

COWPIE, GRUEL AND MIDNIGHT FEASTS: THE REPRESENTATION OF FOOD IN POPULAR CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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If food is fundamental to life and a substance upon which civilisations and cultures have built themselves, then food is also fundamental to the imagination. Perhaps the deepest emotional exposure we have of imagination is that which we experience in childhood. Just as food studies is becoming important in the field of general literature, so too is it becoming important in the field of children's literature. Whether in memoir, fiction or poetry, writers continually hark back to childhood experiences of food, even when the intended audience is adults rather than children, as with Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. Food experiences form part of the daily texture of every child's life from birth onwards, as any adult who cares for children is highly aware; thus it is hardly surprising that food is a constantly recurring motif in literature written for children (Keeling and Pollard, 2009, p.10)

This paper sets out to explore the representation of this 'constantly recurring motif' in children's literature with an emphasis on those aspects of the field which might be loosely termed 'popular' – folktales, the work of such classic children's writers as Kenneth Grahame and Enid Blyton, the school story, and comics, for example. In the process I endeavour to explore the place of food in these genres from the perspectives of psychology, sociology and popular culture.

A common setting related to food in children's literature is teatime. Usually employed to dramatize states of harmony or disharmony, teatime is used to great effect in such works as Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1866), in which Alice learns to come to terms with the world around her via her experiences at the Mad Hatter's distinctly uncivilized tea party. Food and order images are also used liberally in such tales as Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), where food denotes coziness and plenty. In addition to reflecting social order and civilization, food is often representative of the limitations imposed upon a child's world, blending well with the idea of excess as a key element of childhood fantasy. For example, Maurice Sendak's *In the Night Kitchen* (1963) uses food as a vehicle to express strong

childhood emotions, and, like many other children's texts, uses rituals of eating as a metaphor for the power struggle inherent to family dynamics. According to Holly Blackford, the entire question of food in the early life of the child is perhaps a far more complex issue than we might realise. Foundations of power are constructed and expressed by food consumption and production, she maintains (Blackford in Keeling and Pollard, 2009, p.41)

Very many types of families exist within children's literature, their behaviours become homogenised by their need to adhere to the models established by those further up the social scale. The family at table is a strong cultural signifier representing stability and prosperity and the fact that those in power have used this image to reassure the nation only emphasises its influence.

The overriding image of a happy family round the table has remained static, fixed in the culture, as something that should happen, something that is essential to the wellbeing of the family and the nation. This is prevalent in all kinds of different media. *Many Happy Returns of the Day*, for example, an iconic Victorian painting (1856) by William Powell Frith, demonstrates the importance of ritual and celebration in family life, gathered together and marking occasions of private meaning. Such imagery plays a crucial part in naturalising the family meal in the same way as certain types of meals or recipes are handed down the generations and thus create tradition, nostalgia and a sense of belonging. (Alston, 2008, p.125)

Wendy Katz would maintain that to understand the relationship between children and food is to understand the world of the young. Citing such varied examples of children's literature as *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Wind in the Willows* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* she identifies a number of themes as they apply to these texts: civilisation, community, identity, emotional stability, meals and food events, empowerment (Keeling and Pollard 2009, p.10).

Perhaps the first exposure children experience to the cultural codes of society is contained in the tradition of fairy stories. Bruno Bettelheim has undertaken an extensive study of the crucial role of this genre in the process of the psychological development of childhood. In his seminal book *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (1975) Bettelheim considers the significance of food in these stories.

The threat of being devoured is the central theme of 'Little Red Riding Hood,' as it is of 'Hansel and Gretel' he maintains. The same basic psychological constellations which recur in every person's development can lead to the most diverse human fates and personalities, depending on what the individual's other experiences are and how he interprets them to himself. Similarly, a limited number of basic themes depict in fairy stories quite different aspects of the human experience; all depends on how such a motif is elaborated and in what context events happen. 'Hansel and Gretel' deals with the difficulties and anxieties of the child who is forced to give up his dependent attachment to the mother and free himself of his oral fixation. 'Little Red Hood' takes up some crucial problems the school-age girl has to solve if oedipal attachments linger on in the unconscious, which may drive her to expose herself dangerously to the possibility of seduction.

Hansel and Gretel, subjects of their oral fixation, think nothing of eating the house that symbolically stands for the bad mother who has deserted them (forced them to leave home), and they do not hesitate to burn the witch to death in an oven as if she were food to be cooked for eating. Little Red Riding Hood, who has outgrown her oral fixation, no longer has any destructive oral desires. Psychologically, the distance is enormous between oral fixation symbolically turned into cannibalism, which is the central theme of Hansel and Gretel, and how Little Red Riding Hood punishes the wolf. The wolf is the seducer, but as far as the overt content of the story goes, the wolf doesn't do anything that does not come naturally, it devours to feed itself. And it is common for man to kill a wolf, although the method used in this story is unusual.

Little Red Riding Hood's home is one of abundance, which, since she is way beyond oral anxiety, she gladly shares with her grandmother by bringing her food. To Little Red Riding Hood the world beyond the parental home is not a threatening wilderness through which the child cannot find a path. Outside Little Red Riding Hood's home there is a well-known road, from which, her mother warns, one must not stray (Bettelheim, 1976, pp. 159-83).

Another fairy story that deals with food, more specifically, fruit, is 'Sleeping Beauty'. Bettelheim describes how, in many myths as well as fairy tales, the apple stands for love and sex, in both its benevolent and its dangerous aspect. An apple given to Aphrodite, the goddess of love, showing she was preferred to chaste goddesses, led to the Trojan War. It was the Biblical apple with which man was seduced to forswear his innocence in order to gain knowledge and sexuality. While it was Eve who was

tempted by male masculinity, as represented by the snake, not even the snake could do it all by itself — it needed the apple, which in religious iconography also symbolizes the mother's breast. On our mother's breast we were all first attracted to form a relation, and find satisfaction in it. In 'Snow White' mother and daughter share the apple. That which is symbolized by the apple in 'Snow White' is something mother and daughter have in common which runs even deeper than their jealousy of each other — their mature sexual desires. To overcome Snow White's suspicion of her, the queen cuts the apple in half, eating the white part herself, while Snow White accepts the red, 'poisonous' half. Repeatedly we have been told of Snow White's double nature: she was as white as snow and as red as blood—that is, her being has both its asexual and its erotic aspect. Eating the red (erotic) part of the apple is the end of Snow White's 'innocence.' The dwarfs, the companions of her latency existence, can no longer bring her back to life; Snow White has made her choice, which is as necessary as it is fateful. The redness of the apple evokes sexual associations like the three drops of blood which led to Snow White's birth (ibid. pp. 199-215).

One of the most iconic images of food and childhood is that of Oliver Twist 'asking for more' in the workhouse scene of Charles Dickens's eponymous book. Dickens described Oliver's typical workhouse diet as consisting of three meals of 'thin' gruel a day, an onion twice a week, half a bread roll on a Sunday. However, researchers say that while the typical workhouse diet would have been plain it would have been 'nutritionally sufficient' for a growing nine-year-old. They accuse Dickens of exaggerating the sparsity of the food on offer to make his case against the Poor Laws, which said that poor people should work in workhouses. Dickens reminds us that fictional 'truth' does not always coincide with the true facts, maintains Dr Sue Thornton, a senior paediatric dietician at Northampton General Hospital, who led a team which looked at the reality of workhouse diets in the mid-1800s. They compared Dickens' claim with Dr Jonathan Pereira's 'workhouse dietaries', published in 1843 and adopted by poorhouses throughout England.

In the novel Oliver leaves the workhouse after committing the sin of asking for more food. But research into the workhouse diet of the era reveals a very different idea of what would have been eaten. The real workhouse diet would often have contained meat, including beef and mutton, potato, cheese and rice pudding. Even the gruel would not have been the 'thin' meal that Dickens described, and would have

contained one and a quarter ounces of the 'best' Berwick oatmeal, according to Pereira's diet book. The team who led the research say that the Pereira diet would have sustained the growth of a nine-year-old child, like Oliver, unless they were forced to do very physical activity every day:

Oliver Twist's diet:

Three meals of "thin" gruel a day

An onion twice a week

Half a bread roll on a Sunday

An extra two and a quarter ounces (60 g) of bread on religious holidays

The 'real' workhouse diet:

Thick gruel containing one and a quarter ounces of "best" Berwick oatmeal

Meat - including beef and mutton

Potato

Cheese

Rice Pudding

Bread

(Devlin, 2008)

Charles Dickens's great fable of Christmas, *A Christmas Carol* emphasises the contrast between poverty and wealth which was such a great concern of the Victorian middle class. The consumption of food places a critical role in the representation of this distinction.

When it comes to culinary delights Charles Dickens is a master of description. *A Christmas Carol* is full with delicious Christmas food: geese and game, mince pies and oysters, apples and oranges, raisins and figs are laid out before the reader in such a way as to evoke the Christmas cheer of Victorian London from the street markets to the poor man's humble festive dinner. Dickens writing on Christmas food also serve as a way of contrast between the rich colours, textures and smells of the culinary delights and the mean, cold and dark life of the main character, Ebenezer Scrooge; Scrooge who takes his 'melancholy dinner in his usual melancholy tavern' and returns to his gloomy, dark, cold rooms where a little saucepan of gruel lies on the bare table. When the Spirit of Christmas Present visits Ebenezer Scrooge, a feast of gastronomic delights takes place. It is a feast for the eyes and the senses: a mighty blaze is roaring in the hearth, holly, ivy and mistletoe hanging from the walls and ceiling and on the

floor forming a kind of throne is such Christmas food as Scrooge's home had never known: 'turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, great joints of meat, suckling-pigs, long wreathes of sausages, mince pies, plum puddings, barrels of oysters, red hot chestnuts, cherry-cheeked apples, juicy oranges, luscious pears, immense twelfth-cakes and seething bowls of punch that made the chamber dim with their delicious steam'.

Dickens emphasises the bounty, despite their poverty, of the Cratchits family Christmas dinner and some of his references to food in this episode of *A Christmas Carol* are particularly cinematic. Christmas food in the home of Scrooge's employee consisted of goose, gravy, mashed potatoes, apple sauce and pudding, apples, oranges and chestnuts.

'There never was such a goose. Its tenderness and flavour, size and cheapness, were the themes of universal admiration'.

'A great deal of steam! The pudding was out of the copper. A smell like a washing-day! That was the cloth. A smell like an eating-house, and a pastry cook's next to each other, with a laundress's next door to that! That was the pudding'.

The pudding: 'like a speckled cannon-ball, so hard and firm, blazing in half of a half-a-quartern of ignited brandy, and bedight with Christmas holly stuck into the top' (Dickens, 1843, 2005 edition)

Many commentators (McGillis, Daniels and Katz, for example) have emphasised the link between sex and oral gratification that comes from food in children's literature. Certainly the gluttony and lack of resistance to temptation emphasised in children's literature point towards the expression of the sexual as does the fact that these slips often occur outside family control, when the child is in the company of the ever-threatening other, as in the symbolic role that food plays in fairy stories, as we outlined earlier. But the cosy food-related images prevalent in the texts of Blyton and Grahame suggest a sense of self-indulgent desire, albeit one that is socially controlled (Alston, 2008, p.111).

The family in children's fiction is all about control and adherence to a certain way of life, and it directs children to the conservative even when it seems at its most sensual, for the literature and the food it features remain policed by custom and tradition. Food signifies a sense of belonging and the need to belong is intrinsic to children's literature and of course, to family but belonging also entails loyalty to family and

nation and it is noticeable that children's literature is often very conservative about the type of food which it promotes. The children in the *Famous Five* series, *Swallows and Amazons*, *The Wind in the Willows* and countless others all eat what seems to the modern eye vast amounts but they are never constructed as gluttons and this is because they eat very traditional British food, the type of food that is considered wholesome, that mothers are supposed to put on the table. The children in these texts consume ginger beer, tea, sandwiches, fried breakfasts, potatoes, roast dinners, fish and fruit pies and they avoid foreign food such as Turkish Delight (Alston, 2008, p.119).

Jackie Wullschlager describes Kenneth Grahame's ability to identify the association between food, nostalgia and the longing for home in his 'great pastoral drama of the changing seasons,' the Edwardian children's classic *The Wind in the Willows* as a technique of 'imbuing food with a precisely evoked nostalgia for time, place and English tradition':

When the girl returned, some hours later, she carried a tray, with a cup of fragrant tea steaming on it; and a plate piled up with very hot buttered toast, cut thick, very brown on both sides, with the butter running through the holes in it in great golden drops, like honey from the honeycomb. The smell of that buttered toast simply talked to Toad, and with no uncertain voice; talked of warm kitchens, of breakfasts on bright frosty mornings, of cosy parlour firesides on winter evenings, when one's ramble was over and slippers feet were propped on the fender; of the purring of contented cats, and the twitter of sleepy canaries. Toad sat up on end once more, dried his eyes, sipped his tea and munched his toast, and soon began talking freely about himself, and the house he lived in, and his doings there, and how important he was, and what a lot his friends thought of him (Wullschlager, 1995, p. 163).

The boom in children's comics began in the 1930s with the arrival in the marketplace of Scottish company DC Thomson. This company, based in Dundee had previously published story papers but now took a fresh approach with *The Dandy* (1937) and *The Beano* (1938). These comics will be familiar to successive generations of Irish and British children and they, more than any others, have defined modern

perceptions of a comic in this part of the world and it is a testament of their phenomenal success that they have survived to this day. They were published on cheap paper and had brightly coloured covers that were to prove irresistible to children. The real secret of the comics' success was their fluent style of joke telling and the illusion of movement the picture panels achieved through dispensing with the previous use of captions beneath the pictures. These papers had what has been described as a 'Depression sensibility' insofar as the mood in the early issues (and since) reflected the place of their origin, Dundee, in the midst of the 1930's Great Depression. This was a world where social inequalities were pronounced and where everybody was hungry: hence strips about relationships between 'toffs' and the working class, typically ending with a reward of a plate of 'grub' (such as a huge plate of mashed potatoes with sausages sticking out at odd angles). Curiously, this formula has remained little changed over the years (Sabin, 1996, pp. 28-9).

One of the most enduring features of these papers was Desperate Dan, a character in *The Dandy*. Dan was American, living in the Wild West, in the town of Cactusville, a curious place that, whilst unmistakably in the Wild West, nevertheless had British street lamps and was policed by British bobbies. Starting before the Second World War, this series has been described as a kind of British comedic indigenization of Americana. Dan is so tough that he shaves with a blow torch and his appetite is so huge that he famously consumes huge portions of cowpie (Stratton, 2010, p. 53)

Enid Blyton wrote 21 *Famous Five* books, the first, *Five on a Treasure Island*, was published in 1942. As Dr Joan Ransley, honorary lecturer in human nutrition at the University of Leeds, notes: 'The food eaten in the books anchors the Famous Five to a definite period in dietary history. During and immediately after the Second World War British children ate well but austere and Blyton is true to this.' In other words, they ate healthily but not heartily. Well over half of the books were written during food rationing, as Ransley points out. Perhaps Blyton is consciously enticing her readers with elaborate descriptions of foods way beyond the ration book allowance, she concludes.

In that first book, a simple spread of cold ham, salad, bacon and eggs, plums and a ginger cake fuelled the discovery of gold ingots on Kirrin Island. But over the years,

as the five go off in a caravan, or camping on Billycock Hill, the author has discovered the importance of food in recounting a good yarn: ‘A large ham sat on the table, and there were crusty loaves of new bread. Crisp lettuces, dewy and cool, and red radishes were side by side in a big glass dish, great slabs of butter and jugs of creamy milk’ – simple descriptive skills which make the food hugely appealing..

Staples are found throughout: ham, bacon, eggs, the ubiquitous ginger beer and lemonade, together with loaves of crusty bread and cakes and buns. But luxuries – chocolate for example – don't find their way onto the menu until the postwar years. Blyton doesn't goad us with unobtainable ‘exotics’ as Elizabeth David did in the 1950s, rather she describes familiar foodstuffs, albeit available to her readers in much reduced quantities through the rationing system.

The five eat a balanced diet. Despite an abundance of humbugs, toffees and ginger pop, when grouped into the five main food categories (fruit and vegetable; meat and fish; dairy; starchy foods; high fat/sugar foods), no one group outweighs another. This comes naturally to the children rather than by diktat. Sweets are eaten sparingly; hunks of crusty bread are accompanied by handfuls of radishes or fresh fruit.

The children manage a structured approach to eating. Breakfast, lunch, dinner and supper all mark out the day. Even while cavorting across the moors in search of spook trains, the five will stop and sit down so that a meal becomes an enjoyable social interaction. Mealtimes provide an opportunity for the children to share thoughts and to take in all that is happening to them (Sutton, 2012)

It may be useful to help us to understand the immediate post-war obsession in British literature for children (and adults – as in Ian Fleming’s lovingly composed descriptions of James Bond’s meals – an early 1950s version of product placement) by examining the wartime (and immediate post-war era) diet:

1oz cheese (Roughly about 2 inch by 1 inch by half inch cube, barely enough to fill 1 sandwich)

2oz tea (Equivalent to about 20 teabags today)

2oz jam spread

4oz bacon or ham

8oz sugar

1 shilling's worth of meat

8oz fats of which only 2oz could be butter

Later sweets and tinned goods could be had on a points system. Bread was not rationed until after the war in 1946. For many rationing was harder after the war in the late 40s and early 50s than during the war. Juliet Gardiner outlines how rationing did not actually end until 1954, 14 years after its introduction and 9 years after the end of the war (Gardiner, 1999, p. 60).

The many references in children's popular literature to food and eating might, along with the tantalising fantasy resulting from deprivation (as in Dickens) or restricted diet (Blyton's post-war children's books), as has been discussed above, be considered as expressive of sexuality. This carnal association is all the more pointed in that quintessential setting of British popular literature for girls – the school story. The constancy of these references has been noted by McClelland and others in their commentary on the *Chalet School* series. Helen McClelland quotes one 26 year old Australian fan who wrote 'Why, oh why, are they always eating?' These descriptions in the main fall into one of two categories: specifically 'foreign' food; and festive meals at school. 'Foreign' food is often eaten on excursions. For example, in the first of the Swiss books, *The Chalet School and Barbara* (1954), the girls have a 'typically Bernese' lunch:

They began with a thick vegetable soup, and followed it up with Bernerplatte which turned out to be cabbage boiled together with thin strips of smoked ham, smoked sausages, potatoes and carrot. It was good, but so very filling that it was just as well that the sweet was of the lightest - meringues, blanketed in whipped cream and adorned with glace cherries. (Brent-Dyer, 1954b, p153)

Later 'they went to a patisserie where they had the sort of luscious tea with cakes of cream and nuts and honey and chocolate that everyone enjoys once in a way' (Brent-Dyer, 1954b, p154). A typical description of a festive meal is as follows: 'A gorgeous meal was spread. Jellies, creams, fruit, sweets, chocolates, cakes and sandwiches of all kinds covered the table; and there were [sic] frothing chocolate with whipped cream, and iced lemonade to drink' (Brent-Dyer, 1934, p98). It is noticeable that most of the food on offer at this latter meal is sweet, and the only savoury items - sandwiches - are listed last although sandwiches are normally eaten first. As the

majority of Brent-Dyer's readers were pre-adolescent, it is probable that many readers derived a sensual pleasure from reading these descriptions of mainly very sweet foods, both 'foreign' and British. However, unlike many girls' school story authors Brent-Dyer did not portray midnight feasts as desirable, and used the only midnight feast mentioned in the series to illustrate the consequences of greed (McClelland, 1981, p174).

Other authors such as Enid Blyton kept their descriptions of sweet food for descriptions of midnight feasts, where its association with an enjoyable, forbidden night-time activity made its erotic function more overt:

Golly! Pork-pie and chocolate cake, sardines and Nestlé's milk, chocolate and peppermint creams, tinned pineapple and ginger-beer!" said Janet. Talk about a feast! I bet this beats the upper third's feast hollow! Come on—let's begin! (Blyton, 1953, 2005 edition).

The conventional hero of the Boys' Paper genre was very much associated with the project of empire. In turn, the genre of the boys' school story was a central aspect of the imperial narrative, one feeding into the other in the creation of that essential moral and physical structure of 'Muscular Christianity.' By implication the antithetical characters (those who cannot rise to such heroism) are physically limited, and thus 'space' was created for those characters that were not physically proficient and athletic to be stereotyped with a range of negative personality traits. The 'Muscular Christian' model of heroism dominantly continued – and does so today – setting up oppositional stereotypes. Billy Bunter is perhaps the most well known of these, who centrally filled the space left in opposition to the muscular hero. First featuring in the magnet paper in 1908 (in *The Greyfriars School Stories* by Frank Richards) Bunter went on to become a principal character in thirty eight books written between 1947 and 1965. He also featured in several comic strips in the 1950s and 1960s. Billy Bunter, although one of the main characters in these tales, is a 'hero' with distinctly antiheroic qualities who set up as a comic character and is the butt of jokes. He is decidedly overweight, greedy, a spy, lazy and cowardly. In all he demonstrates negative qualities in opposition to the ideal qualities of the Muscular Christian hero. He is described as 'The Fat Owl of the Remove' – his food choices are invariably unhealthy, sweet highly calorific foods, as with the sticky buns which he lovingly

devours in such great quantities. Food becomes sexualised because Bunter is often portrayed with an almost lascivious, sly expression as he is about to consume that which he loves. Iced buns themselves are almost sexual objects, sweet, soft, moist and fulsome to the mouth. The image of Bunter could not be more different from that of the typical imperial hero – he is effeminized with the emphasis placed on his overly coiffured hair, the curls more befitting a girl than an aspiring hero in the mode of Muscular Christianity. In short, his food choices are in accord with the demasculinization of the obese figure (Webb in Keeling and Pollard, 2009, pp.109-10).

Food can also be employed, as Jackie Wullschlager outlines, to define the exotic, to contrast the predictability of the culinary conventions of home with the exotic as in this iconic scene from *The Wind in the Willows*, the encounter between Ratty and the grizzled, old and much travelled Sea Rat:

That is indeed an excellent suggestion,' said the Water Rat, and hurried off home. There he got out the luncheon-basket and packed a simple meal, in which, remembering the stranger's origin and preferences, he took care to include a yard of long French bread, a sausage out of which the garlic sang, some cheese which lay down and cried, and a long-necked straw-covered flask wherein lay bottled sunshine shed and garnered on far Southern slopes. Thus laden, he returned with all speed, and blushed for pleasure at the old seaman's commendations of his taste and judgment, as together they unpacked the basket and laid out the contents on the grass by the roadside (Wullschlager, 1996, p. 165)

Childhood literature is essentially the concerned with adventure – and the recurring desire for the security of home, that place of safety to which we all, in one form or another, long to return, as in the example of *The Wind in the Willows*, but also in the stories of Enid Blyton and such children's classics as Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons*.

P.L.Travers, the author of *Mary Poppins* spent her childhood yearning for the England she imagined from her own reading and as she listened to the tales of her father. In her compelling portrayals of middle-class English childhood the world of 17

Cherry Tree Lane is one of sensible shoes and nannies, teatime and nursery food – gingerbread, raspberry jam, thin bread and butter slices and crumpets. Its sensory preoccupation with traditional foods and an ordered existence punctuated with magical adventures was English to its core. In our sense of place, our desire to orient ourselves in the world, home is a central preoccupation. Food is, literally, a vital component of our understanding of the essential meaning of home (Knuth, 2012, p.181).

There are few more poignant descriptions of the pull of home, of its place in our memory and the central importance of mealtime routine in the process of nostalgia than Rupert Brooke's recollection of his childhood as expressed in his 1912 poem, *The Old Vicarage, Grandchester* written in 1912 in Germany as he recovered from a breakdown and forever engraved in our collective cultural consciousness by the poet's untimely death, at the tragically young age of 28, in transit with his regiment to the ill-fated Dardanelles campaign , in 1915:

Say, is there Beauty yet to find?
And Certainty? and Quiet kind?
Deep meadows yet, for to forget
The lies, and truths, and pain?... oh! yet
Stands the Church clock at ten to three?
And is there honey still for tea?

(Giles and Middleton, 1995, p.210).

In conclusion I would like to quote from George Orwell's seminal piece, 'Boys Papers', first published in 1939, which encapsulates much of the significance of the various aspect of food in popular children's literature as we discussed in this paper:

The year is 1910 — or 1940, but it is all the same. You are at Greyfriars, a rosy-cheeked boy of fourteen in posh tailor-made clothes, sitting down to tea in your study on the Remove passage after an exciting game of football which was won by an odd goal in the last half-minute. There is a cosy fire in the study, and outside the wind is whistling. The ivy clusters thickly round the old grey stones. The King is on his throne and the pound is worth a pound. Over in

Europe the comic foreigners are jabbering and gesticulating, but the grim grey battleships of the British Fleet are steaming up the Channel and at the outposts of Empire the monocled Englishmen are holding the niggers at bay. Lord Mauleverer has just got another fiver and we are all settling down to a tremendous tea of sausages, sardines, crumpets, potted meat, jam and doughnuts. After tea we shall sit round the study fire having a good laugh at Billy Bunter and discussing the team for next week's match against Rookwood. Everything is safe, solid and unquestionable. Everything will be the same for ever and ever (Orwell, 1977, p.189-90).

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Cowpie, Gruel and Midnight Feasts: The Representation of Food in Popular Children's Literature. 47. Eamon Maher. *The Rituals of Food and Drink in the Work of John McGahern*. 63. vi. Rhona Richman Kenneally. *The Elusive Landscape of History: Food and Empowerment in Sebastian Barry's Annie Dunne* Section II. *Culinary and Dining Traditions in Ireland*. 79-99. "Food experiences," writes Michael Flanagan in his paper "Cowpie, Gruel and Midnight Feasts: Food in Popular Children's Literature," "form part of the daily texture of every child's life; thus it is hardly surprising that food is a constantly recurring motif in literature written for children." Though Helen Oyeyemi's sixth novel, *Gingerbread*, is far from a novel for children, it is steeped in the tradition of the Brothers Grimm, Roald Dahl, L. Frank Baum, even Lemony Snicket. But this being the work of Oyeyemi, these initial influences are soon turned inside out, reimagined and repurposed by her. Food is everywhere in children's stories, from fairytales to Enid Blyton, Billy Bunter and *Desperate Dan* "but it may not always be as innocent as it seems." This paper sets out to explore the representation of this "constantly recurring motif" in children's literature with an emphasis on those aspects of the field which might be loosely termed "popular" "folktales, the work of such classic children's writers as Kenneth Grahame and Enid Blyton, the school story, and comics, for example. In the process I endeavour to explore the place of food in these genres from the perspectives of psychology, sociology and popular culture. A common setting related to food in children's literature is teatime.