Whatever the ins and outs of the

⁴² As a caveat, it would be an interesting topic to see how "plant-based" and "vegan" interplay in discourse. When and by whom is one term preferred over the other?

⁴³ In a radical change of policy, Chief Humm has announced that from 14 October 2025, a non-plant-based menu will be available using protein derived from fish, shellfish and poultry. Subsequently, diners may opt either for the plant-based or the more traditional omnivore haute cuisine menu. Both cost \$365. However, it is noticeable that the discourse used on the restaurant's webpage suggests that plant-based represents the norm, and non-plant options are there if you so wish.

debate, the undeniable fact is that, since 2021, in the land of KFC and the hamburger, healthy dining has an establishment with three Michelin stars. To conclude, leaves need not lag behind lobster in the culinary stakes.

That might seem obvious till we recall that health and pleasure can become distant cousins. And the United States, the fast-food nation *par excellence*, provided an example that became global. During the nineteenth century, nutritional science, Zehn affirms, promoted products that were healthy rather than tasty (142). The most celebrated figure was John Harvey Kellogg, whose recipes for good health were satirized in Alan Parker's film, *The Road to Welville* (1994). It is certainly ironic, in the light of his crusade for health, that some of his breakfast cereals, due to their high sugar content, are now judged unhealthy. The United States is notorious for its obesity problem, by no means unique in the world, caused by what Belasco denotes as a "toxic food environment", brought about by "junk food advertising, [...] 'supersizing' of portions [...] loss of cooking skills [...] Obesity is a symptom of poverty, racism, and sexism" (95). In the light of such a damning pronouncement, it is not surprising that health concerns become paramount.

However healthier a more varied, more plant-based diet might be, its links to sustainability, surely one of its major reasons for being, remain tenuous, as the following example shows. Quinoa, a grain that originated in the Andean Highlands in Bolivia and Peru, is now visible in many supermarkets, especially in prepared lunch salads or for grazing at any hour of the day. To say that it is seen by many as a miracle food, gluten-free, containing fibre, antioxidants, plus a lengthy etcetera might be an exaggeration, yet only a slight one. What can go wrong with consuming this wonderful grain that even reached breakfast cereals, such as Cheerios Ancient Grains? Is it not an example of food diversity for a good cause?

Before answering, we have to consider two further issues, one having to do with foodways and the other with systems. Supporters of diversity always encounter one obstacle: Columbusing. This term refers to discovering something that was already there, indeed, the necessary first step that leads to cultural appropriation. That is perhaps inevitable, but the economic consequences can be devastating. Quinoa has become a cash crop, which has resulted in two damaging outcomes (Zehn 173). The increasing demand of the Global North has led to short-term gains for farmers, but over-production has led to decreasing soil quality, as fallow time has been reduced. One knock-on effect of cash crops, as is the case here, is that the communities that produce them cannot afford to buy their former staple for their own everyday use. This cycle of the causes and effects of supply and demand affect not simply quinoa but any crop that it is "discovered" and promoted in similar ways.

That leaves us with one final concern which will bring us back to Saint Augustine via J.H. Kellogg. Do we eat quinoa because it tastes good? That is a question I leave unanswered, but it forms part of what Zehn labels "this ideology of nutritionism."

The dietary advice that consumers receive prioritizes the consumption of specific nutrients and vitamins—while systematically decontextualizing how these nutrients and vitamins relate to broader systems of health and well-being” (142). As we saw, decontextualizing extends to ignoring the effects consumption unleashes on producers’ communities. A rather more pedestrian product that requires contextualisation is fruit juice. It is intuitively classified as healthy, despite the lack of fibre that induces consumption in large quantities, to judge from the discarded litre packs in my local gym. Very few people would eat a dozen or so oranges at one sitting, but many more would consume the equivalent in juice. In other words, on its own, taken in moderation, it is healthy, but healthiness requires us to examine our diet as a whole rather than fix our attention on one part of it. Such reasoning proceeds to consider one topic that remains almost a taboo: the extent to which nutritionism determines our food choices, rather than availability, cost, tradition, or preference. In our times, are people’s diets based primarily on what is believed to be healthy rather than what they like? To what extent is this ideology a familial rather than individual concern? The reason why this is an intriguing debate has a lot to do with the two gentlemen mentioned a few sentences back. Again, we have to reflect on the nexus between pleasure and eating. Have the frugality of the saint and the vegetarian puritanism of Kellogg gone global? Are we kidding ourselves when we consume sustainable coffee, tea, or chocolate? These are just some of the issues that face us in 2025 and beyond.

The concern for a healthy, sustainable diet often has its roots – if you excuse the pun – in the distrust of the technologization of food production. Nostalgia advertising, using names that conjure up an idyllic, rural past, partly obscures the industrial process. Think, for example, of the successful Italian firm Mulino Bianco (the white mill), or the American pancake company, Aunt Jemima (since 2021, Pearl Milling Company), or the widespread use of such words as “home-baked”. What does “fresh” mean nowadays? Modernity has replaced taste with convenience but not necessarily responsibility (Belasco 7). Distrust of science led to genetically modified food becoming labelled “Frankenstein food”, while the ultimate villain is currently ultra-processed food (UPF).

Nonetheless, as Zehn points out, even making a slice of toast puts science on show: “presliced bread was a radical technology” (119). A toaster is “radical”, too, if we consider the alternative systems that have been and are available. Besides, a toaster requires electricity, which is by no means universal. At the same time, the nutritional value of a slice of toast is minimal, hence the growing demand for healthier and more traditional cereals like spelt. What Zehn asks us to reconsider is the extent to which industrial food products are as bad as claimed and whether traditional products and methods are as good and healthy as their proponents would have us believe.

One vocal opponent of much health literature is the food historian Rachel Laudan, and in particular her controversial 2001 article, “Why We Should Love New, Fast, Processed Food.” Published over twenty years ago, its – presumably intentionally – provocative tone represents a critique of those who too rapidly dismiss industrialized food, including the powerful Slow Food Movement. She labels them “Culinary Lud-dites” (36). For reasons of space, I will just address three of her claims. “Fresh and natural”, she argues “has become an article of faith” (36). However, she asserts that a predilection for fresh and natural is a very modern idea, as humankind has for centuries expended great effort in improving the original. “Natural often tasted bad. Fresh meat was rank and tough, fresh milk warm and unmistakably a bodily excretion; fresh fruits (dates and grapes being rare exceptions outside the tropics) were inedibly sour, fresh vegetables bitter” (36-37). The art or technology of preservation, curing, and similar improved the digestibility and taste of food. What Laudan does not mention, but is also relevant here, is that the domestication of fruit and vegetables – to make them tastier and easier to digest – was accompanied by the domestication of animals for the same purpose. Second, Laudan believes that most national, traditional dishes are not only post-industrial but “a lot of them were dependent on [industrialisation]” (39). She proposes that “Hungarian goulash was unknown before the nineteenth century, and not widely accepted until after the invention of a paprika-grinding mill in 1859” (40). She provides many other examples.

The third point of interest to our discussion is the question of time. Both historical and literary evidence demonstrate that in agricultural societies, families dedicated much time to the preparation of food. As Laudan puts it,

Nor should we think it was only the British, not famed for their cuisine, who were delighted with industrialized foods. Everyone was, whether American, Asian, African, or European. In the first half of the twentieth century, Italians embraced factory-made pasta and canned tomatoes. In the second half of the century, Japanese women welcomed factory-made bread because they could sleep in a little longer instead of having to get up to make rice. Similarly, Mexicans seized on bread as a good food to have on hand when there was no time to prepare tortillas. Working women in India are happy to serve commercially made bread during the week, saving the time-consuming business of making chapatis for the weekend. (42)

This evocative passage expounds the well-known idea that modernity contributes to freeing women from repetitive, laborious, time-consuming tasks in the kitchen. I wonder, though, how many readers share Laudan’s effusiveness, evident in her word “delighted”, which lies a long way from a perfunctory “accepted” or a more moderate “welcomed”. “Delighted” is a strong term indeed.

So where are we now? Is there a way out of what seems to be a maze: if we eat healthy quinoa, we can be accused of Columbusing; if we eat UPF, it is convenient but unhealthy. I would propose two solutions. First, at the beginning of this essay, I mentioned that sometimes food studies hypotheses seem paradoxical, and hopefully that, rather than confusion, represents a valid view of reality. Many of the problems

must be approached from different perspectives, and it is precisely this complexity which we must embrace in order to achieve coherence. For example, is Humm's project sustainable or merely a shrewd example of capitalist enterprise? I would propose that one would be naïve to judge things in such a Manichean way. There is no reason a phenomenon should be exclusively one thing rather than the other. As it is such a successful enterprise, from what moral high ground is one justified in condemning it? Second, Laudan's article veers, it would seem, precisely towards such simplification. "Cultural Luddism" would not win a prize for linguistic diplomacy. However, Laudan does not mock wokeism and direct us all towards the paradise of Taco Bell. On the contrary, she argues that Luddites are nostalgic and essentially elitist, an argument that carries much weight, but additionally proposes that issues of taste and health should be separated from judgements on industrialized food products. Just because they emerge from a factory does not mean they are inherently unhealthy or, on the contrary, nutritious. The two strands of the discussion have to be disentangled, as one of the reasons for the current confusion about diets, and healthy diets in particular, stems from advertising and informative campaigns that serve one purpose: to sell through confusion, as the quinoa controversy demonstrates.

It also reveals another phenomenon that I mentioned earlier, namely the difference between food systems and foodways, and the rather hazy area that exists between the two. For example, the issues of supply and demand, the price hike for native consumers, are clearly matters that have identifiably material origins and consequences, whereas demand, if stimulated by the ideology of nutritionism, would seem to belong to the realm of foodways. However, if nutritionism is an ideology that affects demand, there is little point in trying to achieve a working model that explains where one ends and the other begins. That is precisely the contribution food studies accomplishes. Its interdisciplinary nature allows it to cross academic boundaries. Belasco's stress on the importance of generalists and holistic approaches reinforces this idea.

Our final topic, through a brief analysis of a well-known painting, underscores the situation even further. The artwork in question is *The Garden of Eden with the Fall of Man* (see Figure 1, p. 181) painted by two artists from the city of Antwerp: Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), and Jan Breughel the Elder (1568-1625). This picture can be viewed at the Mauritshuis in The Hague.⁴⁴ The museum also provides a short, informative video ("Jan Brueghel the Elder & Peter Paul Rubens"). We know that Rubens painted the human figures and horse, basically the material on the left, and Breughel, the animals and the rest. Whether or not we are interested in food studies,

⁴⁴ For a digital version of the painting and the information video, please follow this link to the Mauritshuis: <https://www.mauritshuis.nl/en/our-collection/artworks/253-the-garden-of-eden-with-the-fall-of-man>.

this painting reworks a highly familiar scene in which the Fall of Man is hastened by the disobedient woman, enhanced by the proximity of hand, apple, and serpent.



Figure 1: Jan Brueghel the Elder & Peter Paul Rubens, *The Garden of Eden with the Fall of Man*, 1615. Mauritshuis, The Hague. Reproduced with permission.

We can also note that the woman's upright position indicates hubris, in stark contrast to the humble, pliant, seated Adam. A standard reading would highlight gender roles, where evil runs down the tree through the hands of Eve; the apple is both close to Satan in her left whilst close to Adam in her right. We could also discuss the idyllic nature of the scene, evident in the vast catalogue of animals. We can see a domestic pooch by Eve's feet, local farm animals, and European species such as rabbits, dogs, coots, and mallards, and more exotic animals like lions, tigers, camels, and an emu or ostrich. If we had more space, we could discuss the iconography surrounding each beast, but suffice it to say that the scene falls in line with Isaiah's depiction of the messianic age, "[t]e wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them" (Isaiah 11:6). Disobedience will wreck everything, while there is no doubt as to who is to blame. The more beautiful the scene remains in our consciousness, the greater the loss we have suffered and the greater the blame that can be laid on Eve. As a curiosity, red hair, traditionally seen as transgressive, is perfectly acceptable in Eden.

Coming from food studies, other interesting proposals suggest themselves, though naturally you are invited to find more for yourselves. Idyllic beauty, judging from the two nude figures, involves, in the case of the male, a degree of muscularity, but

clearly does not demand the current requirement of a six-pack or anything else derived from nutritionism. Rather than an illustration of hubris, the figure of Eve, reinforced by the presence of an apple in both of her hands, intimates that the woman is predestined to be the gatherer and provider. There are two human figures in the company of many animals, both domesticated and wild. Noticeably, the largest is the horse, so fundamental to many of the world's civilisations, whether nomadic, pastoral, or early industrial; here, it lives freely rather than as a working-animal in civilian or military life. The scene indicates, I would propose, that the cohabitation of so many species indicates that the animals feel no threat either from humans or from other animals. In other words, perfect harmony existed because our first parents were herbivores. Subsequently, one of the consequences of the Fall is that we became omnivores, which goes some way towards the explaining why the cooked rather than the raw has such a notable presence in the story of Jacob and Esau. The early pastoral figures of Genesis, Cain, Abel, Jacob, Esau, and so on, are rude if not sinful, and this is highlighted by their meat-eating habits. In other words, the Fall was accompanied by the Fall from a plant-based diet. Adam and Eve, at least before their expulsion, were vegans; they simply chose the wrong fruit.

This example will hopefully encourage readers to concentrate on the presence of food systems and foodways in their study of language, literature, and culture. I am not proposing a revolution, simply suggesting that awareness of these two concepts illuminates canonical authors and texts. Here are a few suggestions to follow up. Earlier, I mentioned Joyce because he is arguably the writer with the keenest awareness of foodways, but his contemporary, Virginia Woolf, particularly in the lengthy preparation, consumption, and consequences of the monumental dinner in *To the Lighthouse* (1927), shares the same incisive awareness of the role food and social meals play in our lives. What about Paul Cézanne's quasi-obsessive representation of apples? Charles Dickens's awareness of food systems and foodways dominates the narrative of *Great Expectations* (1860-61) throughout. Other writers are more overtly conversant on the subject; take, for example, Günter Grass's *Der Butt* (*The Flounder*) (1977). Two films that extend foodways to metaphors of consumption and self-destruction would be Richard Fleischer's cult film *Soylent Green* (1973), and Marco Ferreri's *La grande bouffe*, released in the same year. In all these cases, I would urge you to look at the role food plays as, to cite Zehn, food communicates, it has its own powerful semiotics: "if food was simply nutrition, there would be nothing much to talk about" (35).

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