

13. *Ibid.*, 25.

14. Oliver Wendell Holmes, *The Common Law* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 87.

15. John Fabian Witt, *The Accidental Republic: Crippled Workingmen, Destitute Widows, and the Remaking of American Law* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 43–45, 65.

16. Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), 221.

17. *Ibid.*, 221–22.

Consider the Recipe

Kyla Tompkins

Pomona College

The recipe contains grammatical and syntactic conventions that demand an analysis in which attention is paid to form, consistency, and sequence as well as the moments of narrative and poetic defamiliarization that have generally been favored by literary critics: such attention, I argue, opens a window into the daily intertwining of past, present, and the future, inscribing time as it happens on the local scale of quotidian aesthetic production.

Consider a recipe that begins: “Take 40 or 50 young swallows when they be ready to fly out of their nests.”¹ In the early modern period, as today, recipes—or, “receipts,” which are not always associated with food, but also with medicine and other household items—often begin with the imperative, understood here as both a tense and a mood.² In this text, brought from England to Massachusetts and found in a box of manuscript cookery books at the American Antiquarian Society, the painstakingly handwritten text conveys the sense of continuity between an authorial voice from the past—a past both temporally and geographically distant—and the performative, the repetitive and active making of, the present and future.

The imperative tense implies both an “I”—the speaker or author of the recipe—and a “you”—the reader—while the imperative tone commands without the social lubrication of the polite invitation. The recipe thus exists as an ongoing command—“you: do this”—implying a hierarchical relationship in which the past—invoked as an eternal present tense—may command the future. At the same time, the recipe evokes a temporality in which the past imagines the future—the quite beautiful “when swallows be ready to fly”—as a moment of possible improvisation for the reader and cook.

Indeed the text, for “Water of Swallowes, an Exelent receipt,” does allow for a certain amount of variation. It is thus also a hypothetical, listing as it does a variety of conditions that the water will treat: “good against ye passion of ye heart or passion of ye mother, for ye falling sickness, for a suddain fit, for ye dead palsey, for ye apoplexie leathergie or any other impediment from ye head” and allowing for new versions of itself: “if ye can not get so many swallowes at one time as one have prescribed, then take as many as ye have kill ym & putt ym into an oven.”

Scribbled into family bibles or onto envelopes, cut from newspapers and stuffed into other books, recipes (and cookbooks) are often discarded as marginalia and ephemera, left behind as the archival traces of labor that is both minoritized and quotidian.³ A recipe, unlike a poem or a novel, will never be taken as complete unto itself: we assume that other, often entirely orally passed-down, iterations preceded it—other recipes for “waters,” infusions, and decoctions—and we assume many other recipes will follow. Recipes are never finished: they morph across time as foodways are handed down and changed, as migration, ecology, technology impact and are impacted by human hunting, farming, cooking and eating cultures. Certainly the recipe references, with pragmatic literalness, a set of objects and actions that are meant to signify unto themselves only; butter is butter, curry powder is only that. And in fact, to ignore the exactness of those references is at times to risk recipe failure. A recipe is thus, on first glance, missing some of the qualities that we have come to associate with, for instance, lyric poetry, the genre whose nonnarrative form the recipe most superficially resembles but whose rhetorical qualities the recipe may not perform: obscurity, metaphor, semantic polyvalence.⁴

Nonetheless, in the nineteenth century, recipes were often transposed into poetry:

Corn Bread

Two cups Indian; one cup wheat;
 One cup sour milk; one cup sweet;
 One good egg that you will beat;
 One-half cup molasses, too;
 One-half cup sugar add thereto,
 With one spoon butter, new,
 Salt and soda each a teaspoon.

Mix up quick and bake it soon;
Then you'll have corn bread complete,
Best of all corn bread you meet.⁵

Or,

Breakfast Dish.

Cut smoothly from a wheaten loaf
Ten slices, good and true,
And brown them nicely, o'er the coals,
As you for toast would do.

Prepare a pint of thickened milk,
Some cod-fish shredded small;
And have on hand six hard-boiled eggs,
Just right to slice withal.

Moisten two pieces of the bread,
And lay them in a dish,
Upon them slice a hard-boiled egg,
Then scatter o'er with fish.

And for a seasoning you will need
Of pepper just one shake,
Then spread above the milky juice,
And this one layer make.

And thus, five times, bread, fish and egg,
Or bread and egg and fish,
Then place one egg upon the top,
To crown this breakfast dish.⁶

Although print and not manuscript, these recipes continue the use of the imperative tense. Here, however, by borrowing from the musicality of lyric song, these recipes bridge another gap: that between the oral and the written. The meter of the poem prescribes a rhythm to the work of cooking: cut smoothly, brown nicely, layer, and repeat. It also allows for a cook to memorize the recipe and move away from the book, not only to not dirty the pages, one imagines (though the crumbs and fragments

and smudges of a well-used cookbook are surely part of its delights), but also to allow everyday life to continue without having to interrupt work to consult a guiding text.

While sometimes descriptive and always denotative, a recipe is rarely intended to be connotative: we don't think of recipes as indexing more than what they describe, of exceeding, as art often does, the bounds of what it most obviously says. Perhaps this is because we think of the recipe less as having an ideal form, as having generic conventions, than we do the poem or novel (even when they are striving against that form) and more as a text with limited work to do: to offer a set of instructions that should provide reproducible results.⁷ This latter sense is almost purely a result of the home economics movement, which sought to rationalize domestic labor by borrowing from science to standardize the recipe form. Then too we need pay mind to the recipe's particular relationship to copyright history: since the instantiation of copyright as a legally enforceable concept in the nineteenth century, the recipe has been legally defined as a formula and therefore non-copyrightable.⁸ A recipe belongs to everyone; it must be reproducible: it is only the text surrounding the recipe and the style in which it is written that cannot legally be copied.

And yet, textuality seems a poor container for the worlds hinted at by the recipe: just as we understand a recipe to be something that is written down and passed on—that is *received* by someone else, as the Latin roots of the word itself imply—there is a world of culinary knowledge passed on beyond just words, a field of embodied knowledges, movements, flavors, smells, gestures, and habits that is only hinted at by its own textual remains.⁹ “Mix up quick and bake it soon”: recipes demand to be *done*, to be *experienced*. They choreograph the present by *performing*: by executing something that has already been imagined.

It is this “doingness” of the recipe, if I may call it that, its embeddedness in the temporality of the everyday that makes it so different from other kinds of text.¹⁰ This sense of time, perhaps, is why the recipe been taken up by (largely women's) literature in the twentieth century, in the genre of writing that has come to be known as recipistolary writing, narrative interspersed with recipes.¹¹ For example, *The Alice B. Toklas Cookbook*, perhaps the seminal text in the modern literary history of food culture, consistently interrupts the narrative flow of recollection with a recipe:

Many times I held the thought to kill a stupid or obstinate cook. Then a gay and enchanting Austrian came. [Frederich] was the perfect cook. He told us that he and Hitler had been born in the same village and that anyone in the village was like all the others and that they were all a little strange. This was in 1936 and we already knew Hitler was very strange indeed. [Frederich] had been for several years a cook at Frau Sacher's restaurant and frequently baked us the well known

SACHER TORTE

Cream $\frac{1}{2}$ cup butter, gradually add 1 cup sugar, the grated peel of 1 lemon, 4ozs. melted chocolate, the yolks of six eggs, fold in the beaten whites of six eggs and three tablespoons of flour. Butter and flour a flat cake pan and bake for 40 minutes in a 325° oven. Let cool in pan . . . ¹²

This shift between epic historical time—the invocation of the period leading up to the Second World War—and the mundane present tense of the recipe is marked by a caesura in the sentence that leads up to the capitalized (and guttural) title, “SACHER TORTE.” While the recipe marks the everyday as a choreographed series of discrete and uneven temporal movements and gestures—creaming, gradually adding, folding, baking for 40 minutes, cooling—the formal contrast between World War II and the domestic life of two Jewish lesbian aesthetes produces what we might call a camp effect in the juxtaposition between war and chocolate, genocide and dessert. Adding to that effect, the recipe inverts the hierarchical relationship between history and the quotidian in the contrast between the “well known-ness,” as it were, of the recipe, which gives the sense of a knowledge held by many across a horizon of shared time, and the retrospective failure of local historical knowledge, held by too few: “we already knew Hitler was very strange.”

We might argue that recipes, so often considered marginal to the literary archive and historical record, consistently reference what we might call micro-theories and micro-performances of time, exhibiting a now-ness that might explain the vogue for recipes in twentieth-century literature, a century in which the sense of time has been under constant assault. A recipe is not necessarily a poem, although there are poems that are recipes; rather, the recipe choreographs the everyday, marrying

the imperatives and wisdom of the past to the contingencies of the present in a form that perhaps finds better analogy in dance notation than in scientific formula in that it is, by definition, always subject to improvisation.¹³

The recipe is an evolving textual form with a history of its own, one that deserves to be recorded: via the textual remains and cultural production of a diverse set of authors, artists, and everyday historical actors, the recipe valorizes the place of culinary work in binding the fabric of the everyday into something we call “time,” and links that work to project of living within, and writing, history.¹⁴

Notes

1. Recipe found in the Charles Brigham account book, American Antiquarian Society. The Brigham recipes are discussed in Rebecca J. Tannenbaum's *The Healer's Calling: Women and Medicine in Early New England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

2. For a discussion of the linguistic components of the modern recipe, including the use of the imperative tense, see Colleen Cotter, “Claiming a Piece of the Pie: How the Language of Recipes Defines Community,” in *Recipes for Reading: Community Cookbooks, Stories, Histories*, ed. Anne L. Bower (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997).

3. For a discussion of marginalia with a brief focus on recipes, see William H. Sherman's *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 57.

4. See Reginald Sheperd, “What We Talk about When We Talk about Poetry,” in *A Martian Muse: Further Essays on Identity, Politics and the Freedom of Poetry* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010). For a history of the lyric form and its attendant criticism, see Virginia Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005). Jackson's intervention into the intertwined history of lyric form and the criticism associated with it does offer a question, which I hope to take up in future work: if a poem can look like many things, what if we read the recipe's literary context as poetry rather than narrative, as most literary responses to the recipe have so far done? What if its temporality is interruptive rather than continuous?

5. Mrs. H. R. Welsford, in *Marshall's Ladies and Choicest and Best, Compiled by the Ladies of St. Cecelia's Guide* (Marshall, Minnesota 1898), 49. Also cited in Jan Longone, “The Mince Pie That Launched the Declaration of Independence, and Other Recipes in Rhyme,” *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture*, 2, no. 4 (Fall 2002): 86–89.

6. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “Breakfast Dish,” in *The Woman Suffrage Cook Book: Containing thoroughly tested and reliable recipes for cooking, directions for care of the sick, and practical suggestions*, Hattie A. Burr, author. Self published, 1886.

7. As ever, if there is something to be said about food or food writing, M. F. K. Fisher said it best. Ruthlessly describing—writing a manifesto for, really—the modern recipe, she says: “A recipe is supposed to be a formula, a means prescribed for producing a desired result, whether that be an atomic weapon, a well-trained Pekingese, or an omelet. There can be no frills about it, no ambiguities . . . and above all no ‘little secrets.’” “The Anatomy of a Recipe,” in *With Bold Knife and Fork* (New York: Paragon, 1983), 20. None of this is to say that Fisher opposed style in food writing, as she seemed to approve of style in everything.

8. See <http://www.copyright.gov/fls/fl122.html>: “Copyright law does not protect recipes that are mere listings of ingredients. Nor does it protect other mere listings of ingredients such as those found in formulas, compounds, or prescriptions. Copyright protection may, however, extend to substantial literary expression—a description, explanation, or illustration, for example—that accompanies a recipe or formula or to a combination of recipes, as in a cookbook.”

9. In paying close attention to the textual conventions and form of the recipe itself, I am working with it somewhat differently than does Susan J. Leonardi in her now-canonical article “Recipes for Reading: Summer Pasta, Lobster à la Riseholme, and Key Lime Pie,” *PMLA* 104, no. 3 (May 1989): 340–47, in which she writes, “The ‘nature’ I explore here is that of the giving of the recipe and not simply of the list of ingredients and the directions for assembling them. Such

a list alone is, in fact, surprisingly useless, even for a fairly experienced cook, and surprisingly seldom encountered.” Leonardi is interested in recipes as they gain meaning in exchange: here I am more interested in what historical remains lie in the recipe form itself.

10. Here, of course, I am riffing off of Elin Diamond’s definition of performance as “a doing and a thing done,” Elin Diamond, “Introduction,” *Performance and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 1.

11. The term “recipistology” was coined by Doris Witt in her foundational study *Black Hunger: Food and the Politics of U.S. Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). She brings up the term in relation to Ntozake Shange’s *Sassafras, Cypress and Indigo* (11).

12. See Alice B. Toklas and M. F. K. Fisher, *The Alice B. Toklas Cookbook* (Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot Press, 1998), 43–44.

13. The idea of an improvisatory everyday is explored in Michel De Certeau and Luce Giard, *The Practice of Everyday Life: Living and Cooking* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998). For a discussion of dance notation and improvisation, see Susan Leigh Foster, *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

14. Taking up the question of its temporality in my current book project, tentatively titled *So Moved*, I trace the recipe form across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to think about both its relation to literature and its scholarly uses as an archive of everyday life.

Forms That Work and Beg

Elisa Tamarkin

University of California–Berkeley

No painting has ever worked as hard as Ford Maddox Brown’s painting *Work* (1852–65) (figure 1). It took more than a decade to complete and Brown even recorded the number of hours he spent each day filling in piecemeal the overcrowded picture of laborers (called “navvies”) building a water main in Hampstead, and of everything else besides. There is a beer seller, orange seller, and weed-gatherer; a boy delivers pastries in the margin on the left. In front of him, a woman hands out religious tracts and, in front of her, a woman watches her pretty little greyhound run toward the dusty lime the navy shovels through a sieve. A gentleman and his daughter ride on horseback in the middle distance but, because the road is blocked, the daughter looks back for a way to avoid the work ahead. Street urchins and stray dogs squeeze into gaps at the bottom of a slope where the figures are so tightly stacked it seems hard to breathe. On the shaded bank beneath the highroad, unemployed haymakers take naps and an Irishman and his wife feed their baby cold mush. We know the mush is cold because Brown says it is in his gloss on the iconography of the painting. Against the railing, Thomas Carlyle stands to the left of F. D. Maurice, a Christian Socialist who founded the Working Men’s College and also believed in the redemptive power of work. Men with orange signs campaign in the distance for “Bobus,” a sausage-maker in Carlyle’s *Past and Present*