

2

The Embodied Rhetoric of Recipes

Jennifer Cognard-Black

Introduction

When I got married in 1992, I received a few cookbooks as wedding gifts: from my mom, Anne Cognard, the now infamous 1975 “new edition” of the mother-and-daughter Rombauers’ *Joy of Cooking*; from my paternal grandmother, Peg Cognard, the “*Reader’s Digest*” *Great Recipes for Good Health*; and from my best friend, Kristi Frahm, a copy of *The Enchanted Broccoli Forest* by Mollie Katzen. As a twenty-three-year-old, newly zealous vegetarian, I mostly turned to Katzen, especially for my first, anxious dinner parties—bright yellow turmeric still marking recipes I used for my initial attempts at hippie hostessing. Mom had told me that *Joy* was a book containing “every answer to any cooking question you’ll ever have,” and so I treated it as an encyclopedia: how to freeze fresh tomatoes or what to substitute for missing buttermilk. The *Reader’s Digest* book I ignored. I wasn’t tempted by a book boasting recipes low in calories, cholesterol, and salt: a kind of abstemiousness and absence of flavor that I didn’t associate with my grandmother, a woman of abundance. Within my first year of housekeeping, I donated *Great Recipes* to a book sale at the university where I was a graduate student.

Yet I still retained my grandmother’s culinary influence in that early, efficiency-apartment kitchen, for I’d also received another cooking text from my mother the night before my wedding: a plastic, mauve-colored recipe box, organized with hand-drawn alphabetic dividers and filled with handwritten index cards containing all the best dishes and baked goods that my mom had learned. A few of the recipes were from my mother’s youth in Scotland (“Flora’s Rich Cream Scones” and “Joan’s Shortbread” testify to this heritage), but mostly, Mom was given these recipes by her mother-in-law. The “B” section alone, chiefly for “Breads,” is an archive of some of Peg Cognard’s best baking: “Canned Bread,” “Banana Bread,” “Southern Cornbread,” “Perfect White Bread,” “Orange Xmas Bread,” “Sticky Pull Apart Rolls,” “Butterhorn Rolls,” and one recipe actually handed up to Grandma from my mom for “Gruyere Herb Bread.” While each of these recipe cards is fairly utilitarian in its form and style—my mother wrote all of them in pencil or pen, with a title at the top, a list of ingredients below, and then a few short sentences of efficiently worded instructions—as feminist scholars have shown studying cookbooks of all kinds, these texts remain potent pieces of writing. They contain the intertwined stories of my mother’s and my grandmother’s foodways and thus evoke their respective kitchens, cooking communities, national and ethnic affiliations, place in history, and culinary identities.¹

But allow me to return for a moment to the unusual fact that my mother gave me a handwritten copy, on note cards, of a compendium of my grandmother’s recipes in the early 1990s—at a time, it’s true, when the Internet wasn’t widely used (no e-mail, no food blogs, no BigOven or Epicurious websites), but yet it was still easy to take personal documents, such as old recipe cards, to Kinko’s and have them photocopied and spiral-bound into a makeshift book. Instead, my recipe box is a one-of-a-kind manuscript of an altogether different sort: a boxed-bound book, with index-card pages that may be reordered at a reader’s will and yet are organized broadly according to alphabetic chapter

headings. And that my mother spent not just mental time but bodily time in the making is significant. These texts are tactile, homespun. The cursive is an extension of my mother's personality, open yet tidy, and a trace of her skin cells remain across each card. Indeed, a strong appeal of my recipe box is its closeness to the body, how it represents and even contains it: my mother's, mine, and even my grandmother's. The collaboratively voiced narrator of these recipes establishes its ethos, in part, by this corporeal fingerprint, this intimacy. My recipe box is a text I trust.

With this corporeality in mind, I want to suggest that what persuades a reader most in such recipe cards is that they constitute what I'm calling an "embodied rhetoric." This essay, then, seeks to delineate how recipes create and sustain this embodied rhetoric in the United States, particularly among recipe-sharing cultures of letters among women.²

The Rhetoric of Recipes

Before I discuss what I mean by the embodied rhetoric of recipes, I want to explain more closely the highly specific and atypical form of the recipe itself—as both a particular and a peculiar rhetorical genre. Built around a stable organizational structure and adopting a strategic voice, a recipe seeks both to inform and to persuade its audience on how to prepare a certain dish and how best to go about doing so. Though a recipe may appear seemingly simple or even simplistic, or as merely an ingredient list followed by a set of instructions, it is actually a highly complex form, one containing discrete parts and serving multiple functions within a wide range of rhetorical contexts: ordinary and exceptional, popular and erudite, private and public, practical and literary. Moreover, though a form determined by its logos—a didactic genre meant to instruct a reader on how to assemble a specific foodstuff—a recipe is simultaneously pathos-driven. It's a synthesis of collective memories from a community of cooks who share and extend these memories with their readership. And, perhaps surprisingly, it's also a narrative in its own right.

The Logos of Recipes

Sociologists and linguists, along with feminist historians and literary theorists, have long contended that the recipe should be valued as *sui generis*, a unique piece of discourse.³ Sociologist Graham Tomlinson, writing almost thirty years ago, selected the recipe as his exemplar for studying the characteristics of written instructions, analyzing its structure in minute detail. Tomlinson begins by noting that a recipe must have what he calls the "standard two-part format," meaning a list of ingredients followed by a paragraph or more of instructions (203). A recipe's form, then, is determined by its logos for it is arranged rationally, chronologically, and even spatially on the page as a series of if/then statements. This if/then structure, Tomlinson asserts, serves as a set of "scientific hypotheses or promises. If one takes a particular action, then predicted consequences will follow" (202). Such simplicity is what makes the recipe form so useful—and so ubiquitous. If a reader gathers these ingredients in this list, then she or he may follow the subsequent directions, resulting in something (hopefully delicious) to eat.

These precise, stable, and logical qualities of the if/then disposition of recipes have enabled the form to function as a scientific genre within the realm of cooking.

Indeed, this format became prototypical in North America as a direct result of the professionalization of homemaking into an academic discipline at the end of the nineteenth century, first termed “domestic sciences” and then, later, “home economics.” The intent of the curriculum for this new discipline was to apply empirical approaches and principles to domestic situations, including the chemistry of cooking and the nutritional value of foods. In 1896, when Fannie Merritt Farmer produced her widely influential *Boston Cooking-School Cook Book* for use at the school where she served as principal, she thought of her volume as a manual meant to teach “scientific cookery.”⁴ Prior to this publication, recipes in America had been presented in published cookbooks and personal manuscripts via a range of rhetorical forms, from long paragraphs to mere outlines. But Farmer self-consciously standardized her recipes, organizing them like formulas and, thereby, investing them with a scientific ethos. Additionally, Farmer codified the use of distinct and replicable measurements within her ingredients lists, rejecting terms such as “dash” and “handful” in favor of level “tablespoons,” “teaspoons,” and “cups.” This precise and consistent diction, echoing the specialized language of the laboratory, further strengthened the integrity of her recipes.

Thus the modern form of the recipe is rational and highly reproducible. And yet even this seemingly straightforward format is modified in almost every case by numerous elements that mediate the recipe’s structure, such as inserting a title, crediting an author or authors, evoking a region or nation, giving evaluative and informational comments, providing notes on presentation, suggesting advice on how and when to serve, extending cultural or personal comments on the dish itself, adding illustrations, and noting components that may be considered optional. Also, while the ingredients of a recipe are certainly conveyed through the precise diction of measurement, such as “teaspoon” and “¼ cup,” adjectives, adverbs, and verbs that further refine and treat these ingredients are often imprecise.

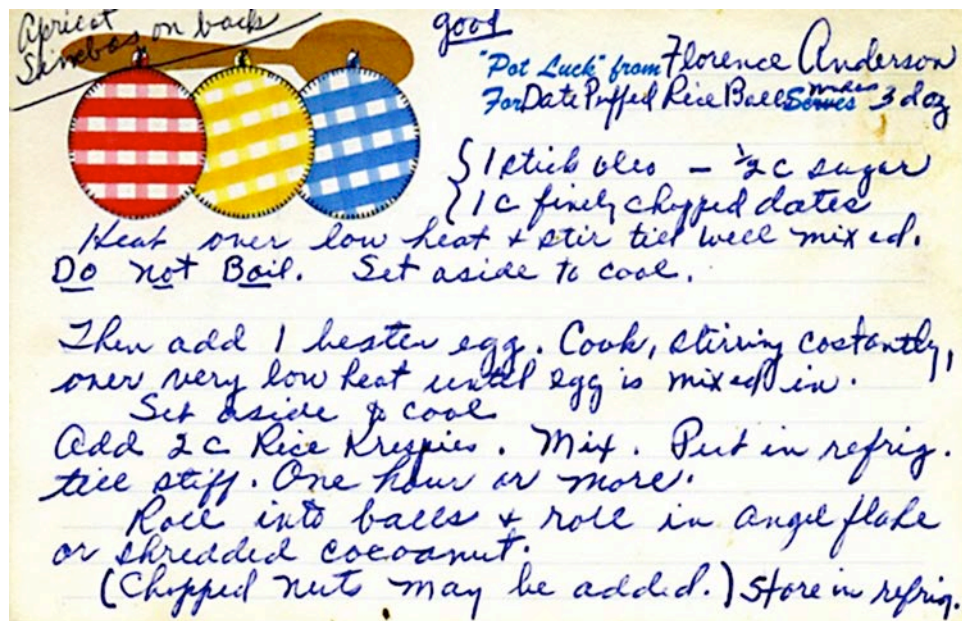
For instance, from ingredients on a recipe card owned by my grandmother Peg Cognard for “Orange-Pecan Loaf,” what might “finely-snipped” dates, “coarsely chopped” pecans, or even “grated” orange peel mean, exactly? How does a cook “snip” a date? How “coarse” is coarse? And just how fine should the grated orange peel be? Moreover, even though the subsequent instructions usually follow a clear sequence, that sequence may or may not convey the necessary kitchen equipment, recommended setup, complete cooking process, and serving advice—again, all in ambiguous diction necessitating assumptions about what certain words mean (for example, “thick” or “sprinkle”). As linguist Cornelia Gerhardt points out:

recipes are not simple, straight-forward . . . instructions that can be successfully used by any novice[;] they represent a register containing presuppositions on many levels, necessary incompleteness in the steps of preparations or sets of instructions, [and] assumptions about cultural knowledge, practical skills, and technical equipments evoking a complex set of practices. (43)

In other words, recipes are as varied as the dishes they attempt to convey, and readers must develop a kind of recipe literacy in order to fully understand the meaning within these texts.

The Pathos of Recipes

It is within the many modifications of the if/then recipe form that pathos resides: where recipe writers elicit historical, personal, communal, narrative, symbolic, and imagistic associations to appeal to their readers' emotions—appeals that are often gendered. To illustrate this point more fully, let me turn to a recipe that predates the ones my mother gave me on the eve of my wedding. This recipe card is for “Date Puffed Rice Balls” (figure 2.1), and as a document, it is at least sixty years old. It comes from a personal archive: an impressive collection of fourteen hundred handwritten recipes, all contained in a single, long recipe box that I inherited from Peg Cognard, my grandmother, when she died.



By the time I knew my grandmother the best (in her sixties, seventies, and eighties), Peg was a highly skilled seamstress, maker, cleaner, gardener, decorator, and cook. To be more precise, she was a consummate cook, a virtuoso in the kitchen. Wearing aprons she embroidered herself, she pitted and canned cherries that grew from the tree in her backyard; baked her own white and brown bread each week; kept dozens of homemade oatmeal chocolate-chip cookies in her freezer for whatever occasion might crop up (including a visit from her grandchildren); made thirty different kinds of cookies and candies for her “Christmas baking”; cleaned and prepared the pheasant and trout my grandfather shot and caught; and participated in dedicated cooking circles, including supper clubs and various ladies clubs—particularly the Women’s Society of Christian Service. In addition, for Sunday supper each week after church, she cooked ample and delectable meals: rich meats, complicated potato and vegetable dishes, salads with such imagistic names as “Cherry Mincemeat” and “Copper Pennies,” homemade breads or rolls served with her own preserves, and at least one made-from-scratch dessert, such as “Thumb-Print Cookies,” “Lemon Freeze,” “Chocolate Scotcheroos,” “Waldorf Astoria Red Cake,” or simply a latticed cherry pie made with her own cherries and a homemade crust (a personal favorite).

In other words, Cognard didn't just view herself as a good cook or a good housekeeper. She also identified as a domestic aesthete, demonstrating beauty through making and serving attractive food. She wasn't merely a maker; she was also a teacher. And recipes facilitated this dual position, their form predicated on both making (art) and didacticism (craft).

The section of Grandma Cognard's box that contains the most cards is "Desserts," and of these, many are instructions for making cookies, bars, brownies, or balls. A particular recipe for "Date Puffed Rice Balls" is one that Cognard apparently received from a friend, but it's recorded in her own handwriting.

Certainly, this particular text is recognizable as a "recipe" because it starts with the requisite list of ingredients ("1 stick oleo—½ c sugar / 1 c finely chopped dates"), followed by instructions that begin, "Heat over low heat + stir till well mixed." Yet almost immediately, the traditions of this genre are compromised, with Cognard embedding additional ingredients in the subsequent instructions—a "beaten egg," "2 c Rice Krispies," and "Angel flake or shredded cocoanut [*sic*]." From the get-go, then, Cognard—as writer—is already modifying this text from what might be called its cookie-cutter formula, imbuing it with a more idiosyncratic structure and voice.

The recipe's title and credit line in the upper-right-hand corner further modify its fundamental form, providing more than just subject matter and signature. Indeed, I argue that all recipe titles and attributions potentially convey a food's ethnicity, class origin, historical period, authorship, and connection to a specific discourse community. In this case, in order to understand what "Puffed Rice" and "Balls" refer to, a reader needs to be an informed member of a group of consumers who can afford, and who know where to buy, Rice Krispies. These readers also recognize the then-current fashion for ball-shaped desserts and consider them worth making. In addition, this dessert is attributed to a creator named "Florence Anderson," whose name alone gives information about her gender, her probable race, and her likely locale. With the surname "Anderson" (or "son of Ander / Andrew"), she is almost certainly an Anglo-American woman from a family who probably emigrated at some point from England to the United States. She's probably someone, too, growing up during a time in which "Florence" was a relatively common female name, which means somewhere between 1880 and 1940.⁵ Importantly, too, this attribution actually constructs a dual authorship since the recipe itself is in Cognard's handwriting but is ascribed to someone else. As such, this text is clearly collaborative, gesturing to the practice of midcentury, middle-class female cooks sharing their creations with each other: a practice that is part and parcel of the recipe form itself. Let me note, too, that Cognard's own annotation above the title, "good," signals an assessment tool at work, where certain recipes receive positive interpretations (for example, "good!" or "very good!"), while others do not (for instance, "not worth the trouble" or "so-so"). So here is evidence that the voice of a recipe is not merely informative and collaborative: it is also evaluative.

Looking beyond the title and credit line to the ingredient list, this recipe for "Date Puffed Rice Balls" reveals even more about the text's historical period, in part by the quantification language of "cups," "teaspoons," and "tablespoons" (thereby signaling a post-Fannie Farmer era), as well as Cognard's use of the term "oleo," from the Latin *oleum* meaning "oil," an abbreviation of "oleomargarine"—a butter substitute made from purified beef fat mixed with milk. First patented in 1873 in the United States, this

foodstuff became more widespread when real butter was rationed during wartime.⁶ Thus Cognard wields the language of her particular kitchen.

Yet it's also worth noting that hers is a 1950s middle-class American kitchen. According to feminist culinary critic Sherrie Inness, by the middle of the twentieth century, such a kitchen was represented in cookbooks, advertisements, and women's magazines as "an up-to-date room overflowing with innovative technology and new convenience foods" (156). It's not an exaggeration to say that these new technologies and foods revolutionized cooking, allowing results to be more consistent and cooking more expedient: the wood-burning stove was replaced by gas and then electric ranges; the apple-parer came to be a universal kitchen tool; both frozen and canned foods became widely available; and measuring cups were now commonplace kitchenware.⁷

Five years before her death, Cognard wrote a memoir, *Incidents in My Life*. In this memoir, Cognard explains that, when she herself was a newlywed, she lived for a time in a small apartment in Rock Port, Missouri. She laments, "We [had] an old-fashioned range. . . . I recall having such a time trying to bake as I had to stick my hand into the oven to guess at its temperature. . . . I never liked Rockport [sic]" (32). Later on, however, moving to Auburn, Nebraska, she and her husband rented a small house, which was "unfurnished, except for a davenport," and yet they had enough money to purchase some furniture and a "good gas stove." As Cognard notes, the new stove "served us well, through all our moves, and was still in use in the basement of our last home in Omaha . . . many years later" (32).

In owning such an up-to-date and well-made appliance, Cognard achieved status—her workshop stylish, her tools advanced. Moreover, what she made in this workshop equally bespoke her position as a homemaker on the rise: her pantry now included more than the jams and jellies she made herself or the tomatoes she grew, harvested, and "put up" back when she lived on an acreage. Rather, it now boasted such name brands as Rice Krispies cereal and Angel Flake coconut—brands that, by the 1950s, signaled a mass-produced American cuisine sold as "healthful" and "contemporary" due to their uniformity and secure packaging.⁸ In the memorable words of Inness, "the well-stocked kitchen became a signifier of the American dream" (144).

Touching on just the title, attribution, ingredients, and necessary tools alone, then, a reader already understands that "Date Puffed Rice Balls" is an emotional and informative text. A whole world has been evoked, one in which writers and readers—as well as cooks and eaters—find themselves at an American table during the 1950s or early 1960s, with the resources to enjoy desserts made from ingredients produced by an industrialized food economy and imagined within an "American dream" kitchen. Furthermore, the collaborative authorship and artistry that's happening as women swap, record, and edit these texts brings to mind a feminized form of exchange that's both vibrant and precise. As such, the rhetoric of recipes is complex in its appeal and nuanced in both its voice and structure.

The Embodied Rhetoric of Recipes

Beyond invoking a historical period and a community of cooking women, perhaps the most pathos-based elements of any recipe are its narrative qualities, which are also crucial to the recipe's uniqueness as an embodied text. Feminist literary critic Anne

Bower has argued convincingly that community cookbooks are a form of American storytelling—and, as such, a kind of literature. Breaking down the codes and conventions of these cookbooks into detailed discussions of their settings, characters, plots, and themes, Bower maintains that such books have all the basic elements of a story—elements that, in turn, their readers recognize as literary. As Bower insists, “Professional novelists are not the only ones who use the language of domesticity to consider our history, our present lives, and our future” (49).

While this reasoning is convincing, Bower also believes that recipes themselves are not narrative but merely functional. “The only sequence of events a [recipe] reader desires is the linear process of the recipe,” she contends.

For a beginning—take these ingredients; for a middle—go through these processes; and of course, for an ending, voilà!—a dish to please the tummy and the tongue. But reading for *more* than a recipe, reading the full cookbook as a text, can yield inklings of different beginnings-middles-ends and a new sense of plot. (37)

Literary critic Susan Leonardi concurs, insisting that, “like a story, a recipe needs a recommendation, a context, a point, a reason to be. A recipe is, then, an embedded discourse”—meaning a discourse that’s completely reliant on the cookbook or novel or memoir in which it is contained (340).

I disagree. I contend that recipes are stories unto themselves. Certainly a recipe changes if it’s the basis of a poem or the centerpiece of an essay. And yet a recipe’s title, ingredients list, annotations, illustrations, and directions conjure the power of imagery and tell a story.

Consider that an opening ingredient list constructs a three-dimensional space, one initiating a narrative through which a reader-cook will move from A to B to C—from beginning to middle to end—first in the reading but then, even more importantly, in enacting the text when she or he puts it in motion. In order to enter this particular “Date Puffed Rice Ball” story, the reader-cook will need, first, to set out one stick of oleo, a half cup of sugar, and one cup of finely chopped dates on her or his kitchen counter. In a sense, then, a scene is set: this list is akin to “Once upon a Time,” told in the third-person point of view, that tried-and-true perspective signaling an omniscient narrator. But instead of introducing a cottage in the woods or a castle on a hill, the reader is asked to imagine that idyllic 1950s American kitchen—a sugary, fruity, buttery scene in which ball desserts are all the rage. On this particular recipe card, this scene is underscored by the illustration of hanging hot pads in cheerful primary colors, dangling from a wooden spoon in the left-hand corner, a visual that’s purposefully nostalgic and tidy, with a gingham design on the hot pads and each one placed precisely in a row on the spoon.

After evoking this setting, the recipe then moves into that expected set of directions: a series of imperative phrases beginning with verbs in the present tense. Heat. Add. Cook. Mix. Roll. This storyteller is confident, telling a reader exactly what she or he must do through a series of precise verbs—how to move through the space and time of this setting (in other words, the plot) to arrive at a successful dish (the “just deserts” or denouement). Yet this narrator isn’t merely assured. In starting each task with a verb, the narrator also invites a reader to co-create meaning by participating directly and actively in the unfolding of this narrative, always in the now, the eternal present tense. For the reader-cook is also a reader-character.

And here’s where a recipe sharply differs from other kinds of storytelling texts. When “Date Puffed Rice Balls” are actually cooked and not just read about, the material

world beyond the text is changed—fiction becomes fact. The fantasy so often played out in short stories, children’s books, novels, and films in which a reader gets to walk into a piece of fiction is realized in the flesh-and-blood world of actual experience. A reader doesn’t just imagine herself or himself as a cooking character within this setting, doing these kitcheny things. A reader actually becomes that character.⁹

Thus the reading experience of recipes is distinct. In this case, Peg Cognard’s audience comes to contain sugar, dates, and puffed-rice cereal, changing not just sense but substance. And Cognard, as author, will have the privilege of maintaining her connection to her reader-cooks by sustaining them, literally, long after the recipe is back in its box. They will carry her writing with them for the rest of their lives. As rhetorician Jamie White-Farnham has said of domestic writings she terms “rhetorical heirlooms”—including shopping lists and recipes—they are significant not so much for their physical forms but “in their rhetorical forms, in their ability to be adapted for use according to circumstances, and *in their ability to affect circumstances*” (211, emphasis mine).¹⁰

As I’ve tried to make clear through this extended example, then, both the recipes my mother gave me for my wedding and, too, the profusion of cards I inherited from my grandmother’s own master recipe box are examples of embodied rhetoric in a number of ways. First, they inscribe a specific authorial body: that of the recipe writer, holding the pencil or pen, translating a literal dish into the symbolic of language. Yet such cards also inscribe other bodies as well, both the quick and the dead. There are the bodies of the past—the women (and a few men) who originally created and shared these recipes with the writer of the current moment, scribbling on a card. Then there are also the bodies of the future and those of the future-present. For one, there’s the figure of the imagined cook, the recipient of this card, when she or he eventually gathers ingredients and moves through a kitchen, animating this text, this story. And, too, there are those bodies that will be (and then are) in the process of sustaining themselves, literally: those lucky few who sit down to a plate of sugary “Date Puffed Rice Balls,” thereby turning the words of a recipe into a living legacy. An embodied rhetoric.

Conclusion

My own readerly and eaterly body is built from Grandma Cognard’s culinary construction of the past. This means that my body carries the optimism (the ideal) but also the limitations (the real) of her embodied rhetoric. To conclude my thoughts on the embodied nature of recipes, I will expand a bit on both: my real and my ideal inheritance, especially as a woman writer and a home cook in my own right.

The Real

As a cook, recipe writer, and member of the body culinary, my grandmother was also judgmental, a racist, a sexist, and sometimes small-minded about other people’s looks.

Brief examples. Grandma Cognard once tried to make a joke by wondering aloud what a “grasshopper” drink could possibly be. I told her. As a college student, my body was, in part, a drinking body. She gave me a withering look and said, “I’m sorry you know that.” She called Brazil nuts “nigger toes” for her entire life; she often commented on working-class women’s “slovenly” appearance when we were at the store or the mall

together; and though heavy herself, she maintained a fierce competition with her daughter, my aunt Shirley, who was a thinner version of fat. As a feminist myself and someone who works hard to articulate the intersectionality of racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia in my classrooms, this part of my embodied inheritance is difficult to recognize and to admit.

Extended example. Grandma Cognard was also vain about her cooking abilities. There is but one instance in her memoir in which Cognard compliments her own culinary and entertaining skills, but the moment is telling. At the last reunion ever planned for her own side of the family—which, traditionally, had been held close to her mother’s birthday and ceased after “Mommie” died—my grandparents were in charge of organizing the event: renting the hall, providing the drinks, and bringing the main course (the rest was potluck). Cognard decided to bake “a huge ham loaf with pineapple slices” (20). At the time, she was feuding with a sister named Laura—who Cognard represents in her memoir as a jealous woman. Cognard goes into detail about how one of her brothers reacts to her supper:

Buster (Walter) was home from the Air Force, and after eating dinner he said, “That’s the best meal I’ve ever eaten in my life.” Laura looked mad as a bulldog. The dinner was good. I doubt if Buster had ever had such a ham loaf before. I also had made Mommie’s table decorations with rabbits sitting, joined at the top. On one side I had printed “Happy Birthday, Mommie” and “Happy Easter” on the other. I had taken birthday napkins and used a tall single rabbit for the middle of the table. This was the only family reunion for which table decorations had been used. (20)

That Cognard records Buster’s hyperbolic compliment in direct dialogue, as a quotation, as “evidence,” then goes on to make a comparison between a bulldog and Laura, and then states simply, “The dinner was good,” speaks to Cognard’s self-congratulatory attitude over the success of her ham loaf and, more broadly, her meal. That the scene is one of family—not church members or neighbors or friends—highlights the reputational stakes. Cognard’s abilities would be judged by sisters and brothers as well as by that cook she admired most, her own mother. So to further her status not only as a cook extraordinaire but as a decorous and decorative hostess, Cognard synthesizes her piety (observing Easter) with her filiality (commemorating Mommie’s birthday) with her sense of taste—displayed in her homemade centerpieces and holiday-themed trimmings.

Here, then, the ham loaf recipe, in its realized form, comes to embody Cognard’s pride: pride in it being *her* dish and in it representing her brother’s “best meal.” And as Buster, Laura, Cognard herself, and the reader consume this pride, each comes to embody Cognard’s sense of self, for better or for ill. For Laura, this consumption is for ill, furthering her unhappiness. For Buster, it’s for better: a happy repast. For Cognard and for me—a reader who is also the inheritor of her recipes, raised on her writing (figuratively, literally)—that prized ham loaf is a vexed identity. It’s an identity both profound and petty, a story that pushes and pulls.

The Ideal

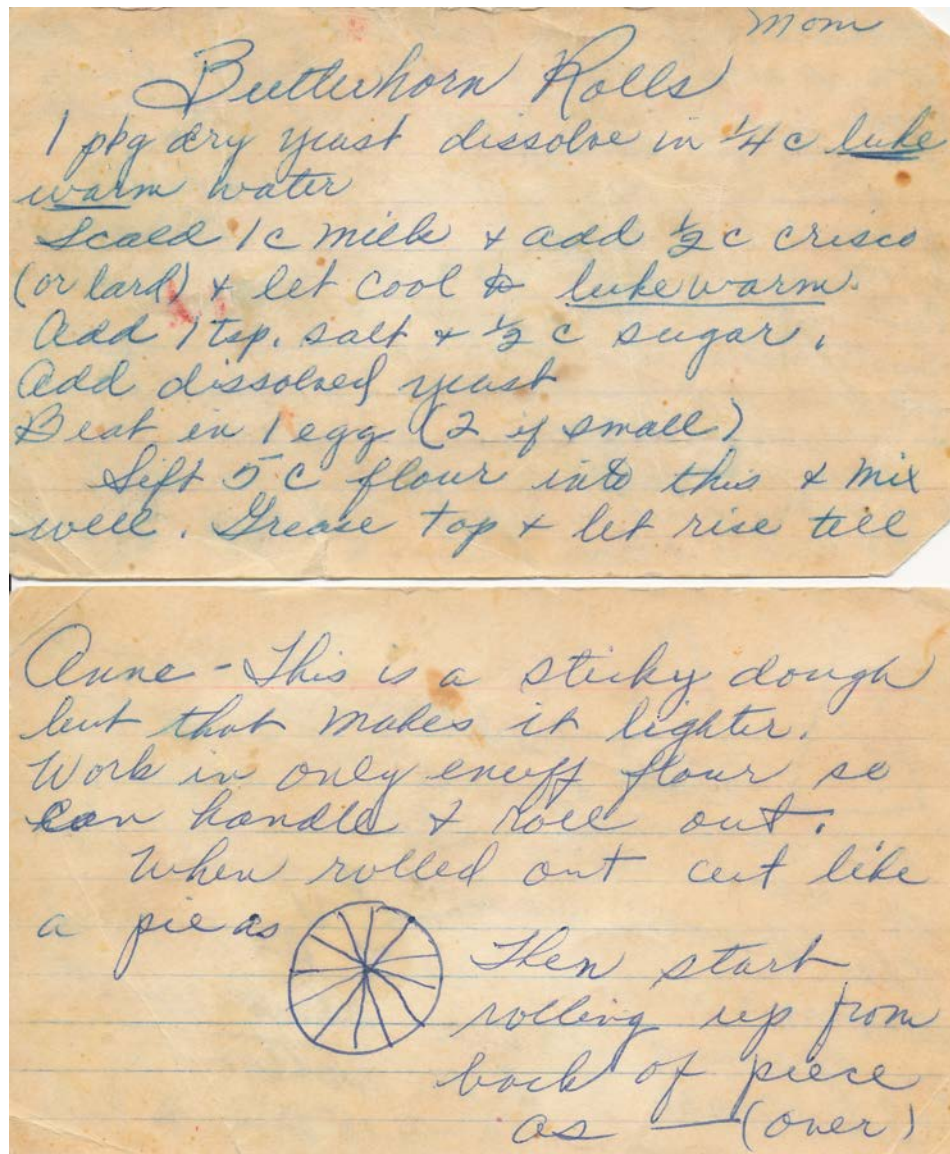
Feminist critic Sarah Sceats, writing about the incorporation of recipes within certain novels, comes to the conclusion that such food literature—primarily written for and “consumed” by women—is both potent and powerful, despite its resistance to rejecting traditionally defined femininity. “From a feminist point of view,” Sceats admits, “this

may seem a limiting conclusion, entrapping women in a retrograde domesticity” (185). Yet she continues, “On the other hand, the combination of networking, mutual support, shared knowledge, creative experiment and the creation of a specific discourse may be viewed by anyone as an empowerment greatly to be desired” (185).

When my mother, with a doctorate in Renaissance literature and a lifelong vocation as a teacher, gave to her daughter—then working on a master’s degree in English—a recipe box full of handwritten recipe cards the night before her white-dress wedding, this act bespoke a tension between the professional and the domestic that clearly persists to this day. Even now, twenty-five years later, my own expert literacies are still ones that are recognized as a legitimate part of the meritocracy that is academia: the work I do as an editor, an English professor, and a published writer. Yet I believe that engaging the embodied rhetoric of my grandmother’s recipes makes me a more complex woman reader and writer than those other ways achieved solely through established authorial means. Moreover, in being one among the body culinary of this particular community, I honor the world it memorializes while, at the same time, I can critique it. I can change it.

Every Christmas, my mom and I bake Peg Cognard’s “Butterhorn Rolls”—it’s a ritual at least as old as I am. In doing so, we revive my grandmother (dead for a decade) but also a woman neither of us ever knew named Delza from Auburn, Nebraska, from whom Cognard first received this recipe. We also turn Cognard’s flat, figurative, and historical recipe card into something organic, material, extant, and real. And, too, we incorporate Cognard’s past into our now. Redolent with the smell of yeast and lightly browned from the oven, we unwrap the horn-shaped rolls like presents perpetuating our own present—the experience of our own bodies.

Thus this “Butterhorn Roll” recipe (figure 2.2) is a form of writing unlike any other, informing and persuading its audience in singular ways. For one, this recipe is simultaneously figurative and literal: metaphoric and yet insistently material, both the method for making butterhorn rolls and also its inviting result, ready for butter. In addition, this recipe records the past, inhabits the now, and imagines what’s to come—a palimpsest of previous butterhorn-roll recipes, an articulation of the present outcome of the current recipe, and a vehicle for visualizing future rolls that may or may not be baked and served. Perhaps most importantly, this recipe is also an inherently collaborative form, a perpetual revision of past versions of butterhorn rolls but also a form that must be incarnated in the actions, and eating, of its current audience in order to be realized completely.



Finally, however, is what happens when this recipe moves on, beyond my mother's and my own bodies. For Grandma Cognard is also remembered and remade in the next generation when my own daughter, Katharine—only four years old when her great-grandmother died—helps to make, and then enjoys, the fruits of this “Butterhorn Rolls” recipe. Katharine didn't know her great-grandmother in a conscious way: the only real inheritance she has from her and her body culinary is in consuming her recipes.

This, then, is potentially a way to see the embodied rhetoric of recipes as endless transformation, to keep these texts from being essentialized into a past body, a retrograde body, a singular body. For just as novels often reflect back to readers their prejudices and limitations, their meanness and violence, and thereby teach humanity to strive to be better, recipes have the power to inspire endless optimism because they endlessly create and sustain new bodies.

Rhetorician Lynn Bloom's idea that the readers and authors of food writing are “allies” is provocative here. As she puts it, “they share a passion for both the text and the

subtext, a zestful appetite for life, which they expect to be satisfying—if not in the living, then in the writing, the retelling and interpreting” (354). For unlike the author of a novel or a poem—and yet akin to the sensuous or sardonic food commentator—a recipe writer co-creates meaning with a reader most fully when the text is consumed by the reader’s mind and body with a passion for both the writing and the living. Recipes are remarkable insofar as authors become passionate, zestful allies with their readers to produce texts meant to take on the literal weight and heft of the living people who read and use them. The word forever made flesh.

All cooking and reading women, the dead and the living, co-create such texts. This is a radical kind of authorship, close to the wonder of childbirth, to that other miracle of making bodies. I suggest, then, that a recipe demands an adaptation of the rhetorical triangle, with the “dish” becoming a sensuous and sensory “text” mediating between writer and reader—not a metonymic substitute for the text but, rather, an organic, three-dimensional version of that text, scooped from the stovetop or, in the case of butterhorn rolls, pulled from the oven, now waiting on the kitchen counter to be “read.”

Works Cited

- Bloom, Lynn Z. "Consuming Prose: The Delectable Rhetoric of Food Writing." *College English* 70.4 (March 2008): 346–62.
- Bower, Anne. "Cooking Up Stories: Narrative Elements in Community Cookbooks." *Recipes for Reading: Community Cookbooks, Stories, Histories*. Ed. Bower. U of Massachusetts P, 1997. 29–50.
- Cognard, Nellie ("Peg") Frances Rogers. "Incidents in My Life." 1999. TS. Collection of Jennifer Cognard-Black, St. Mary's City, Maryland.
- Farmer, Fannie Merritt. *The Boston Cooking-School Cook Book*. 1896. Little, Brown, and Company, 1912.
- Floyd, Janet, and Laurel Forster. "The Recipe in Its Cultural Contexts." *The Recipe Reader: Narratives, Contexts, Traditions*. Eds. Floyd and Forster. U of Nebraska P, 2003. 1–11.
- Gerhardt, Cornelia. "Food and Language—Language and Food." *Culinary Linguistics: The Chef's Special*. Eds. Gerhardt, Maximiliane Frobenius, and Susanne Ley. John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2013. 3–52.
- Inness, Sherrie A. *Dinner Roles: American Women and Culinary Culture*. U of Iowa P, 2001.
- Leonardi, Susan J. "Recipes for Reading: Summer Pasta, Lobster à la Riseholme, and Key Lime Pie." *PMLA* 104.3 (May 1989): 340–47.
- Sceats, Sarah. "Regulation and Creativity: The Use of Recipes in Contemporary Fiction." *The Recipe Reader: Narratives, Contexts, Traditions*. Eds. Janet Floyd and Laurel Forster. U of Nebraska P, 2003. 168–86.
- Theophano, Janet. *Eat My Words: Reading Women's Lives through the Cookbooks They Wrote*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.
- Tomlinson, Graham. "Thought for Food: A Study of Written Instructions." *Symbolic Interaction* 9.2 (September 1986): 201–16.
- White-Farnham, Jamie. "'Revising the Menu to Fit the Budget': Grocery Lists and Other Rhetorical Heirlooms." *College English* 76.3 (January 2014): 208–26.

Jennifer Cognard-Black is a professor of English at St. Mary's College of Maryland, where she teaches literature, theory, and writing. Her short stories, essays, and criticism have appeared in a number of journals and magazines, including *College English* and *Feminist Studies*, and she's the author or co-editor of five books, including *Books That Cook: The Making of a Literary Meal* with Melissa Goldthwaite.

Notes

I wish to extend a special thanks to “the two Sues” (Sue Bobek and Sue Bacon) at St. Paul United Methodist Church in Omaha, Nebraska, who gave me access to their only copy of the *Golden Jubilee Cookbook* that my grandmother helped write, and who also assisted me with finding other information about Peg Cognard’s involvement in their church. I also wish to thank Roger Cognard for his invaluable patience in helping me get the details right about his mother’s life, as well as Anne Cognard for making me, and then giving me, the living text that is my mauve-colored recipe box. This essay would have been all the poorer without the support and advice of these individuals.

¹ As a number of feminist historians and literary critics have noted, both recipes themselves along with compilations in manuscripts and cookbooks serve as archives of individual and community memory, as well as a history of women’s literacy. In her groundbreaking study of American cookbooks as repositories of women’s writing, *Eat My Words: Reading Women’s Lives through the Cookbooks They Wrote*, folklorist Janet Theophano claims that, from the seventeenth century through the late nineteenth century,

cookbooks and recipe collections were a “place” where [women] could engage in compiling, editing, categorizing, composing, and responding to written texts. Women wrote letters to request recipes, compiled cookbooks for publications, and submitted their own creations to newspapers and magazines. Likewise, they read and wrote in the margins of the published works that they used for cooking. In this way, they practiced literacy, even when they were denied it by formal institutions of learning. (156)

For more on women’s culinary writing identities and the importance of publishing alternate histories based on cookbooks and recipes, see Janet Floyd and Laurel Forster’s *The Recipe Reader: Narratives, Contexts, Traditions*; Anne Bower’s *Recipes for Reading: Community Cookbooks, Stories, Histories*; and Susan Leonardi’s watershed article “Recipes for Reading: Summer Pasta, Lobster à la Riseholme, and Key Lime Pie.” Also, see: Eves, Rosalyn Collings. “A Recipe for Remembrance: Memory and Identity in African-American Women’s Cookbooks.” *Rhetoric Review* 24.3 (2005): 289–97.

² While I believe that the embodied rhetoric of recipes is applicable to those recipes found in typed texts, such as community cookbooks, published cookbooks, and on recipe-swapping sites on the Internet, for the purposes of this essay, I am limiting my discussion to handwritten recipe cards since these add an additional layer of embodiment.

³ In addition to Graham Tomlinson’s essay, for careful examinations of the language of recipes, see Cornelia Gerhardt, Maximiliane Frobenius, and Susanne Ley’s edited collection *Culinary Linguistics: The Chef’s Special* and Colleen Cotter’s “Claiming a Piece of the Pie: How the Language of Recipes Defines Community” in Bower, Anne. *Recipes for Reading: Community Cookbooks, Stories, Histories* (U of Massachusetts P, 1997): 51–71.

⁴ In Farmer’s dedication to her former teacher Mrs. William Sewall, she extolls Sewall’s “untiring efforts in promoting the work of *scientific cookery*, which means the elevation of the human race” (n. pag., emphasis mine).

⁵ See “British Surnames Beginning with ‘Anderson,’” *British Surnames, Ancestry*, accessed 22 June 2014; and “Florence,” *Think Baby Names*, accessed 22 June 2014.

⁶ “Oleomargarine,” *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford UP, 2014), 24 June 2014. After 1949, the term fell out of regular circulation in the United States, although Cognard said “oleo” (or just “oly”) when she meant “margarine” for the rest of her life.

⁷ See Waverly Root and Richard de Rochemont, *Eating in America: A History* (Ecco P, 1981), 146–49, 156–60, 213–46.

⁸ The advent of a national food market created by the inventions of the tin can in 1825 and the icebox railway car in 1842 paved the way for an American cuisine that emphasized industrially produced, prepackaged, and ever-consistent food. For a broad summary of the history of food and foodways in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America, see Jennifer Cognard-Black, “Food and Drink and Professionalism,” *American Literature in Historical Context*, ed. Gary Scharnhorst (Gale, 2006), 391–95.

⁹ Poststructuralist theorists have written widely about how imaginative texts affect and potentially alter a reader’s psyche in ways that other kinds of texts do not. See Roland Barthes’s *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973), particularly his discussion of the “jouissance” of novelistic reading that occurs when a reader loses himself or herself within the book, as well as M. M. Bakhtin’s theory of heteroglossia as a “speaking” discourse within novels in his *Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1975).

¹⁰ Situating her work within studies of everyday writing and rhetoric informed by Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism, White-Farnham defines “rhetorical heirlooms” as writing practices that are handed down within families and that sustain the commonplace “activity system of a household” (208). To develop her concept, White-Farnham adapted Suzanne Rumsey’s notion of “heritage literacy” as realized in Amish communities. See Rumsey, “Heritage Literacy: Adoption, Adaptation, and Alienation of Multimodal Literacy Tools,” *College Composition and Communication* 60.3 (February 2009): 573–86.