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Nourishing the Self: Cookbooks as Autobiography

Rebecca Q. Barlow

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Nourishing the Self: Cookbooks as Autobiography

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Though casual readers may often assume cookbooks are primarily reference materials, cookbooks actually offer readers a type of autobiography; I examine cookbooks as literary autobiographical acts by analyzing three celebrity chefs' cookbooks and the recent film, *Julie and Julia*. *Julie and Julia*, starring Meryl Streep and Amy Adams, illustrates several key autobiographical ideas, specifically Barthes' ideas of readerly and writerly texts and the distinction between an author and a persona. The film acts as a visual representation of the way a reader engages with a text and makes it a writerly text while successfully distinguishing between an author and a persona/narrator. After a brief review of autobiography theory through *Julie and Julia*, the three selected authors' work further magnifies the ideas. The first celebrity chef, David Lebovitz, uses a highly narrative style and incorporates numerous autobiographical details into his books. The second, Ina Garten, utilizes different methods of creating a persona, including photography. The third chef, Dorie Greenspan, uses the same methods used by Lebovitz and Garten, but has been replicated extensively in online baking groups, making her texts ideal for understanding the role of the reader in an autobiography. The work of these three authors illustrates well how autobiographies function and how readers can reiterate their own autobiographies through the books and food they consume.

Keywords: autobiography, cookbooks, food, Roland Barthes, David Lebovitz, Ina Garten, Dorie Greenspan, food blogs, narrative, persona, reader

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Introduction

Though casual readers may often assume cookbooks are primarily reference materials, they actually offer readers a type of autobiography. Susan J. Leonardi writes, “I think I can safely claim that a cookbook that consisted of nothing but rules for various dishes would be an unpopular cookbook indeed. . . . Like a story, a recipe needs a recommendation, a context, a point, a reason to be” (340). These contexts and recommendations most often appear in cookbooks as stories from the author’s life. These stories tend to relate to the food at hand, but still feature characters and plots, making them personal literary narratives and, therefore, autobiographies. In this article, I will examine cookbooks as literary autobiographical acts by analyzing the ways authors incorporate personal narrative into traditional cookbook structures, considering how these narratives form personas, and evaluating how these personas function with regard to the book’s readers/cooks who become familiar with them as they read the contexts and replicate the recipes from which these personas emerge.

Celebrity cookbooks, cookbooks that are marketed with the well-known chef/author as a major selling point, function as autobiography particularly because of the importance and draw of the pre-existing persona. These types of celebrity cookbooks which I refer to are not cookbooks written by (or ghostwritten for) popular celebrities—rather, they are cookbooks written by people important in the food industry where their names suggest a level of credibility. Many celebrity cookbooks share similar features: an introduction, occasionally a preface by another well-known author or chef, chapter introductions, recipe headnotes (brief narratives that immediately precede the recipe), sidenotes with supplemental information, and extensive photography. These various structures together produce or reinforce the persona of the author and, therefore, are central to the performance of the autobiographical act. Further, the readers, by

cooking from the autobiographical cookbooks, collaborate with these personas while producing them as well, and translate the authors' autobiographical acts into their own. A cookbook, then, can be an autobiographical act of its readers as well as its author.

Autobiography is a wide-reaching genre including the most deliberate memoirs to quotidian acts of self-expression. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson define a "life narrative . . . as a general term for acts of self-presentation of all kinds and in diverse media that take the producer's life as their subject" (*Reading* 4). We can call what writers and readers of cookbooks and recipes do as they follow recipes autobiographical acts in their own right because, as Smith and Watson have demonstrated, any act of self-presentation qualifies as autobiography. Smith and Watson further define autobiography by quoting Elizabeth Bruss: "Autobiography is a personal performance, an action that exemplifies the character of the agent responsible for that action and how it is performed" (*Reading* 206). Bruss's emphasis here is on the action—the performance. Autobiography is not a static object; rather, it is a dynamic act that is performed and, in the case of cookbooks, that act can be altered or added to in readers' own autobiographical performances.

Casual readers may assume autobiographies are strictly nonfiction, but autobiography theory dismisses this assumption. Shari Benstock notes, "Autobiography reveals the impossibility of its own dream: what begins on the presumption of self-knowledge ends in the creation of a fiction that covers over the premises of its construction" (11). An autobiography presents a narrative, but that narrative is a fiction, meaning that the subject is a persona—a fictional representation based on the author but not equal to the author. This is not to imply that the persona is a misleading figure: it may resemble the author, but it is never wholly the author and therefore is a fiction.

We express ourselves through the way we live our lives, and food is a prominent part of how we live because it is so essential to survival and often also enjoyable. Lucy M. Long writes, “[food] reflects not only who we are, but also who we were in the past and who we want to be. It expresses our personalities” (“Learning” 119). John Paul Eakin furthers the definition of narrative: “narrative is not merely a literary form but a mode of phenomenological and cognitive self-experience” (100). Food, specifically its production and consumption, acts as a way of expressing selfhood, because it is something a person does daily. Smith and Watson state that “through our consuming habits, we circulate our own personal narratives, even by the cars we drive, the beverages we drink, and the furnishings with which we surround ourselves” (*Getting* 3). Alimentary narrative, then, becomes tied to life, self, and persona and thus further justify reading a cookbook as an autobiography and the readers’ cooking from it as an autobiographical act.

While I suggest that all cookbooks are autobiography, celebrity cookbooks overtly display themselves as autobiographical acts because, as mentioned, they often focus as much on the author’s established persona as they do on the recipes. As the persona is already established, readers/cooks find both the persona and the recipes appealing. The cookbooks under consideration here certainly function in this way. These authors are celebrities first and foremost in the food industry: David Lebovitz, a trained pastry chef, blogger, and author of four cookbooks and two food-related books; Ina Garten, former owner of the now-closed Barefoot Contessa specialty foods store in New York, Food Network star, and author of seven cookbooks; and Dorie Greenspan, author of ten cookbooks (one of which was James Beard Award winner) who has worked with renowned chefs such as Julia Child and Pierre Hermé. These three authors continue to develop their personas in their cookbooks through the narrative frames and recipes

they write, which encourage readers to replicate their culinary autobiographical acts, making the cookbooks function as writerly texts for the readers as they reproduce the text first and then as they reproduce the dishes.

Julie and Julia: Theoretical Background

In the film *Julie and Julia*, Julie Powell (played by Amy Adams) tells Amanda Hesser of the *New York Times* (played by herself) about her year of cooking from Julia Child's famous cookbook, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*: "You have such a sense of Julia when you do something like this—as a teacher, as a voice. I have conversations with her while I'm cooking. I feel like she is there with me in the kitchen." Julie Powell, as imagined by director Nora Ephron, recognizes the persona present in the cookbook she cooks from. Powell never meets Julia Child, but she feels Child's presence as a real person as she refers to Child's cookbook and develops a relationship not with Child herself but with the persona—the character developed and presented by *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*—that Child's cookbook constructs. Sharing characteristics with the author, this persona represents a deliberate construction and a performance: an autobiographical act.

The concept of subject as fiction is magnified in the film *Julie and Julia* because it is an adaptation of a memoir written by Julie Powell. The characters in the film, while based on real people, are fictional. In both an interview and a blog post after the film aired, the real Julie Powell—claiming that Amy Adams' portrayal of her resembled her only slightly—complained to the media, "But that's not ME!" (Pastor, Powell), not understanding that the difference is unavoidable. In the film, Julie's husband, Eric, does understand this multiplicity of personas. He tries to console the film-version Julie when she learns that Julia Child does not approve of her blog (despite Julie's insistence that Child is perfect) by telling her that the "Julia Child in *your*

head is perfect; the Julia Child who doesn't understand what you're doing is not perfect. The one in your head is the one who matters" (*Julie and Julia*). This scene suggests that distinction which Powell (the author and not the film character) had a hard time grasping: the film character is a fiction based on her blog persona. Smith and Watson explain, "the 'I' available to readers [or viewers] is the 'I' who tells the autobiographical narrative" (*Reading* 72). The "I" available to readers, therefore, is not the author or the subject of the text: it is a narrator. Author Powell finally seemed to accept the difference several months after her initial outburst. In a *USA Today* article about her, she says, "I did have to get my head around the fact that someone so perky and sweet and lovely would be playing me, because I'm not particularly sweet." In Ephron's script, Adams is 'portraying a Julie Powell that Nora invented based loosely on my book,' Powell says. 'It's a rom-com (romantic comedy) version of my life'" (Memmott). What is not mentioned in the news article is that the "Julie Powell . . . based loosely on my book" is still an adaptation; the author, Julie Powell, wrote a book about herself and by so doing, created a narrative persona. This persona, not the author, was adapted for the screen.

Roland Barthes confirms the distinction between author and persona in his essay, "From Work to Text." He writes, "It is not that the Author may not 'come back' in the Text, in his text, but he then does so as a 'guest.' . . . He becomes, as it were, a paper-author: his life is no longer the origin of his fictions but a fiction contributing to his work" (161). The author becomes a historical figure associated with the text—the paper-author is a distinct figure from the historical author. Smith and Watson cite Eakin, who refers to life writing as "a process of constructing a 'narratively constituted identity,' not an instantiation of an autobiographical subject, in Barthes' terms, as 'merely . . . an effect of language'" (*Reading* 214). Here, Eakin distinguishes again between the author and the persona.

Authors simply cannot present an unbiased and accurate recreation of themselves, which is further complicated by Barthes' theory regarding readers. Readers, according to Barthes, play an important role in the creation of the text as well, which describes well the interesting dynamic present in a cookbook. Barthes expects engagement with the text to be of utmost importance to readers and suggests this engagement is a form of writing. For Barthes, "the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text" (*S/Z* 4). He elevates readers as writers and indicates that the process or activity of connecting with the text as he suggests is an act of rewriting, the result of which he calls a writerly text. A readerly text can be construed as a finite object while a writerly text extends beyond the boundaries conceived by author or reader. Julia Child had no idea that Julie Powell would use her book to create a blog, yet Powell took the book and replicated it. By cooking each recipe from the book, she reproduced both the text and Child's persona in the text. It obviously was not in a way that the author Julia Child approved of (*Julie and Julia*), though Julia Child's text now includes Julie Powell's work as well. In fact, it has probably enjoyed a renewed popularity thanks to the publicity Powell's work inspired. As Powell's work has influenced the reception of Child's text by readers, the relationship between the two illustrates well Barthes' theories in "The Death of the Author" that "it is language which speaks, not the author" (143). The author becomes a historical figure associated with the text—but not in a privileged position regarding the text. It was not Child's role to mandate how readers engage with her text because the text only exists insofar as it is being produced by its readers (Barthes, "From Work" 157). Barthes suggests that while readerly texts "make up the enormous mass of our literature" (*S/Z* 5), it is up to readers to make texts writerly by becoming writers themselves in their (re)productions of these

texts. I suggest that cookbooks encourage writerly production because of the recipe production inherent in them.

Barthes' idea of readers producing a text is magnified further by the idea of replication—that is, by the fact that cookbook readers are intended to replicate the recipes they find in the books and goes beyond the engagement with a text that Barthes alludes to. By cooking from the recipes included in the cookbook, readers replicate the autobiographical act performed by the author and thereby create their own autobiographical acts. Nora Ephron mimics the idea of replication in the movie by using a series of flashbacks between the two heroines performing identical tasks: they sharpen knives, type recipes, frost chocolate cakes, and take antacids in front of bathroom mirrors, suggesting a parallel that bridges time and space. This repetition implies more of a parallel between the two women than probably exists, which performs two functions: it exemplifies the way the two women used cooking to define themselves, and it makes the actions the two women perform seem universal, even across generations, as if to invite the audience to mimic the action further to experience the same feeling. The movie, through these repetitive flashbacks, exemplifies the replicative nature of Powell's blogging project. By cooking the very recipes that Child perfected, she performs the Child persona she has perceived and created in her own mind. She perceives that Child is influencing her, though it is actually just the persona she has read, not the real Child. After her husband tells her that she does not have to make all the aspics—that she could lie—she retorts, “I can't, I just can't. Julia will know. It's like she's watching me, I'm under her influence, I'm becoming a much better person because of her” (*Julie and Julia*). Powell, according to the film, believes that the cooking project she has undertaken, to replicate Child, is making her a better person. Her husband disagrees, at least in the moment, but Powell's belief works to show viewers how formative cooking can be for a persona, marking it

as an autobiographical act as the following discussion of David Lebovitz, Ina Garten, and Dorie Greenspan illustrates.

David Lebovitz: Churning a Persona

David Lebovitz, a trained pastry chef and cookbook author, uses narrative strategically in his writing creating a public persona which functions as a performance, though his “chatty style” (Leonardi 345) creates a familiarity that readers are drawn to and trust. Readers easily feel that they know the “real” David Lebovitz, as illustrated on his high-trafficked blog which receives numerous comments every day. While not intentionally deceptive, Lebovitz encourages this relationship with readers through the narratives he shares which make his books function as autobiography. The persona created, the “I” available to readers, shares characteristics with the real Lebovitz but is not the same person, illustrating the manufactured nature of personas while demonstrating the efficacy of cookbooks as autobiographical acts.

Lebovitz’s propensity for including narratives in his writing is clear early in his ice cream cookbook, *The Perfect Scoop*, which was published in 2007. Lebovitz begins his introduction to *The Perfect Scoop* with the intention of writing autobiographically: “I’d like to start this book with a nostalgic tale,” he writes. “I was much younger, and my sister and I spent our summer afternoons hand cranking ice cream on my grandfather’s porch in the warm glow of July” (vii). Lebovitz thus begins his cookbook by sharing a narrative that explains the draw of the subject matter to him, a story that will hopefully inspire readers. Not only does it link the subject of the book (ice cream) to the celebrity chef, but it also ties the subject to nostalgia and Americana. He invokes the image of a hand-crank ice cream maker (which sounds like a lot more fun than it actually is), reminding readers of old-fashioned homemade ice cream fresh from the machine with chunks of fruit, “sun-warmed peaches [harvested] from gloriously overloaded trees” (vii),

as Lebovitz describes them, making an effort to encourage readers to imagine the taste of those peaches. His use of adjectives may not be precise, but the attempt at invoking nostalgia in readers works to help us as critical readers understand his persona: he wants us to relate him and his recipes with rural Americana.

While this first story is a lovely narrative, involving vanilla beans, ripe peaches, and fresh cream from a dairy farm, Lebovitz next confesses that it is all fiction. He writes, “That would indeed make a lovely story. If any of it were true” (vii). This move into meta-discourse announces the presence of a narrator and reminds us that the story never happened outside the text. His confession also shows that Lebovitz recognizes the social aspect of food: preparing food together and sharing it always makes it taste better—Lebovitz will even make up memories to serve his purpose. While Lebovitz may not have spent a summer churning ice cream from fresh cream and peaches, it is an association he has deliberately made with ice cream, whether fictional or not, and thus still offers insight into the persona his cookbook works to create.

Lebovitz’s second narrative, which he claims is the “true” version, relates his earliest “real” memories of ice cream, and to the younger generation to which many of his readers belong, it is equally nostalgic. He describes serving up ice cream at a genuine soda fountain, strengthening his teenage forearms while scooping it up non-stop for hours on end. In explaining why the shop was so busy, he says, “[the ice cream] was fresh and locally made, truly delicious. But another and perhaps equally important draw was that we gave unreasonably huge scoops . . . completely out of proportion to the fragile sugar cones we were constantly breaking” (vii). While we may be tempted to write off this second (and supposedly true) narrative because Lebovitz has established himself as a fiction writer, we need to remember that he is actually hard at work developing a persona. This persona is driven first by the demands of the cookbook genre,

but also by history and by nostalgia and provides several images to evoke that nostalgic feeling. We may not know what kind of real interactions this persona had with ice cream when he was a child, but we do know that the persona tells stories rich with detail, from the “glowing sun mak[ing] its early evening retreat” to the “blissful moment [that] would pass over [him] as the icy-cold blast of air hit [his] face” in the giant walk-in freezer (vii-viii). While it is easy to say one of these stories is true and one is false, the truth is that both stories stand in relation to the reader as fictions. Readers have read them, and they are now (re)producers of the text and the persona which Lebovitz uses the text to create.

The focus on place, both domestic and foreign, exemplifies Lebovitz’s American upbringing and works to evoke nostalgia in readers. As Kathleen A. Boardman and Gioia Woods explain, “one marker of autobiography produced in and about the North American West is a preoccupation with place, along with a focus on identity issues directly related to place: rootedness, anxiety, nostalgia, restlessness” (Smith and Watson, *Reading* 43). By using location and a sense of place, Lebovitz targets his primarily American audience and successfully appeals to readers’ senses of nostalgia and wanderlust. He emphasizes the importance of place in his introduction to the “Sauces and Toppings” chapter. Intending to unite readers, Lebovitz notes, “Because *we* Americans are famous for our love of butterscotch and gooey caramel, there’s Pecan-Praline Sauce . . . and a Creamy Caramel Sauce as well. With a nod to ice cream lovers around the world, I’ve also gone global, with recipes such as Candied Red Beans, Cajeta, and Dulce de Leche. I think you’ll enjoy making and eating them all, no matter where you call home” (163, emphasis mine). He ends his paragraph with a reference to home, a particularly interesting move since he claims his identity as an American even though he has resided in Paris for nearly a decade. He associates home with America, though he chooses to live elsewhere, and

ties a sense of location to the selection of caramel sauces. This globalization of caramel connects his persona with his nationality and enables readers to understand his background while refocusing our attention back to the persona rather than the place.

Lebovitz's introduction is not limited to personal and collective nostalgia in its construction of the Lebovitz persona; he also delves into exploring a more specific relationship with ice cream itself. Ice cream, Lebovitz suggests, is more than a food—it is an experience both of homey indulgence and international travel. The transition from Americana to multiculturalism is sudden in *The Perfect Scoop*. Lebovitz finishes his second story and immediately states that “Americans aren’t the only ones who love ice cream” (viii). The switch to the global dessert traditions first reiterates that ice cream is a notable feature of traditional America and then leads readers into a whirlwind tour de taste of international ice cream traditions, which makes it (and Lebovitz’s persona) more global. Lebovitz starts with Europe and describes gelaterias in Florence and the famous Berthillon shop in Paris, about which he notes “locals and tourists line up for cones of *glace* Berthillon, dainty little *boules* of ice cream with intense flavors” (viii). He continues on to Mexico, Spain, and India before returning to a (semi-) domestic space in Hawaii. Explaining the unique flavor combinations he has encountered in his travels works to expand his persona from the down-home all-American boy to a world-class traveler with a refined palate. It also expands the idea of ice cream from the hand-cranked variety on the back of Grandpa’s porch to an internationally-inspired dessert with a multitude of variations. Broadening the scope of ice cream foregrounds the unusual flavor combinations contained in the cookbook, ranging from Basil Ice Cream, a close variant of mint (100), to Goat Cheese Ice cream (62). Lebovitz admits, “I’ve . . . gone out on a limb and included some flavors and ingredients that you may not be

accustomed to seeing in ice cream, like cheese, herbs, and vegetables” (ix), self-selecting himself into the foodie category.

Lebovitz uses the recipes often as a forum for sharing the autobiographical experiences of his travels. This is true with the recipe for “Kinako Ice Cream,” which Lebovitz was inspired to create after a visit to Japan where he tasted a dessert his guide could not explain. He later found the flavoring in a market and was able to translate kinako as soybean powder (42). While that ice cream itself is not native to Japan (at least as far as Lebovitz knows), the flavor is, which shows readers that ice cream is not limited to the traditional flavors we see in the supermarket. With an exploration of both nostalgic and ethnic variations, Lebovitz expands the idea many readers may have of ice cream and finishes his quick tour of international experiences with the invitation to use the book as a guidebook, again reflecting the allusions to travel. He promises that making ice cream is easy—indeed, some recipes “require nothing more complicated than pressing the button on [a] blender” (viii). After being around the world, Lebovitz brings it back to the home kitchen and encourages readers to venture out on their own culinary adventures, right from the comfort of their own blenders.

After describing international ice cream in the introduction, Lebovitz shifts his focus from his personal experiences with ice cream to the creation of ice cream in the home kitchen, where readers will have the means to (re)produce his text. He invites the readers to consider what they can personally accomplish in their kitchens by explaining the simplicity of many recipes which do not require specialized equipment. But before Lebovitz even gets to the recipes, he expands on ways readers can personalize them, through mix-ins (see chapter six) and serving suggestions like ice cream sandwiches. Not only do his suggestions encourage readers to replicate and recreate his recipes, they suggest that in their replication, readers can become

authors in their own right, creating versions and variations that are solely their own. When making ice cream, it is up to the readers to create their perfect experience and by so doing, they create their own autobiographical acts. Of course, as the celebrity chef, Lebovitz also promises to nudge them along: “Along with the basic recipes . . . I’ve included lots of variations, called Perfect Pairings, which you can use to customize your scoop” (ix). He still takes the lead as the travel guide, if you will, and encourages the readers who are just beginning their exploration of ice cream, emphasizing his role as mentor and readers’ role as apprentices.

Lebovitz’s emphasis on readers here in the introduction foreshadows many such moments in the rest of the cookbook, heightening the ways in which *The Perfect Scoop*, like all cookbooks, operates as a dynamic text. Lebovitz’s encouragement for readers to create their own desserts by recreating and then altering his original recipes makes his cookbook an autobiographical experience for not only the writer but also for the readers. The participation of readers in (re)producing the text exemplifies Barthes’ theory that a text is an experience or an activity: it exists only insofar as it is being produced either by the author in the initial writing or by the reader (“From Work” 157). Just as Lebovitz creates an autobiography by weaving personal narratives into his recipes, readers enact their own autobiographical acts as they make ice cream, an experience that immediately becomes part of their life stories. Leonardi discusses this idea in her analysis of *The Joy of Cooking*. She argues that “like a narrative, a recipe is reproducible, and, further, its hearers-readers-receivers are *encouraged* to reproduce it and, in reproducing, to revise it and make it their own” (344). The interaction with the text that is inherent in using it makes cookbooks, which include both recipes and narratives as Lebovitz’s does, a uniquely dynamic discourse.

Lebovitz exemplifies the dynamic discourse inherent in cookbooks through the language he uses: he writes in an imperative tone which is moderated by the persona he has constructed in the narrative portions of the text. Lebovitz instructs readers to act, to cook. However, his imperative tone is not dictatorial; it is friendly and encouraging. Lebovitz adopts this tone throughout *The Perfect Scoop*, in the introduction as already discussed and in the recipe headnotes. For example, in his recipe for “Cinnamon Ice Cream,” Lebovitz directs, “Skip the bowl of whipped cream to accompany pumpkin pie or apple crisp and treat your lucky guest to cinnamon ice cream instead” (38). This is clearly a directive, but it does not carry the same weight as a traditional imperative tone: it can hardly feel harsh when the subject is whipped cream and cinnamon ice cream. Rather than feeling oppressed, readers may feel included, mentored, or welcomed, which is magnified by his writing elsewhere in the book, such as in the chapter introductions, which include numerous encouragements along with the directives. He says, for example, “If you’ve never made a stovetop custard before, it’s quite simple, and I’ve offered step-by-step instructions with pictures and lots of pointers and tips to ensure success” (23). His step-by-step custard instructions are extensive and longer than most recipes, again exemplifying his mentoring role and the modification of a somewhat authoritative tone.

Once readers engage the text and recreate the dishes proposed by Lebovitz, the dishes become a part of the readers’ narrative of self, a narrative that, like Lebovitz’s, constructs a certain persona that can be read as indicative of this “self.” For instance, readers who select a more complicated recipe from Lebovitz’s cookbook, such as “Toasted Almond and Candied Cherry Ice Cream” (60), which not only involves making the time-consuming custard ice cream base but also includes ingredients that require separate preparation like the candied cherries, announce themselves as readers with discerning palates. They cannot be satisfied with basic

peach ice cream. The selection of this recipe also suggests the readers have time to dedicate to making the ice cream, the process of which may span several days with well over an hour of active work time. These readers may be more comfortable with the techniques of making ice cream and may consider themselves experts. On the other hand, beginners may select one of the simpler recipes, one made without eggs such as the “Chocolate Ice Cream, Philadelphia-Style” (28), which involves only mixing, melting chocolate, and blending prior to freezing. A simpler ice cream such as this may be just right for someone without a lot of experience. Or it may suggest someone who prefers the simpler texture of a traditional ice cream over that of a frozen custard which can be quite rich. Whatever the intent, the recipes selected by readers for recreation in the kitchen forms part of their own personas, part of the narrative of their lives. They may, as Lebovitz suggests, share their creations with friends, or they may, as so many others have done, write about their experiences on a blog, making it a part of their own personas.

Lebovitz creates a certain image of self through all the stories he shares in his cookbook—a persona upon which his popularity is largely based. This persona is that of a down-home American boy with roots in the heartland who has self-demonstrably broadened his rural horizons through international travel and formal training. The Lebovitz that emerges from *The Perfect Scoop* is encouraging and welcoming. He is open, sharing memories from his childhood, which helps readers feel comfortable. He is the encouraging mentor, whether or not David Lebovitz, the author and celebrity chef, is himself. Cookbooks illustrate well the distance between the autobiographical persona of the author and the author himself (though the two may certainly share characteristics), and because of their dynamic nature, they also demonstrate the manner in which readers create personas in their recreation of recipes as well. This is not limited

to David Lebovitz's cookbooks, by any means; other celebrity authors incorporate similar structures and narratives into their cookbooks to create their own unique personas.

The Barefoot Contessa: Using a Persona for Branding

The persona that Ina Garten develops in her popular cookbooks is quite different than David Lebovitz's, but it functions in a similar way. While Lebovitz's casual persona shares memories from childhood and works to make readers feel comfortable, Garten's persona (whose moniker suggests a shoeless Italian royal) presents a high society experience attainable to the average cook but manages to do so without appearing stuffy. She avoids being overly formal through her oft-repeated phrase: "How easy is that?" This phrase became such a mantra through her writing and television career that she used it as the subtitle of her most recent cookbook, *Barefoot Contessa: How Easy Is That?*, published in 2010. Garten uses this phrase, her moniker, "Barefoot Contessa," and her pedagogical strategies to develop a cooking empire. Fans of Garten can not only watch her on the Food Network and purchase cookbooks written by her, but they can also purchase a variety of baking mixes and condiments marketed under the Barefoot Contessa label. Garten thus uses her persona as a means of branding. All celebrity chefs engage in a form of branding (Lebovitz, for instance, has branded himself on his website as a means to market his cookbooks); however, Garten's branding is more overt and commercial than others, marking her persona clearly as a brand. While branding herself seems to commodify her, it actually shows a different way an author uses autobiography. In her work, she advances her persona through narratives, like Lebovitz, but also relies heavily on photographs and ingredient lists.

The tone of her mantra, along with the tone she uses throughout her recipe headnotes, involves readers by asking for a response, even if an expected silent one, which encourages

readers to invest themselves in her text. She phrases numerous notes in her cookbooks as questions, such as this note included with the “Baked Blintzes with Fresh Blueberry Sauce” recipe: “I love blintzes on Sunday morning, but who wants to stand at the stove first making the crepes, then making the filling, and then frying the blintzes—not to mention make the sauce?” (*Back to Basics* 230). Here, it would have been quite simple to write a declarative sentence: “I don’t like to stand at the stove cooking on a Sunday morning.” By phrasing it as a rhetorical question, she begs her readers to see where she is coming from and to realize that this recipe is the perfect solution to the predicament she has presented them with. While she does not expect an audible (or written) response to her frequent queries, she does expect the questions to engage readers and prompt them to try the recipes which might initially appear too difficult, thus creating, once again, their own autobiographical acts and culinary personas. Her encouragement of readers illustrates her emphasis on teaching. By showing how simple her recipes are and by engaging readers by asking rhetorical questions, Garten develops an instructive persona who teaches readers basic cooking principles.

Garten’s emphasis may be on the ease of her recipes, but her persona is also rooted in her upscale Hamptons home in New York. She presents a glimpse into her home life as a celebrity, though she attempts to make it appear ordinary both through some of her narratives and through photographs. Garten, in her narratives, references some of her high-society acquaintances, such as in her *Barefoot in Paris* book in which she shares a narrative of her first visit to the famous E. Dehillerin cookware store in Paris, a story she also related to Chuck Williams of the American Williams-Sonoma store while hosting him for dinner. He apparently had a similar experience, which inspired him to start his famous cookware stores in America. She finishes these two intertwined tales with a note, “Of course even having the world’s best cookware can’t ensure a

perfect dinner . . . this [dinner with Chuck] was the first time I forgot to serve the main course!” (107). Her narrative, however lighthearted, is keyed into the instruction based around the importance of cookware. Each narrative she shares enhances her informative segments which are meant to educate readers, magnifying the pedagogical nature of her persona: while she casually name-drops to illustrate her upper-crust associations, she does so to show readers her point, thus demonstrating her cookbook persona to be high society but also a teacher.

Garten also uses photography to develop her cookbook persona. While Lebovitz’s *The Perfect Scoop* has numerous photographs, those photographs are primarily focused on the food. Garten’s books feature a number of photographs of her, starting with the front covers which feature a prominent photograph of Garten, generally involved in some aspect of food preparation. In contrast, Lebovitz’s author photograph appears only on the back flap of his *The Perfect Scoop*. In addition to the cover art, Garten’s face appears numerous times throughout the text in various poses and stages of eating, all the way from preparing the food in the kitchen with friends to eating it out on the back lawn. Excluding the cover, her face (not including photos that might be her arm or her back for instance) appears thirteen times in *Barefoot Contessa: Family Style* and eight times in *Barefoot Contessa At Home*. The frequency of personal photos indicates the importance of having the visual representation of her to the persona. Further, she also includes numerous other lifestyle photographs, which work to illustrate for readers her daily life. The introduction of *Barefoot Contessa At Home* features photographs of her large, beautifully furnished home. She may intend for the photographs to be welcoming to readers, just as she intends her home to welcome her friends and neighbors, emphasizing again her pedagogical nature: by inviting readers into her life, she invites them to feel comfortable with her which enables her to mentor them, much like Lebovitz does in his own text through his narratives. The

photographs of her lifestyle also work towards the branding alluded to earlier. By including photos of her lifestyle, she entices readers who may wish to recreate it. Her branded mixes (available through Stonewallkitchens.com) enable those readers who are too busy or are less inclined to bake to participate in a similarly constructed lifestyle—indeed, the “Barefoot Contessa” lifestyle.

There is more to Garten’s cookbook persona than the high-society, pedagogically-minded persona. She also emphasizes the importance of good ingredients, which illustrates her tastes. She clarifies her preference for quality ingredients in her first cookbook, in which she dedicates a section to ingredients. She titles it “Fresh Ingredients for Simple Food” and explains, “the key to delicious simple food is, of course, to use the best ingredients . . . the same holds true for kitchen staples. I am always testing olive oils and finding the ones with the freshest fruity olive flavors” (*Barefoot Contessa* 29-30). This explanation describes concisely her philosophy regarding food which is consistently seen throughout her texts. No recipe calls for olive oil without specifying “good olive oil,” and references to other “good” ingredients are abundant in Garten’s recipes. Some brand preferences are supplied as a way to ensure recipe success: if a recipe was tested using Skippy peanut butter, for instance, like her recipe for “Kathleen’s Peanut Butter Icing” (*At Home* 188), a baker could best hope to recreate it accurately by using the same brand. However, some brand preferences are little more than her own taste, again magnifying her philosophy of using only the best and freshest ingredients as a means to best control taste. She encourages readers to order Pernigotti cocoa powder from Williams-Sonoma for her “Chocolate Sorbet” (*At Home* 183) and hamburger buns from Eli Zabar “if you want delicious brioche hamburger buns” (*At Home* 92). Her philosophy of using quality ingredients in simple ways is an enticing and manageable way for readers to recreate her lifestyle, again contributing to the Barefoot Contessa

brand. Though she does not benefit financially when someone orders cocoa powder from Williams-Sonoma, dedicated readers willing to do that are also most likely to purchase additional Barefoot Contessa titles if they found the Chocolate Sorbet to their liking. When they have recreated the Chocolate Sorbet as closely to Garten's as possible, readers also assume they will enjoy Garten's other recipes just as much.

While Garten enables readers to mimic her lifestyle by providing photographs and specifying brand preferences, she does so with risk. Not all readers will have the time or financial means to replicate her accurately, and her repetition of lifestyle photographs and the importance of good ingredients can marginalize readers. By emphasizing these two components of her persona, Garten may unintentionally distance readers who cannot obtain expensive, quality ingredients, or who feel uncomfortable by the overt display of wealth. For instance, in a chapter interlude in her *Barefoot Contessa At Home* book titled "Designing a Kitchen," Garten goes into great detail about her preference in kitchen design, assuming that readers will have the opportunity to make such decisions as which direction to face the windows and whether to include a wood-burning oven (211). This display of wealth may marginalize a great number of her potential readers who could never dream of building a home with a large enough kitchen to accommodate a wood-burning oven. Her tone may invite readers to relate by encouraging them and instructing them, but the subject matter distances them. Some people, though they may like the persona Garten presents, may simply not have enough in common with her to relate to her and truly engage with her while others may value it as a means of "seeing how the other half lives" and fantasizing about fitting into a life like Garten's. Either way, readers are interacting with a persona with whom they have little in common, creating a distance that for some will be difficult to overcome. While it may not endear all readers to her, Garten's persona is consistent

throughout her books. Like Lebovitz, Garten engages readers and invites readers to replicate and reproduce the text by cooking the recipes.

Tuesdays With Dorie: Replicating the Persona

Ina Garten encourages readers to replicate her dishes by showcasing their ease of preparation and David Lebovitz offers readers suggestions of ways to make the dishes their own. Dorie Greenspan similarly encourages replication through her tone and through her sidenotes which appear next to many recipes, encouraging cooks to experiment. “Dorie,” as she is referred to online, has inspired hundreds of cooks and bakers around the world to replicate and blog about her recipes: one blogger created two online cooking groups dedicated to Greenspan’s books. While Lebovitz and Garten both encourage readers to replicate their texts, Greenspan’s texts are particularly helpful to the discussion of replication because her books have been publicly replicated by an organized group. Greenspan’s text thus functions as her autobiographical act and also magnifies the importance of the text in readers’ autobiographical acts.

Greenspan includes encouraging sidenotes in both of her two most-recent books. In her latest book, *Around My French Table*, Greenspan titles the sidenotes “Bonne Idée,” literally translated as “good idea,” while in her baking book, *Baking: From My Home to Yours*, they are titled “Playing Around.” Both sets of notes accomplish the same thing: they give readers an idea of possible variations they can try and often suggest variations that Greenspan herself has used. Further, she has included many recipes which are not exactly recipes but are rather more like ideas than actual recipes, such as her “Goat Cheese and Strawberry Tartine” (44) or her “Pumpkin Stuffed with Everything Good,” about which she acknowledges, “as soon as I’d baked my first pumpkin, I realized that an outline is about the best you can do with this dish. . . . My guess is that you’ll have the same feeling once you start playing around with this ‘outline’”

(364). Greenspan encourages replication first by not discouraging cooks. By not demanding specialty ingredients and by encouraging readers to cook to taste, she allows for readers to use what they have available. Her recipe also suggests her persona is one of sharing and encouragement. Greenspan treats her cookbook readers much like friends who might ask for a recipe, to which she might respond, “it’s simple really: here’s how you do it,” giving them a sense that they can cook it to taste, just as she does. Greenspan reinforces this implied tone in her introduction. Her last note reassures readers. “Just about every time you cook or bake, you’ve got to make a judgment call—it’s the nature of the craft. And so, I’ve given you as many clues as I can for you to decide when something is done . . . but the success of any cooking—whether from this book or any other—depends on using your judgment.” Further, she notes, “I always feel that when I send a recipe out into the world, I’m asking you to be my partner in making it, and I love this about cookbookery. I trust your judgment, and you should too” (*Baking* xiii). Greenspan shows her persona to be warm, encouraging, and trusting—she expects average readers to use her cookbook and trusts that with the instructions she has given, they will be able to use it well.

Greenspan thus encourages replication by treating her cookbook not as a perfect, unalterable text, but as an educated starting place for cooks to use as inspiration. By treating cooks as peers and not students, Greenspan allows readers to make a recipe their own and thus a part of their autobiographical act. As Lynn Z. Bloom writes, “readers and writers are allies in the text, and therefore in life” (354), suggesting the collaboration inherent in a text alluded to by Barthes: “the text requires that one try to abolish (or at the very least diminish) the distance between writing and reading” (“From Work to Text” 162). As allies, the writer and readers participate in creating the text, a dynamic work that operates as an autobiographical act for both writer and reader. Her encouragement for readers is reiterated through a narrative she shares in

which she expresses her joy in learning someone else had enjoyed making one of her recipes. Following her recipe for “World Peace Cookies” in her *Baking* book, Greenspan includes a narrative about the menu at a luncheon at which she spoke. The chef served a plate of cookies, and Greenspan notes, “One look and I was pretty sure they were World Peace Cookies; one taste and I knew. But what was I supposed to say? Was I supposed to admit that I knew the cookies and that the recipe was probably mine?” (139). Having been served her own recipe at a luncheon, Greenspan was thrilled. She tells the chef, “You have no idea how exciting this is!” She finishes her brief narrative with an appeal to readers: “It was a joy to know that something I liked so much had made other people happy. That the feeling had come full circle made it even more joyful” (139). Greenspan has indicated here why she writes cookbooks: she enjoys sharing her recipes which she hopes will make others happy as they prepare them. Greenspan’s delight in sharing recipes again magnifies the importance of sharing and friendship to her persona. She genuinely wants to share her recipes, which have brought her so much joy, with others, in hopes that they will also bring joy to them. The “World Peace Cookies” narrative encourages readers to recreate the recipes because it showcases Greenspan’s desire for others to recreate her dishes.

In addition to overtly inviting readers to enjoy her recipes, Greenspan also uses a friendly, informal tone in her recipes which functions to create a welcoming persona, the seeming equivalent of Greenspan inviting readers into her kitchen as she prepares recipes. In her “Orange Berry Muffins” recipe, she describes what cooks should do to combine the ingredients: “Don’t worry about being thorough—the batter will be lumpy and bubbly, and that’s just the way it should be” (*Baking* 3). This instruction is more descriptive and less formal than many muffin recipes that appear in other cookbooks, such as the “Blueberry Streusel Muffins” from Ina Garten’s *Barefoot Contessa: Back to Basics* book. Garten says, “[Mix] just until blended. . . .

Don't overmix!" (244). Many recipes state to mix just until blended and to avoid overmixing, just as Garten does here. However, few authors speak to readers as close friends, reassuring them "that's just the way it should be." This welcoming and encouraging tone advances Greenspan's persona as a casual friend, which helps readers feel confident in their abilities to replicate the recipes. By reassuring readers, Greenspan ensures that if readers do not make a recipe, it will not be because they do not feel confident.

While Greenspan has invited replication of her book through her narratives and welcoming language, Laurie Woodward, a blogger, took her invitation to recreate her recipes a step further by founding *Tuesdays With Dorie*, an online baking group, as a way to motivate herself to keep a New Year's Resolution. The group, which includes over three hundred members, bakes the same recipe from Greenspan's *Baking: From My Home to Yours* each week and posts photographs and experiences about the recipe each Tuesday. This group provides a sense of community for the members, but more importantly, the members' blogs are a visual representation of the readers' replication of Greenspan's text. Dorie Greenspan has mentioned the group on her blog multiple times, always with joy. Similar to the joy she expresses in her *Baking* book regarding the "World Peace Cookies," she notes, "It always thrills me when the TWD [Tuesdays With Dorie] bakers like the recipes they make" (*In the Kitchen*). Greenspan derives great pleasure from seeing others enjoy her recipes, reiterating her friendly persona. Further, this public replication illustrates the autobiographical acts the readers have performed by cooking from Greenspan's text.

By replicating Greenspan's text publicly, the members of Tuesdays With Dorie enable visitors to their blogs to see the autobiographical acts they have performed by baking the recipes. Up to this point, I have speculated at the autobiographical acts performed by readers; this online

group, however, enables us to read actual autobiographical acts by readers. For instance, when Valerie, of *Une Gamine dans la Cuisine*, hosts the group, she notes about her choice of recipes:

When it was my turn to pick a recipe, I wanted to choose something that was not only simple, but had a quirky ingredient that takes a traditional recipe up a few notches. Who knew that cornmeal would shine in shortbread? Well, I kind of figured it would. You see, I was not a fan of cornmeal until we actually introduced ourselves properly. Now I love the texture and hearty flavour [sic] it lends to sweets.

Valerie takes the opportunity to explain her choice of recipes. This is a written explanation of an act that every cook or baker performs each time she cooks. Recipe selection, as previously discussed, can be analyzed to understand a cook's persona. In Valerie's case, her persona seems to be adventurous. She notes that she wanted a recipe that "had a quirky ingredient," which suggests that she is using her involvement in the group as a growing experience. She also says that she did not always like cornmeal, suggesting that she is open to new experiences and flavors—not your typical picky eater. Because the group members publicly perform their autobiographical acts as they (re)produce Greenspan's text, we can see how Greenspan's text has inspired readers to replicate her recipes.

While the group itself has formed a community centered around Dorie Greenspan's *Baking: From My Home to Yours*, Greenspan herself has communicated with and about the group, even blogging with the group on occasion, creating an additional persona and reinforcing the constructed nature of personas. Greenspan, who Woodward invited to host the recipe on the anniversary of *Tuesdays With Dorie*, selected the "French Pear Tart." While the narrative she shares on her blog is similar to the recipe headnote which appears in the book, the tone is far

more personal, and she claims in it that the tart is one of her husband's all-time favorites (368). She also shares a narrative of what they did with the tart during this particular week: they shared it with dinner guests, but Greenspan notes, "Since we were eight for dinner, the plate should have returned empty, but Michael [Greenspan's husband] was in charge of cutting and, while he wasn't stingy, he was careful -- careful to leave enough to snack on today!" This short narrative adds humor, but also validates her statement that it is among her husband's favorites, which is high praise considering Greenspan confesses in her introduction that "rarely a day goes by that I don't bake" (xiii). By participating with the group, Greenspan unknowingly presents another persona, making it clear that both personas are created and are not entirely Dorie Greenspan herself: they clearly have a lot in common, but the Dorie Greenspan of the cookbooks is not the same Dorie Greenspan of the blog. Dorie of the books has presented recipes that online bakers have reproduced, while the Dorie of the blog is flattered they have done so and participates occasionally in their online activities—the author reenters her text. While the two personas may be distinct, they share a lot of characteristics with the actual Dorie Greenspan who splits her time between New York, Connecticut, and Paris.

Conclusion: Replicating Further

Like other books, cookbooks present unique personas and do so through the use of narrative, which authors incorporate into introductions, recipe headnotes, photographs, sidenotes, and other insertions. These narratives tell stories that develop the personas the author presents which inspires readers to replicate the recipes, making narratives an important component of cookbooks. Numerous cooks have noticed this, such as Julie Powell, who treated Julia Child as an old friend, and Barbara Fairchild who notes that "Dorie makes you feel that you have a good friend in the kitchen with you" (Greenspan, *Baking* back cover). Cookbooks not only present

recipes to cook from, but also personas to become acquainted with. However, they also exemplify Barthes' ideas regarding texts which should engage the reader as a writer. By encouraging replication through their very structure and purpose, cookbooks engage readers as they cook and develop their own autobiographical acts. By acting as a dynamic, literary text, cookbooks function as autobiographical acts for both the author and readers.

I have performed my own autobiographical act as I have cooked and baked from my collection of cookbooks, some of which I have analyzed here. David Lebovitz, for instance, has taught me how to make ice cream through his thorough cookbook. Over the course of three or four years, I have made close to a dozen different ice creams from his book—certainly enough to block anyone's arteries. One day, after discovering I had some heavy cream in the refrigerator that needed to be used, I settled down with his cookbook to find another recipe to try. However, I was not excited about any of them, at least any of them for which I had the ingredients. After browsing, I decided to try combining two of my favorite recipes that had a similar technique—chocolate and cinnamon. I fell in love with cinnamon ice cream when I studied abroad in Paris as a sophomore—my first taste of cinnamon ice cream was from a Carte d'Or ice cream cart on my birthday. You cannot beat birthday ice cream, especially when it is as delicious as cinnamon. Both recipes used a custard base, and I reasoned that I could meld the two quite easily, especially after consulting Lebovitz's recipe for Chocolate Raspberry Ice Cream. I had to call a neighbor first to borrow a few extra ounces of chocolate, but when I promised her some of the resulting ice cream, she was happy to loan it to me. The result? Delicious. It ended up being a little heavy on the cinnamon, but that was a problem I was happy to live with. Chocolate and cinnamon pair really nicely together. My neighbor loved it, as did my husband, who has requested it several times since, although I am trying to give our hearts a break this year and have avoided buying

cream in large quantities. What I loved most was that this ice cream was mine. I (re)produced Lebovitz's text, but produced it in a way that reflected my tastes and my persona, which is obviously indecisive. If you are as indecisive as I am, let me share my recipe for Chocolate-Cinnamon Ice Cream, with my thanks to David Lebovitz for providing my ice cream education—this ice cream is the perfect way to avoid making a decision, at least when the decision is about what kind of ice cream to eat!

Chocolate-Cinnamon Ice Cream

2 cups whipping cream, divided

1 cup milk

3/4 cup sugar

5 egg yolks

5 ounces semi-sweet baking chocolate, chopped

3 tablespoons Dutch processed cocoa

5 5-inch cinnamon sticks, broken into small pieces (I originally used 6, but felt it was just a bit too much)

1 teaspoon vanilla

In a saucepan, warm 1 cup cream and the cocoa, whisking vigorously to blend—the cocoa will stubbornly resist blending. When it is warm, remove from the heat and stir in the chocolate. Stir until the chocolate melts and is thoroughly mixed in. Remove to a medium bowl and set the bowl in an ice bath. Scrape the pan out as well as you can. Place a wire strainer over the bowl.

To the same saucepan, add the milk, remaining cream, sugar and cinnamon sticks. Warm until the sugar is dissolved, but do not allow it to boil. Remove from the heat, cover, and let the cinnamon steep for an hour.

Rewarm the cinnamon-milk mixture and strain out the cinnamon stick pieces with a slotted spoon. Meanwhile, whisk the egg yolks. When the cinnamon-milk is warm, slowly pour it into the egg yolks, whisking while you pour. Pour the mixture back into the saucepan and cook. Do NOT let it boil. Stir it constantly until thickened (it should coat the back of your spoon and leave a trail if you run your finger through it). Immediately remove from the heat and pour through the strainer into the chocolate-cream mixture. Add the vanilla and stir to cool the mixture. When it is cool, place it in the refrigerator, covered, and chill overnight. If it gets too thick, whisk it before you churn to thin it out. Freeze in your ice cream maker according to the manufacturer instructions.

Food tells of feelings and emotions. It narrates our lives. Cookbooks and food writing are ways of recording these gestures and function literarily and particularly autobiographically. What I do with food narrates my life with my family. It can narrate yours, too.

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