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Nothing More Delicious: Food as Temptation in Children's Literature

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NOTHING MORE DELICIOUS:
FOOD AS TEMPTATION IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

by

MARY A. STEPHENS

(Under the Direction of Richard Flynn)

ABSTRACT

Although many critics and theorists, including Roland Barthes, have discussed food in literature, little attention has been paid to the food-as-temptation story in children's literature. In Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* food is used as temptation for child protagonists, a tool to lure them into doing evil deeds or being generally mischievous. Some characters, like Alice, act as the tempters as well as the tempted, while others, like Edmund, wait passively for rescue. *Coraline* breaks this model by featuring a protagonist that not only saves her kidnapped parents by using food as a weapon, even after she is tempted by food herself. *Coraline* represents a more contemporary version of the food-as-temptation because its protagonist's agency is more complex. Coraline dictates her relationship with food, which makes her differ from other protagonists in other fantastical children's works.

INDEX WORDS: Children's literature, food, temptation, Carroll, Lewis, Dahl, Gaiman, *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Coraline*, Narnia,

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Chapter 1

Hors D'oeuvres: Food and Food Theory in Children's Literature

In the introduction to their anthology *Critical Approaches to Food in Children's Literature*, Kara Keeling and Scott Pollard argue that “if food is fundamental to life and a substance upon which civilizations and cultures have built themselves, then food is also fundamental to the imagination and the imaginary arts” (5). Food does fuel imagination, especially in children's literature, where picture and chapter books alike are likely to have food fantasy scenes, often with detailed illustrations. Despite its prevalence, studies on food have not been fully embraced by the scholarly world of children's literature—a relatively young field itself—and have only just begun to be discussed within the past couple of decades. Yet food plays a vital part in many types of children's stories, including fairy tales and canonical children's texts, such as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* series.

Many of these stories feature food as a temptation for the young protagonists, as a tool used to trick them into doing something wicked or mischievous, putting them in danger or dropping them into the clutches of an evil power. Sometimes, this tempting food is magical, offered by a witch or supernatural being. Food is often a weapon in fantasy literature, meant to lure children towards evil.

Keeling and Pollard claim that civilizations and cultures are built upon food, both as art and nourishment. This claim is also true for fantasy children's literature as well, where entire fantastical worlds might be built upon it, or even *of* it. Food plays a large role in children's literature, and complex relationships—such as the relationship between

food, child, and provider—can be illustrated through the types of food exchanged. This food-child-giver relationship is at the heart of the food-as-temptation story.

Eating, although necessary for survival, doesn't always appear in literature. When it does, it is usually symbolic. For example, in Homer's *Iliad*, Achilles and Hector's father, Priam, reconcile their differences and share a meal, which unites them despite the enmity between them. In *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin briefly mentions the importance of the funeral meal in the *Iliad* and also includes an entire chapter dedicated to banquet imagery, a frequent feature in Rabelais' work. Food, and the drinking and eating associated with it, is grouped with popular-festive forms, or themes and details taken from popular culture of the time, particularly culture related to the carnivalesque. Since food is a "part of every folk merriment," it often accompanies comic scenes, but the meanings of these scenes are not simply humorous (Bakhtin 279). Bakhtin argues that scenes involving food represent not only the grotesque body (through the consumption of dismembered animals), but also the symbol of "man tast[ing] the world" and making "it a part of himself" (281). Humans literally ingest the world, its animals and plants, and experience victory, "devour[ing] without being devoured" (281). Humanity's victory over the world is symbolically represented through renewal, the refreshment of the body, which means there is a possibility for new beginnings and optimism for the future.

For Bakhtin, food equates to power—power over the world itself, even. Gluttony complicates the "victory" of humanity, however, by making food less about mankind and more about the individual. Bakhtin writes that public eating, in places such as banquets and parties, emphasizes the communal elements of food and mimics the struggle against the world. However, private eating expresses "the contentment and satiety of the selfish

individual, his personal enjoyment, and not the triumph of the people as a whole” (301-302). Gluttonous individuals are not associated with the images of work and hardship, but with “abundance in the home” and greed (302).

While there is no shortage of merry meals in children’s literature, the gluttonous individual is often seduced by food, which is central to story patterns involving temptation. The glutton is the opposite of the ideal individual, one who eats publicly with his or her peers, symbolizing their united victory against the world. The greedy individual represents the loner, who selfishly prefers to dine in isolation. Those who are alone, and eat extravagantly, often end up in trouble, injured, or trapped. These gluttons also may be victims of a larger evil, a villain that aims to lure them into performing misdeeds.

Roland Barthes offers a different view of food in *Mythologies*, which explores various signs and symbols in everyday society. Barthes divides *Mythologies* into short chapters, each dealing with some sort of binary pairing or individual symbol. These short discussions are not developed into full examinations of semiology as a whole, but instead show its use in daily life. Barthes dedicates three chapters to food: “Steak and Chips,” “Wine and Milk,” and “Ornamental Cookery,” although the latter does not deal directly with food, but with the representation of it.

In “Wine and Milk,” Barthes explains that for the French, wine is a symbol of patriotism, “a possession which is [their] very own, just like [their] three hundred and sixty types of cheese” (58). While wine functions as itself, a beverage, it also represents humility, which stands in opposition to the “all too expected environment of cocktails and expensive drinks,” and creates a level of equality between the intellectual and the proletariat (58). Wine is linked to nature, to a more “natural virility” than other drinks,

but it works as an anti-milk, the drink of children, which represents innocence and wholesomeness (59-60).

“Steak and Chips” follows “Wine and Milk,” and follows a similar argument. More important than the consumption of steak is the way the steak is prepared: rare steak “represents both a nature and a morality” that overdone steak lacks (62). According to Barthes, blood, and the natural feelings it inspires, is patriotic for the French, and another national symbol. Chips acquire their national association by their frequent pairing with steak, which “communicates its national glamour to them” (63). Thus Barthes’ argues that food exists, not only as a means of survival, but as a symbol of larger cultural implications. In certain situations, the usually ordinary foods have the power to become a symbol of an entire society and its values.

“Ornamental Cookery” emphasizes the appearance of food, describing the use of garnishes and various preparations to both hide nature and artificially create it. Barthes doesn’t seem to believe in either of these options (one method is “a kind of frenzied baroque” effect, while the other is “an incongruous artifice”), but his overall message is simple; the appearance of food *does* matter and is often discussed in detail when food acts as a central temptation. Visual stimulation works to further entice tempted characters, luring them further into the world that draws them, or the hands of the seducer, whichever might be the case. Barthes’ observations about food, and the symbolic nature of food, are true for children’s works as well. In children’s texts, and especially fantasy texts, food can be representative of a particular culture, or visually appealing for specific symbolic purposes.

Food is also tied to the economics of consumerism. In *Consumption*, Robert Bocoock analyzes and tracks post-war consumption, paying particular attention to how consumption effects the desires of individuals. Although Bocoock does not focus on food specifically, he does note that food is part of consumer culture because the purchase of food must make a profit for the seller (6). Often, “adequate food does not go to those who may need it most,” including those who cannot pay for food or individuals cut off from the market (6). Bocoock also writes that “countries which do not have large productive capitalist industries,” still have people who are “hooked into *desiring* to consume the goods of capitalism” (53). Even though children are not explicitly included in this group, they are often excluded from capitalism because they do not have the financial means to fully participate as adults might. Children in fantasy stories are even more excluded because they are isolated from the capitalistic world entirely and sent to worlds without traditional economic systems. Still, these young consumers are “hooked” on desiring goods. They desire food, and specifically food that tempts them, even if they don’t have the means to pay for it, or even obtain it. The desire to consume places children, and even more so tempted children, in the history of consumerism, both in reality and fantasy.

As a specialized field of study, children’s literature has its own set of works and texts that address food (although these works often build upon theorists like Barthes). One of the first articles to specifically discuss food in children’s literature is Wendy R. Katz’s aptly titled “Some Uses of Food in Children’s Literature.” The article, though humble in its claim, argues that “children’s literature is filled with food-related images, notions, and values” because if one “understand[s] the relations between the child and food...[one] understand[s] the workings of the world of the young” (192). More

importantly, Katz discusses the place of food in the child's "adjustment to the social order"—their acclimation to society— or perhaps even the adult world (193). Just as Barthes' focuses on the presentation of food as well as on the food itself, Katz notes that manners are an important feature of eating. As an example, Katz cites Alice, who is "nothing if not civilized" as she struggles to find her place in Wonderland, and in the real world as well (193). Manners also relate to Bakhtin's discussion of the glutton, as gluttonous individuals tend to be too greedy to take time for manners. The lack of manners might further isolate the glutton, pushing him farther away from society and emphasizing his misdeeds.

Katz's article may seem simple in its scope, yet it has helped shape many key texts that look at food in children's literature. For example, Carolyn Daniel includes an entire chapter on manners in her book *Voracious Children: Who Eats Whom in Children's Literature*, using Alice once again as an example of good manners. Daniel also seems to agree with Katz's claim that understanding children's food means understanding children. Daniel, like Barthes, argues that food is "always symbolic," and should be examined accordingly (3). Since the fictional characters of fantastic children's literature don't need to be shown eating, food must serve a purpose other than sustenance. Daniel also explains that "the feasting fantasy in children's literature is a particularly good vehicle for carrying culture's socializing messages" because eating is a natural event in reality and capable of "naturalizing" the "lesson being taught" (4). As an integral part of reality, food fits seamlessly into fictional narratives, providing a multifaceted and symbolic vehicle for authors to communicate social change or lessons, whichever the case may be.

Not only can the purpose of food be interpreted—how it may teach a lesson to a particularly gluttonous child, for example—but the type of food can be analyzed, too. It is no coincidence that in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* Mr. Tumnus and Lucy share a wholesome tea, or that Edmund longs for the indulgently sweet Turkish delight. The types of food consumed may signal some broader meaning in the text, or important insights about individual characters.

Daniel's chapter on food fantasies and fetishes is most widely applicable to the food-as-temptation story. In British literature, food fantasies typically depict "rich foods" in "vast quantities as well as foods that contemporary discourses on health condemn as fat-laden" (62). Daniel notes that because of Europe's history of famine (in England, France, and Ireland), food fantasies are likely the imaginary manifestation of very real hunger. Another influence on food fantasies is the "harsh regime" of the British nursery, which consisted of extremely bland food to be eaten in isolation, away from one's parents (64). The nursery, which was usually occupied by the children of the house and their caretakers, such as nurses or governesses, separated children from their parents, as well as from food. Daniel writes that mothers maintained "parallel distances... from child-rearing and food preparation, confined to daily visits to the nursery and daily instruction of the cook," a distance which mirrored the "natural" state of both uncooked food and children (67). This separation allowed children to idolize their parents in a way that would not be possible if they were involved in daily life, but also isolated children from what were seen as more indulgent foods, like pork (and other rich meats and sauces) and various sweets. The lack of these foods in the nursery led to the exploration of these foods via literature, in extravagant feast scenes, real and fantastical alike. During the 18th

and 19th centuries when the British nursery culture was at its peak, American children experienced a more hands-off approach to food, with fewer restrictions than their British counterparts. Daniel argues that curiosity might be one motivation for food fantasies in British literature, as children were simply interested in seeing what their American contemporaries ate regularly (70-71).

Food fantasies are seen in realistic fiction, but they are most effective, perhaps, in fantasy literature, where all sorts of foods can be enjoyed, even ones that don't exist in reality. In these fantasy stories, characters can allow food to dominate certain scenes and lead them through the fantasy world. In *Alice in Wonderland*, Alice would not be able to progress through Wonderland without consuming the tiny cakes and bottled drinks. Since food in Wonderland does not act as sustenance but as symbolism, they are a galvanizing force for Alice. Just as wine acts as a nationalistic symbol for Barthes' France, the fantastical eat-me, drink-me cakes and elixirs act as a vital part of Wonderland, an instantly familiar attribute of the fantasy world. This sort of transformation by eating would be impossible in reality, but works to move Alice through Wonderland, leading her to various other, often food-themed, settings, like the mad tea party. Alice's food-filled travels offer her an exciting adventure, but they also give her a gradual understanding of Wonderland's unusual workings.

Keeling and Pollard assert that food sparks the imagination because it is "seldom plain" and can be viewed as a creative form of expression (6). Their collection of articles, *Critical Approaches to Food in Children's Literature* is one of the more recent, more comprehensive examinations of food. The book's introduction, which briefly describes the history of food studies in children's literature, demonstrates how far the field has

come since Katz's article. Although they note that many book length studies about food are published by sociology and anthropology scholars, Keeling and Pollard emphasize that food and literature is becoming an increasingly popular subject, especially in children's literature, but also in texts for adults that focus on children. They write, "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" (10). This observation works on many levels. Food is a daily concern for children, a part of their lives that looms large in their memory, but that concern also reaches to adulthood, both as a part of everyday life and as part of nostalgia for childhood. This nostalgia¹, as well as the strong connection to daily life, makes food not only a common motif in children's literature, but also a transformative one, capable of communicating both didactic lessons and rallying cries of independence.

Often, when food appears as a temptation to children in literature, an evil force is behind the sweet or snack, waiting to coerce the child into general mischievous behavior, or even something more sinister. This story pattern—the theme of food-as-temptation, a tool to lure children towards evil—is typically associated with more canonical children's texts, and may be didactic in nature, resulting in the child learning a lesson about evil, gluttony or themselves. However, it is also possible for this pattern to be seen in more contemporary works as well, albeit in a transformed state.

In Neil Gaiman's 2002 novel, *Coraline*, the eponymous heroine is lured into the other world by delicious foods, all cooked by the initially charming, but ultimately sinister, Other Mother. For the first half of the novel, food works in much the same way

as in other children's stories— Coraline eats the food, falls in love with the other world, and sees the Other Mother as a friend—but as the novel progresses, Coraline learns that the Other Mother has evil plans in store for her, and she must rebel against the Other Mother, and her food, with her own intelligence and ingenuity. Coraline uses food as a weapon against the Other Mother, just as the Other Mother had used it as a weapon against her earlier in the novel. This turn of events is a new variation on an old story archetype. By appropriating the Other Mother's tool of temptation for herself, Coraline not only saves her parents (who had been stolen by the Other Mother), but also asserts herself as a valuable part of her family. As Coraline becomes increasingly heroic through her use of food, both as a weapon and a means of independence, she also overcomes her limited food preferences by eating a meal with her parents, instead of separating herself from them by eating convenience foods. Coraline closes the mealtime gap between adults and children, between the dining room and the nursery, and discovers her place within the family that she so misses.

Coraline offers a contemporary look at the food-as-temptation story pattern, but it is necessary to also look at canonical children's texts that follow a similar theme—*Coraline's* ancestors—to fully appreciate and understand the significance of food in *Coraline*. Although many children's texts use food in creative ways, Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950), and Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964) act as cultural predecessors to *Coraline* and as general models of food-as-temptation stories. These British children's works all use food-as-temptation, albeit in different ways, and demonstrate that tempting food can lead to general mischief, if not evil. Examining the ways these more established

texts use food as a tool of seduction or as a stand-in for sex, and also how the tempted characters are treated, allows for the reader to see Coraline's relationship with food, her family, and herself in terms of the tradition of food-as-temptation stories.

Chapter 2

Soup and Salad: Tempting Foods in Carroll, Lewis, and Dahl

Although food features prominently in many children's texts, characters' motives for consumption vary. The prototypical food-as-temptation story is Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's "Hansel and Gretel," a fairy tale that has been told and retold throughout history. However, motivation plays a large role in food-as-temptation stories, and Hansel and Gretel have convincing reasons for indulging in the witch's edible house.

Since Hansel and Gretel are starving throughout much of the story, Susan Honeyman argues that Hansel and Gretel "is not a consumerist cautionary tale about curbing one's own sweet tooth but originally a premodern story about controlling basic hunger" (196). The siblings are punished for their waste of food (leaving bread crumbs as a trail instead of pebbles), while children in food-as-temptation stories are punished for not only their poor decisions, but also their indulgence in "nonsubstantial foods like candy" (Honeyman 211). The most tempting foods are often candy, or other sweets, foods that cannot be found in the child protagonist's everyday life. The promise of a new, or rare, food is what draws the children into temptation and ultimately leads to their downfall. Therefore, the food-as-temptation story progresses not through necessity (like Hansel and Gretel), but through selfishness. Greed plays a major factor in these stories, and the children who succumb to this greed are often punished or rendered helpless, stripped of any agency they might have had.

Nevertheless, Hansel and Gretel are, in their own ways, greedy. In the 1857 version of the story, they're driven from their home because their father, "the woodcutter could no longer put bread on the table" and their stepmother (or their mother in the

Grimm's 1812 version) believes that she and her husband can survive if they don't have to worry about feeding the children (185). Upon finding the house "built of bread [with] a roof made of cake and transparent windows of sugar," the children do not eat the bread first, which would be more nourishing than the rest of the house (187). Instead, Hansel begins to eat the roof while Gretel tackles the sugary windows. These foods, although less decadent than those in other stories discussed in this essay, are still tempting. The children eat the enticing sweets before considering the more nourishing bread and are in turn punished for their gluttony.

Like Hansel and Gretel, other characters in food-as-temptation stories are tempted by sweet foods, or out-of-the ordinary foods, and are punished in some way for their selfishness. This gluttony might sour a character's relationships with others, in Edmund's case, or might be a lesson that leaves the character in control at the end of the novel, like Alice and Charlie. The themes of "Hansel and Gretel" are seen everywhere in food-related children's literature—from greedy overeaters to consuming mothers to child heroines. These common themes are present in many food-as-temptation stories, and are passed down to future texts, which update these tropes into familiar but contemporary plotlines. These sorts of stories are old, but they're still being produced, even in a contemporary context. Underneath the food-as-temptation story is a basic message of good triumphing over evil, and self-control over indulgence, that is just as relevant today as it was in the past.

Carroll's Alice is tempted by a variety of foods and food-related situations, only regaining control at the end of the novel. Although Alice does make many choices during her trip through Wonderland, I argue that she is subject to the uncertainties of the fantasy

world and its inhabitants, including the mysterious food that appear throughout Wonderland. Eating and drinking pushes Alice's trip through Wonderland forward, and moves her closer to the climax of the novel: the trial scene.

Food—and particularly sweet food—is mentioned at the very beginning of Alice's descent down the rabbit hole. As she falls down the dark hole, she sees and reaches for “a jar from one of the shelves as she passed: it was labeled ‘ORANGE MARMALADE,’ but to her great disappointment it was empty” (8). Her encounter with the marmalade does not result in actual consumption, but it does affirm to readers that Alice likes sweet things, and food in general, and prepares readers for later encounters with food throughout the novel. Although the marmalade is not an exotic food, or even particularly extravagant, it excites Alice. As Kevin Sweeney points out in “Alice's Discriminating Palate,” “Our pleasure is the test we use for evaluation: what we ingest is good to the extent that we are pleurably stimulated” (19). A few pages later, when Alice encounters “a little bottle...[with] a paper label, with the words ‘DRINK ME’ beautifully printed on it,” its odd taste does not alarm her (10). She notes that “it had, in fact, a sort of mixed flavour of cherry-tart, custard, pine-apple, roast turkey, toffee, and hot buttered toast—” an unusual selection of flavors that are largely rich or sweet (11).

Robert Hemmings writes that “nostalgia, in its particularly sensory embodiment, works to cover over aspects of childhood distasteful to adult sensibilities,” although it only has “partial success” (54). Alice's list of tastes are “rich with associations of a privileged middle-class Victorian childhood...exotic fruit, desserts, a roast dripping with holiday associations...nary a vegetable to wrinkle a child's nose” (Hemmings 62). Even though Alice momentarily hesitates to drink the mysterious concoction, thinking of

cautionary tales that featured children accidentally drinking “a bottle marked ‘poison,’” her positive taste-associations overwhelm any negative thoughts and open a new avenue of experimentation and delight (11). Drinking from the bottle shrinks Alice to “ten inches high,” a transformation that begins her tumultuous relationship with size. Alice does not initially know that the drink will change her size, nor is the drink offered by anyone. No one persuades Alice to take the drink other than herself, and so it is only tempting because it is *there*, exposed and available. Alice’s change in size is what moves her through Wonderland. Without drinking and eating in the small room, she never would have turned small enough to swim through her own tears and participate in the caucus-race, and she never would have met so many strange inhabitants of Wonderland. However, aside from plot-progression, Alice’s instinct to consume is important, even when it alarmingly changes her size.

Some critics, like Hemmings, believe that the link between food and nostalgia is the primary function of food in children’s literature, and serves to remind readers (especially adult readers) of their own childhoods. Hemmings writes that “the nostalgic taste of childhood ushers in the traumatizing diminishment of self, as Alice shrinks away and becomes powerless” (62). As one of the few humans in Wonderland, Alice might be in a position of power over the mostly animal inhabitants. Yet instead of controlling the animals, or herself, Alice is physically hindered by the foods she eats, and made as small as the creatures she meets on her journey. Alice is also made large—most notably when she grows within the white rabbit’s house—but her massive size does not give her power. Instead, her giant form is monstrous and frightening to the animal characters and herself (because she does not anticipate her size).

While in the white rabbit's house, Alice sees a bottle labeled "DRINK ME," and proceeds to follow its instructions because she is "quite tired of being such a tiny little thing" (28). Her rash decision teaches her a lesson of sorts. After drinking from the bottle, Alice cannot leave the house. She immediately regrets her decision ("I do wish I hadn't drunk quite so much!"), and reflects that she still has lessons to learn and an adulthood to grow into (28-29). In this scene, Alice expresses a desire to learn lessons, even though lessons (and the boredom that accompanies them) are what send Alice to Wonderland in the first place. Here, food serves as a tool that teaches Alice that being adult is not only about being larger, but also being wiser. Still, the sudden growth makes Alice anxious, and links a certain uneasiness to consumption.

Although she may want to eat the cakes and drink the bottles labeled so attractively, the end result is uncertain, just like growing up is an uncertain task. Just as drinking wine might have unplanned results in "Wine and Milk," growing older promises a mysterious and perhaps dangerous future. However, Elaine Ostry argues that ultimately, "growth in *Alice* is not linked to morality" or power (36). Alice is not a decidedly bad person because she eats mysterious foods, or because she is tempted by particular items (like the tarts during the trial), but she isn't completely good either. Unlike Edmund and Charlie, who are labeled as firmly bad or good (although Edmund is ultimately forgiven), respectively, Alice doesn't seem to have a moral alignment. Throughout her journey, Alice is effectively punished for giving in to her temptation, even though there is no evil force that offers (or creates) the food itself.

The eat-me/drink-me food items are alluring to Alice because they give firm commands. Alice, like Hansel and Gretel, wastes food by eating it when she isn't hungry.

Carina Garland writes that in Wonderland “food is eaten constantly and results in bodily changes but is consumed without any explicit hunger (or desire) being expressed. Alice is continually following (the male author’s) instruction” (32). Garland’s claim that the bottles and cakes are from the author himself makes sense. Without a character or force to provide the food, it is possible to view the food as sent directly from the author himself. Considering Carroll’s frequent meta-comments throughout the novel—for instance, Alice’s insistence that there should be a book written about her— and his transformation of common nursery rhymes and children’s poems, it is logical to view the author as a character himself. Biographically, Garland links Lewis’ controlling presence in the novel with his real-life habits. Carroll—a picky eater himself—“meticulously plann[ed] the times and quantity of his child guests’ food consumption, including treats...in his personal writings, there is much evidence of Carroll’s uneasiness surrounding appetite and consumption” (Garland 25-26). Carroll’s urge to control his child friends extends to the fictional Alice, whose life is also dictated by Victorian conduct norms. Without an evil force or character to serve as the source of Alice’s food, Lewis Carroll himself becomes the tempter, luring Alice deeper and deeper into Wonderland.

There may not be a need to ascribe Alice’s relationship with food to any one source, and it may be sufficient simply to say that Alice is led through Wonderland by a variety of encounters with food. Considering Garland’s view, Carroll might be extending his controlling food habits to Alice and her world, seeking to teach the fictional character (and in turn, readers) to restrain her appetites and learn to be independent.

There are numerous examples of how *not* to behave throughout Wonderland, which might be Carroll's way of communicating what behavior is inappropriate. For example, the wild behavior of the mad tea party infuriates Alice. The Hatter and the March Hare both waste food by constantly moving around and using food for unnecessary reasons, like buttering a watch (58, 55-56). Alice becomes frustrated with the tea party and declares "I'll never go *there* again!...It's the stupidest tea-party I ever was at in all my life!" (61). Alice's attitude towards the tea party reflects Carroll's notions of dietary restraint; constantly drinking tea is excessive, and wasting food is a mark of gluttony. Even though Alice learns that she disapproves of such silliness, she continues to eat found food items, which alter her appearance drastically throughout the novel.

Upon meeting the Caterpillar, Alice learns that she can change her size by eating a special mushroom. The Caterpillar tells her that "one side will make [her] grow taller, and the other side will make [her] grow shorter," but he doesn't inform her which side does what (41). Alice first eats and grows shorter, which frightens her "a good deal," and she then eats and grows taller, which makes her giant (41-42). Alice is also frightened by a pigeon who mistakes her for a serpent, and dissatisfied with both heights. She desperately wants to be a normal height, to be *her* height, but balance remains out of grasp for much of the novel. Alice cannot be her true size at will because she has not learned how to restrain her appetite (and also her curiosity).

In addition to being tempted by food, Alice also acts as a temptress. Although Alice does not completely match the archetype of the original temptress, Eve, by offering food items to other characters, she does frequently bait them with language, luring them

into unpleasant conversations. For example, after eating the caterpillar's mushroom and growing excessively tall, Alice meets a pigeon in a tree who confuses her for a snake and proceeds to yell, "Serpent!...Serpent, I say again!" in fear. Alice attempts to tell the pigeon that she is not a serpent, but even though she "was beginning to see its meaning," Alice excites the bird further (43). When asked if she's trying to get the pigeon's eggs, Alice responds, "I *have* tasted eggs, certainly...but little girls eat eggs quite as much as serpents do, you know" (43). The pigeon tells Alice that she's unsure of the claim, but that "if they do, why, then they're a kind of serpent" (43). The pigeon's assertion that Alice is a serpent comes as a "new idea" to Alice, perhaps because serpents are associated with biblical evil and Alice does not consider herself evil. By casting Alice as temptress, Carroll does not suggest that Alice is evil, but that she is mischievous, playful, and a bit naïve. Alice does not immediately associate a serpent's taste for eggs with a human's taste for eggs and sees them as separate hungers, but she continues to talk with the pigeon anyway, despite its growing anxiety. Similarly, Wonderland's inhabitants (like the Cheshire Cat) play with Alice when she is frustrated.

Aside from the bond between serpents and evil, Alice intentionally baits the pigeon by telling her exactly what she doesn't want to hear: that Alice could and would eat her eggs. This sort of antagonistic goading lures characters into small arguments with Alice, when Alice might just as easily avoid emotional conversations, like the case of the pigeon. Alice plays with language in Wonderland, sometimes acting as the tempted, sometimes the temptress, changing in appearance along the way. Alice's changes in moods and roles mirror her frustrating changes in size.

Although Alice's height fluctuates throughout the novel due to her consumption of various foods, the final scene of the novel features food in a slightly different role. Instead of being led—by the author or another character—to consume an unknown food, Alice is a participant in a trial focusing on food. The King and Queen of Hearts stage the trial to determine who stole the Queen of Hearts' tarts, yet the courtroom serves as a temptation. There is, "in the very middle of the court... a table, with a large dish of tarts upon it: they looked so good, that it made Alice quite hungry to look at them" (86). Since the tarts "made Alice quite hungry," she "began looking at everything about her to pass away the time," and irritably engages the other members of the court (86). When Alice sees the jurors, who are comprised of various animals she's met on her travels, she calls them "stupid things!" even though she is confused about the nature of jurors herself (86). This agitation progresses into physical change as Alice "felt a very curious sensation... she was beginning to grow larger again" (88). This growth, which has always been incited by food before the trial, leads to Alice's biggest outburst: "'Who cares for *you*?' said Alice (she had grown to her full size by this time). 'You're nothing but a pack of cards!'" (97). This moment of adult sensibility—adult because she has applied realistic standards to a fantastical world—brings Alice back to reality, to her sister and life. While previous, food-induced growth resulted in frustration or confusion for Alice, non-food related growth results in anger.

Alice's changing size troubles her, but she is not completely powerless throughout her adventures, since she does assert her right to grow up and one day be an adult (162). Still, Alice is not in control of Wonderland, and her decisions cannot immediately right

problematic situations, for the most part. The trial scene ends with Alice's removal from the Wonderland completely and her return to the real world and her sister.

By leaving Wonderland, Alice will be allowed to grow up and resist the temptation of forever being a child. When Alice meets Humpty Dumpty in *Through the Looking-Glass*, he tells her that she should have stopped growing at seven, "but it's too late now" (162). When Alice protests that she cannot choose to stop growing, Humpty Dumpty explains, "*One* ca'n't, perhaps... but *two* can. With proper assistance, you might have left off at seven" (162). Although Alice quickly changes the subject, it's clear that Humpty Dumpty sees adulthood as a negative prospect, and that it would be preferable to die at seven than to continue growing. Although Alice does not wish to kill herself, and although she is already past the age of seven anyway, staying a child forever is a temptation for her. Halting progression and remaining in a static state, without ever encountering change tempts Alice, but does not ultimately sway her as food does.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland is frequently cited in food theory articles, but it is structurally different from the typical food-as-temptation story, even though it prominently features food and eating. While other novels (such as those discussed in this paper) operate with two fictional parties—the tempter and the tempted—Alice never encounters the source of the mysterious food she eats. Although one might speculate that the giver of the food is the author himself, there is no real solution to the problem. Food also serves a different function in Carroll's novel. Instead of finding herself in grave danger after eating rich food, Alice continues through Wonderland relatively unharmed, although occasionally frustrated. Unlike Alice, C.S. Lewis's Edmund encounters real

danger and troubling consequences for his giving in to temptation in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.

In his essay “On Three Ways of Writing for Children,” C.S. Lewis discusses his use of food in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. He recalls meeting a man who told him, “If you want to please grown-up readers you give them sex, so you thought to yourself, ‘That won’t do for children, what shall I give them instead?’” (207). Lewis responded, “I myself like eating and drinking. I put in what I would have liked to read when I was a child and what I still like reading now that I am in my fifties” (207).

However, in her study of time in children’s literature, Maria Nikolajeva argues that Lewis “fails to acknowledge the parallel between food and sexuality, either being insincere or naïve, or both” (129). While *The Chronicles of Narnia* are filled with food, both simple and elaborate, that excites young and old readers alike, they also contain sexually suggestive imagery or characters, like the White Witch. Although Lewis never admitted that food (and especially food in children’s literature) has sexual connotations, Nikolajeva suggests “meals in myths and fairy tales are circumlocutions of sexual intercourse, which, in its turn, is the necessary stage in a rite of passage” (129). In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the sexualized White Witch acts as a temptress by using food to lead Edmund into her service.

Edmund is, perhaps, aside from the Biblical Eve, the model subject for the food-as-temptation story. His motivations and punishment are equally clear, rooted in excess. Although most of C.S. Lewis’s life was spent in England, his Irish heritage—and Irish associations with famine—are present in Narnia. The Pevensie children do not live in a famine-struck England per se, but their adventure begins when they “were sent away

from London during the war because of the air-raids” (111). Lewis does not specifically discuss rationing or wartime meals—which were a reality for British children until the mid-1950s— but the children’s isolation “ten miles from the nearest railway station and two miles from the nearest post office” suggests that unnecessary foods, like sweets, might have been a scarcity (111). The lack of luxury food, though it does not justify Edmund’s obsession with Turkish delight later in the novel, gives modern readers some context for his interest in sweet foods, and why they might be a delicacy during this time.

Edmund is depicted as an antagonistic and rebellious sibling from the beginning of the novel. His first words are “Oh, come off it!...Don’t go on talking like that,” a grumpy outburst at Susan for speaking approvingly of the old Professor they live with (111). His ridicule of his younger sister Lucy upon her return from Narnia also sets him apart from the other Pevensie children, who, like Edmund, don’t believe her story, but are generally more supportive. Lucy’s initial trip to Narnia, and her visit with Mr. Tumnus, is the first scene to include food, and benefits from a comparison to Edmund’s visit with Jadis, the White Witch. The two scenes are almost opposites, demonstrating how good and bad experiences with food impact relationships and personal well being.

When Lucy meets Mr. Tumnus the faun, she is almost immediately invited to have tea with him. She accepts the invitation and is treated to “ a wonderful tea” with “a nice brown egg...sardines on toast, and then buttered toast, and then toast with honey, and then a sugar-topped cake” (116). Tea with Mr. Tumnus is not out of the ordinary for Lucy (aside from the fact that Lucy has never encountered a faun before) because she is British and middle-class. The foods Lucy enjoys at tea with Mr. Tumnus are mostly wholesome, with some small delicacies added in. The sugar-topped cake, although sweet,

is not over-indulgent, and other sweetened items—like the toast with honey—are more nutritious than other treats, like candy. Also, Lucy is not greedy during tea. Eventually she “was tired of eating,” and simply stops dining to listen to the Faun’s story (116). She stops eating when she is full and satisfied. Mr. Tumnus also does not function as a tempter, although it is his job to trick human children and, ultimately, kidnap them. He tells Lucy, openly, “I’ve pretended to be your friend and asked you to tea, and all the time I’ve been meaning to wait till you were asleep and then go and tell *her*” (118). This confession reveals Mr. Tumnus’ failure as a tempter. His guilt overshadows his bait (food and hospitality), and Lucy, although she is not angry with him, leaves to return through the wardrobe.

Nikolajeva discusses Lucy’s tea with the faun, writing “Apart from the trivial explanation that Lewis himself liked good food, there is naturally a symbolic, or ritual, significance to the shared tea. A shared meal...is the foremost symbol for affinity” (129). Nikolajeva argues that Mr. Tumnus cannot betray Lucy by giving her to the Witch because “a shared meal is a covenant” and cannot be broken (129). By showing affection for Lucy and sharing his food with her, Mr. Tumnus fails where the White Witch succeeds. While Lucy leaves Mr. Tumnus’ home unharmed and informed about Jadis’s intentions, Edmund is not so lucky in his encounter with the Queen herself.

Edmund encounters Jadis after following Lucy through the wardrobe. She’s described as “a great lady, taller than any woman that Edmund had ever seen...covered in white fur up to her throat...Her face was white...except for her very red mouth. It was a beautiful face in other respects, but proud and cold and stern” (123). The Queen’s all-white ensemble reflects a manufactured purity, which is betrayed by her “very red

mouth,” a symbol that has not only carnal, sexual associations, but cannibalistic ones as well. Although white is not exclusively associated with good or innocence—especially in Asia—Western readers might associate white, and the white-robed witch, with goodness. However, Lewis describes Jadis as icy, both surrounded by ice in the cursed winter of Narnia as well as unnaturally pale, cold even, and reminiscent of Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Snow Queen.” The Witch is bossy and unkind as she questions Edmund—in stark contrast to Mr. Tumnus, the failed tempter, and Aslan, the physical representation of ultimate good. She is transparent about her plans, telling Edmund that a “door from the world of men...may wreck all” but that Edmund “is only one, and he is easily dealt with” (124). Edmund doesn’t stop associating with the witch, even after her villainous monologue. Instead, he eagerly takes “something hot to drink,” something “very sweet and foamy and creamy,” in a jeweled cup (125). When the witch tells Edmund that “it is dull...to drink without eating” and asks what he would “like best to eat,” he quickly replies, “Turkish Delight, please, your Majesty” (125). Edmund concludes that he “had never tasted anything more delicious,” and feels comforted by the food and drink (125). This comfort leads to addiction—“the more he ate the more he wanted to eat”—and, once the box is empty, “wish[es] that she would ask him whether he would like some more” (125). Two things differentiate this encounter from Lucy’s tea with Mr. Tumnus: the type of food served and the success of the temptation.

While Mr. Tumnus serves Lucy tea to drink, a common British beverage, the White Witch gives Edmund something creamy and sweet. Although Lewis never specifies what sort of drink the witch produces, it is foamy, akin to hot cocoa, which places it in the category of desserts, or special-occasion drinks. The Turkish Delight is

also sweet, a candy that would be rare during wartime England. Edmund may crave these sweets because of their scarcity in the real world, or, more blatantly, because they are enchanted. Those who eat the Turkish Delight “would want more and more of it, and would even, if they were allowed, go on eating it till they killed themselves,” which describes Edmund’s gluttonous glee and obsession with the candy (126).

Even though the Turkish Delight is enchanted, a tool used to seduce Edmund into working for the White Witch, eating it initially is a choice. Edmund is not forced to accept the food, but instead chooses to, only falling under the Witch’s spell after he initially consumes it. The sweets turn into a bribe when Jadis tells Edmund that if he “did come again—bringing [the other Pevensies]...I’d be able to give you some more Turkish Delight” (126). The initial fear that Edmund feels upon seeing Jadis vanishes at the promise of more enchanted sweets, and he leaves to plot what is essentially the abduction of his siblings. It is unlikely that the witch’s plan would have worked without the enchanted food, which was so appetizing to Edmund, or without the promise of future sweets—both promises that the non-magical Mr. Tumnus could not make. Jadis functions as a temptress by luring Edmund into her service, an act that Mr. Tumnus could not complete. This contrast between the two tempters is stark, although more muddled than the contrast between the witch and Aslan. After Edmund’s initial temptation, his “contract” with the witch complicates the remainder of his narrative. The promise of more enchanted Turkish Delight motivates him to sacrifice his agency, and particularly his decision-making skills, making him a largely passive character for the rest of the novel.

Edmund has one more significant encounter with food. Once all the Pevensie children return to Narnia, they begin to question what their next meal will be, citing hunger as a reason to not journey further. First, Susan tells her siblings, “It doesn’t seem particularly safe here...it’s getting colder every minute, and we’ve brought nothing to eat. What about just going home?” (137). This suggestion prompts Edmund to say, more forcefully, “A lot *we* could do!...when we haven’t even got anything to eat!” (137). While Susan’s mention of food is practical—a realistic concern for children on an adventure to a strange land—Edmund’s comment is more of an outburst, full of exclamation points and self-degradation (“a lot *we* could do!”). However, it’s also possible that Edmund’s frustration is rooted in his addiction to the White Witch’s Turkish Delight, which he still craves and sees as worthy of his siblings’ lives. The children’s food concerns are answered soon, though, by the appearance of Mr. and Mrs. Beaver. The two animals, like Mr. Tumnus, offer a nutritious meal of potatoes, fresh fish, bread, tea (with beer for Mr. Beaver), and a “gloriously sticky marmalade roll” (143-144). C.S. Lewis intrudes during this scene, inviting the reader to think favorably about the meal, writing “You can think how good the new-caught fish smelled while they were frying and how the hungry children longed for them to be done” (143). Lewis draws attention to the meal by directly addressing the reader and explicitly telling him/her how “good” the fish smells. The motivation of this intrusion could be to, again, contrast Jadis’s food and the food given by other characters. Where Jadis essentially starves Edmund by only feeding him empty calories (sweets), the Beavers give the children sustenance for their journey, filling them with hearty and fresh dishes. Dessert is only served after the meal is eaten, as a surprise,

much to the delight of the children, proving that rich foods can be enjoyed, but in moderation and at the appropriate time.

Edmund is punished because of his weakness when faced with temptation, but more importantly because of his gluttony. Eating dessert in moderation—like Mrs. Beaver’s marmalade roll—is acceptable, or even encouraged, yet greedy consumption of sweets is punishable. Lynne Vallone writes, in her study of Maria Edgeworth and C.S. Lewis, that “for Lewis, the functions of food and taste are not merely mimetic, but also metaphoric in nature, and it is the food itself, as well as the consumers of it, that communicates a moral vision” (51). Edmund’s gluttonous nature, combined with his consumption of empty, nonessential food, signifies his allegiance—even briefly—with the evil White Witch, and evil in general. His displeasure after eating the nutritious, filling meal provided by the Beavers shows that Edmund does not desire good morals, signified by the wholesome food, but instead longs for the delicious, but non-nourishing Turkish Delight. In other words, Edmund chooses a life of unfulfilling pleasure over a life of simple, but righteous joy.

His growing addiction to Turkish Delight is addressed by the Beavers and by Edmund himself (by way of the third person narrator). Mr. Beaver tells the remaining Pevensie children that Edmund “had the look of one who has been with the Witch and eaten her food. You can always tell them if you’ve lived long in Narnia; something about their eyes” (149). Also, the narrator notes that although Edmund “had eaten his share of the dinner...he hadn’t really enjoyed it because he was thinking all the time about Turkish Delight” (151). Edmund’s preoccupation with the Witch’s food makes him

unable to appreciate the hearty meal at the Beaver home, and ultimately renders him helpless.

After arriving at the Witch's house, and hearing her disappointment at his failure to capture the other Pevensie children, Edmund is taken captive, forced to travel with the Witch against his will. Before they leave to pursue the Pevensie children, the Witch gives Edmund bread to fuel him for the journey. Edmund immediately says, "Take it away...I don't want dry bread," yet the Witch responds that Edmund should be thankful—he may not get bread again any time soon (161). Edmund, no longer useful to the Witch, does not earn the Turkish Delight he desires. Instead, he's given stale bread to keep him alive. At this point, Edmund is a prisoner, treated roughly and almost used in a blood sacrifice (173). However, Aslan and the Pevensie children save Edmund just before he is killed, and, reunited with his family, Edmund apologizes for his actions. He tells each sibling, "I'm sorry," and "everyone said, 'That's all right'" (174). Edmund's wrongs are forgiven easily, and he is proven to be an essential part of the team by saving everyone in the battle by destroying the Witch's wand (192). Unfortunately, Edmund is wounded in battle. Lucy uses "the precious cordial that had been given her for a Christmas present" and give some to Edmund while Aslan looks on (192). Food ultimately saves Edmund, as he is revived by the drink, yet the all-powerful Aslan disapproves, telling Lucy, "Daughter of Eve...others also are at the point of death. Must *more* people die for Edmund?" (193). This hint of resentment reflects that Edmund may not be *completely* forgiven, but that he is forgiven enough to be saved by Lucy's cordial and serve as a king of Narnia. Though Aslan makes the ultimate sacrifice (dying at the hands of Jadis) for Edmund's sake, it is not Aslan who heals Edmund's wounds. Food tempts Edmund

initially, but it also saves him from death. Not all food is evil, but in the wrong hands—the hands of the tempter—it can devastate characters and rob them of their limited power.

Both Jadis and Aslan view the Pevensie children as part of the Edenic tradition, as Daughters of Eve and Sons of Adam. Throughout the novel, Edmund's obsession with Turkish Delight is compared with his siblings healthy hunger for wholesome foods (Lucy's tea with Mr. Tumnus and the dinner with the Beavers). This comparison of appetites works as both a model of temptation and of the relationship between good and evil. If the Pevensie children participate in "good" eating habits with the Beavers and Mr. Tumnus, then Edmund's indulgence with the White Witch is "bad." Although the relationship between morality and eating habits should not be oversimplified, it does factor into a Judeo-Christian reading of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* that has been popular with some critics and readers over the past few decades.

For some readers, Edmund's temptation only symbolizes humanity's relationship with Satan, or, as Cathy McSporran suggests, Lilith—the fallen first wife of Adam. While the power play between good and evil, right and wrong is clear in Narnia, the essence of the temptation plot lies not with Edmund, the tempted, but with the Witch, the temptress. The Witch, a half Jinn, half giantess, represents not only Lilith, but also the shortcomings of all women, according to McSporran. Throughout *The Chronicles of Narnia*, wicked males are human, and therefore worthy of redemption (or salvation), while equally evil females are seen as inhuman and even monstrous (McSporran 192). Even Aslan is feminized by having his mane shaved off as a symbol of embarrassment and shame when he sacrifices himself and is killed (McSporran 192). The witch is forever condemned because of the sins of her predecessors, like Lilith. Jadis is not

allowed forgiveness because she is female, and because being female means she is monstrously sexual. Her red mouth and pale, statuesque body suggest a sexuality that Lewis felt uncomfortable with, a sexuality that lends itself to her temptress nature.

Decidedly evil, the Witch uses food to her advantage. Mervyn Nicholson, in a comparison of C.S. Lewis and E. Nesbit, argues that Lewis borrows—perhaps subconsciously, perhaps not—essential plot points from Nesbit’s stories, but particularly “The Aunt and the Amabel,” which also features a magical wardrobe that leads to a fantasy world. The difference between Nesbit and Lewis’ treatment of food has little to do with the food itself, and depends on the purpose of the food. Nicholson writes,

In Nesbit, the theme of the instant gratification of desire is part of the human reconciliation that Lewis calls the “healing of harms.” But in Lewis, it is the opposite: instant gratification is part of the wicked witch’s temptation strategy to entrap a young male. By means of it he is made her instrument. (17)

Gratification of desires, generally speaking, leads to satisfaction and fulfillment for characters. This is true for Nesbit’s Amabel, but, as Nicholson points out, completely opposite in Lewis. Edmund’s indulgence in the Turkish Delight and his eagerness to betray his siblings are classified as sin, which condemns him and leads to further bad behavior. Edmund’s time as an “instrument” of the Witch is dictated by his love for the enchanted Turkish Delight, and nothing more. As a young boy, he is not particularly taken in by her looks, although she is beautiful, and he cares about power (his potential life as a prince), but only as a secondary concern. Edmund desires the enchanted Turkish

Delight and it is the driving force behind his obedience to the Witch, which leads to bad behavior and deception.

At one point, after Edmund has made the decision to go to the Witch's house, he thinks to himself that although "he did want Turkish Delight and to be a Prince...and to pay Peter back for calling him a beast...he managed to believe, or to pretend he believed, that [the Witch] wouldn't do anything very bad to [his siblings]" (151). Edmund forces himself to believe that what he's heard about the Witch is untrue, lies or rumors fabricated by her enemies, and convinces himself that no *real* harm will come to his siblings, who he still cares about, even if he is angry at them (152). However, it is impossible for the Witch to be kind to the Pevensie children, including Edmund, because she is an evil temptress.

The Witch also functions as what Nicholson terms the "tricky female," but is more commonly referred to as *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, which means "the beautiful lady without mercy" in French. The *Belle Dame* character type has absorbed traits from other archetypes, like the *femme fatale*. Traditionally, the *Belle Dame sans Merci* is a "fairy who exercises an uncanny power over the mortal who succumbs to her charms" (Fass 22). While the *femme fatale* has the same beauty and charm of the *Belle Dame*, she does not have supernatural connotations, and therefore exists as a separate archetype. The *Belle Dame* and *Femme Fatale* do share one important trait: sexuality. The temptation and allure of female sexuality means that *Belle Dames* and *Femme Fatales* often tempt or seduce men exclusively, but in a children's literature context, this aspect is not consistent. For example, while Jadis possesses a frightening sexuality, the Other Mother's power is based on domestic abilities. While both of these traits—seductive sexuality and

superhuman domestic skills—can be read as traditionally feminine, the variation between female villains shows that the archetype is flexible.

However, the *Belle Dame*'s function of seducing and manipulating mortals meshes with Jadis's role as temptress. Just like the traditional *Belle Dame* model, Jadis is unnatural (half Jinn and half giantess), and she uses her magical ability to lure Edmund into her service. Jadis's intimidating and overpowering nature does not necessarily fit with the *Belle Dame* persona, although it is not strictly excluded either. Being a *Belle Dame* connects Jadis with a whole history of literary temptresses and solidifies her role as a temptress. By offering food to Edmund and enticing him to do her bidding, Jadis proves that she is not only a powerful villain, but a villain linked to a tradition of female temptresses.

Some critics, such as Cathy McSporran and Macy Werner, cite Jadis as proof of Lewis' fear of female sexuality. Werner believes that Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* is a modern retelling of Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market," which follows two young girls as they are tempted by the mysterious goblins who tempt them with delicious fruit. Just as the girls give in to the goblin's orgy of consumption, Edmund gives in to Jadis's offer of Turkish Delight. In both texts, sexuality, or the hint of it, is something to be feared. For the sisters of "Goblin Market," the fruit, a symbol of sexual awakening, causes them to wither away in the real world, and lose their appetite (18). For Edmund, the Turkish Delight—and the gluttony that accompanies it—equals sin. Werner writes that both Rossetti and Lewis "seem to be enthralled with eroticism, as long as the possibility for redemption exists afterward" (21). The sisters and Edmund are all redeemed by the conclusion of their respective stories, yet there is no promised salvation

for Jadis, even if she does hypothetically realize the error of behavior. McSporrán argues that “while villainous males in *The Chronicles* are shown as human (and therefore capable of redemption and worthy of mercy), villainous females tend to be depicted as monstrous and unnatural, and as such are to be killed as swiftly as possible” (192). This damnation of females is not limited to the clearly evil Witch, though, and encompasses other female characters as well.² When Edmund succumbs to female power by taking the enchanted Turkish Delight, he expresses, on some level, submission to female power.

When Edmund eats the Turkish Delight and sides with Jadis, showing his submission to her power, he loses his agency and puts his developing masculinity in danger as well. By aligning with the Witch and submitting to her indefinitely, Edmund will not be allowed to grow up normally and develop his masculinity appropriately—a frightening prospect for an author like Lewis. Although he regrets his decision (since he is forced to eat only stale bread and doesn’t really want to hurt his siblings), Edmund has no power to escape Jadis, and must wait to be rescued by Aslan and the Pevensie children. It takes a male—Aslan—who is essentially an adult character to save Edmund and restore his independence. Regardless of the gender politics incorporated into *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, all of the children, no matter how brave or important they are, are second to Aslan, who can be read as a Christ-like figure, or on a simpler level, an adult. Aslan isn’t human, and therefore cannot be termed an adult literally, but no one in Narnia is human, not even Jadis. Adult status might be regarded as having experience or being powerful, both qualities that Aslan possesses. It’s unfair to say that Aslan is an adult and the Pevensies are children, and therefore subject to his rule, but the Pevensie children *do* follow Aslan blindly, letting him lead them forward without many

questions. This dynamic between the powerful, older Aslan and the weak, younger Pevensie children mirrors the perceived relationship between adults and children in general. Adults are typically viewed as controlling of children, while children are seen as inexperienced and submissive. Aslan and Jadis clearly control the children, leading them throughout the novel and influencing their decisions. At the end of the story, it is Aslan, not the Pevensie siblings, that saves Edmund and restores order to Narnia. The children are allowed to participate in Edmund's rescue, and are even allowed to rule over Narnia, but Aslan is ultimately in charge.

When Edmund loses his freedom when he is captured by Jadis, he does not attempt to escape, but instead waits patiently to be rescued, obeying the Witch's commands. Edmund's decision to stay captive, though logical considering Jadis's power, is reminiscent of Alice's trip through Wonderland. Alice resigns herself to the nonsensical nature of the fantasy world, participating in the games and activities of the land, and often letting her emotions get in the way of communication (i.e. her outburst during the trial scene). Both Edmund and Alice are, in some sense, helpless in their respective situations. Whether bound to the idiosyncrasies of Wonderland or the intimidating power of Jadis, the two children must wait to wake up (in Alice's case) or be rescued.³ By acting passively, Alice and Edmund both risk their own development. While Alice might be tempted to stay in Wonderland forever (in *Through the Looking Glass* especially), Edmund is tempted to sacrifice his development while in service of the White Witch. Neither child would be allowed to grow up normally (or at all in Alice's case), halting their progression and sentencing them to childhood forever.

Charlie of Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* initially has little control as well, locked as he is into a working-class family. He can't control his parents' jobs or heal his elderly grandparents, and for the most part he doesn't really want to. Charlie's family suffers from a "Hansel and Gretel" dilemma; they are almost starving and "there wasn't even enough money to buy proper food for them all. The only meals they could afford were bread and margarine for breakfast, boiled potatoes and cabbage for lunch, and cabbage soup for supper" (5). The meals, though enough to keep the family alive, are bland, and therefore fodder for food fantasies.

Charlie's fantasies focus on chocolate. Grandpa Joe tells Charlie the story of Mr. Wonka and Prince Pondicherry, of how Willy Wonka built the prince "a colossal palace entirely out of chocolate" (12). This story gets Charlie's attention and begins his dream of visiting the Wonka factory. The palace itself is slightly reminiscent of the witch's house in "Hansel and Gretel." It is edible and temporary, an impressive treat meant to be enjoyed, for good or for evil. As Charlie begins to search for the golden ticket that will get him into the Wonka factory, additional children start their own hunt for tickets, revealing their true natures under the heat of competition. The other children who find golden tickets are models of bad behavior. Gluttonous Augustus Gloop "eats *so many* candy bars a day that it was almost *impossible* for him *not* to find one" (21). Veruca Salt represents greed by forcing her father to waste valuable time and money to find her a ticket. Violet Beauregarde has an unhealthily addictive personality, obsessively chewing gum, but then switching to candy bars in order to find a golden ticket. She is also incredibly rude to her mother, yelling at her for merely commenting on the exciting events of the day. Mike Teavee is slothful, refusing to stop watching television to answer interview questions.

Yet initially Charlie isn't much better than the stereotypically "bad" golden ticket winners. When his family "slowly but surely...began to starve," Charlie still dreams of chocolate, standing outside the Wonka factory "taking deep swallowing breaths as though he were trying to *eat* the smell itself" (38). Instead of surrendering a precious found dollar to his starving family, Charlie uses it to buy a Wonka bar in a last attempt to win a golden ticket. His refusal to sacrifice the candy for the sake of his family hints at Charlie's already-growing temptation, but Charlie functions best as a window used to view the other naughty children. Even though Charlie has the same desires as the other children (although for different reasons), readers see the downfall of the other children through his pure—or purer—eyes.

Once Charlie travels to Wonka's factory, the delicious candy he craves is within his grasp. Wonka leads the children and their adult guardians through room after room of chocolate and candy, telling the children to refrain from sampling the most tempting items. One by one, the children are picked off, sent away after eating one forbidden thing or another. After Augustus Gloop falls in the chocolate river, which leads to the Fudge Room, Wonka "gigg[es] slightly" and says little more than "He'll be perfectly safe" (76). Wonka seems to expect the children to give in when they see their favorite candies, and indeed, he is testing them in an attempt to find an heir to his sweet empire. As the children are sent to various punishments (the incinerator or the taffy pulling room, for example, places where they will most likely be harmed in some way), the songs of the Oompa Loompas—Wonka's foreign workers—become more informative. As Veruca Salt falls down the garbage chute towards the incinerator, the Oompa Loompas sing, "And this is the price she has to pay/ For going so very far astray" (117). She has gone

“astray” by giving into temptation and attempting to steal a squirrel from the nut cracking room, so she is rightfully punished (in Wonka’s mind) by being sent to the incinerator. Just as Edmund is taken captive after eating the Turkish Delight, the children that visit the factory are sent to an unknown part of Wonka’s world, where they will be “altered quite a bit” (79). Jacqueline Corinth writes that in “Wonka’s Factory, candy is a sensuous temptation calling out to the children’s baser natures of gluttony and wild-eyed desire... To succumb to the temptation of candy is to place personal gratification over the greater good of the community” (267). The children must be punished because they, unlike the moral Charlie, have put themselves above “the community,” the good of the factory and of Wonka. Whether the children are educated or harmed for their selfishness is unclear, but by the end of the story they are physically different: burned or stretched or discolored. The children are alive, but absurdly changed. Charlie resists temptation throughout the novel and follows Wonka’s orders, which ultimately wins him the company. Wonka decides to make Charlie heir because he doesn’t want “a grown-up person” to run the company (151). Wonka believes “a grownup won’t listen to [him]; he won’t learn. He will try to do things his own way” (151). Charlie’s obedience does not make him superior to the other children, but makes him as malleable as Wonka’s candy. Wonka still desires absolute control over his chocolate empire, but he cannot live forever and must name an heir—an heir he has time to instruct and shape.

Charlie is not helpless like Edmund and Alice, and he experiences no negative effects from his journey to Wonka’s factory as the other children do. By resisting temptation, Charlie offers an alternative fate for children in food-as-temptation stories: reward. Charlie becomes Wonka’s heir because he refuses to overindulge or eat

prohibited food. Still, Charlie doesn't seem to have much control over the situation, and readers are left to believe that Charlie will learn *exactly* how Wonka wants the factory to be run after his death. He will be trained to operate as an extension of Wonka, not his own person. Susan Honeyman views the end of the novel as a promotion of consumer culture. In "Trick or Treat? Halloween Lore, Passive Consumerism, and the Candy Industry," she writes that "Charlie Bucket...seems to be the exception to the protectionist rule that kids require vigilant guidance in consumer affairs—a rule illustrated...by other golden-ticket winners" (85). Charlie represents a model of responsibility, mature enough to listen to instructions and make sound decisions, even if those decisions reflect the wishes of another person or force, like Wonka.

The repeated temptation and punishment of the other children that visit Wonka's factory, paired with Charlie's refusal to disobey Wonka, also has socio-religious significance. Robert M. Kachur argues that the children who are tempted and subsequently give in to that temptation represent the fall of man with Wonka's factory (and particularly the Chocolate Room) acting as Eden. On a grand scale, the factory itself acts as a character, mimicking the process of digestion. Hamida Bosmajian writes that "in the chocolate factory everything can be licked and eaten and consumed, but the orally greedy will also be swallowed, pushed down or sucked up through the great digestive system on Wonka's machinery which finally expels them in altered form" (37). The factory imitates the process of eating and digestion, but it also acts as a punishment for the disobedient children, sucking them towards their unknown fates. The children are punished for succumbing to temptation in a manner that recalls their own downfalls. Instead of being digested by the factory, Charlie, the only child who does not fall,

becomes heir as a reward for his obedience—the self-control that the other children did not possess—and acts as a Christ figure. Kachur writes, “Without exception, [Charlie] resists the temptation of transgressive eating, even when literally starving, as Jesus does during his divinely ordained fast in the wilderness” (229). However, Charlie cannot be a true Christ-figure.⁴ Although he is pure and resists temptation when the other children do not, he does not sacrifice anything or save anyone except himself. Charlie is remarkably un-heroic, satisfied to watch the other children be sent away to whatever horrors await them. Charlie’s character allows readers to play voyeur to Dahl’s sadistic treatment of the children. There is an odd pleasure (for children and adults alike) in watching the bad children being punished, which makes *Charlie* an entertaining and frightening novel at once.

Even though readers are aware of the children’s fates because Charlie, the protagonist, sees them, he is oddly silent during these scenes. For example, after only two children are left—Charlie and Mike Teavee—Charlie says nothing as Mrs. Teavee screams “He’s gone! He’s gone!” (131). Mrs. Teavee’s panic is not transmitted to Charlie, who simply watches and “gather[s] round the television” in anticipation of Mike’s return (131). Charlie and Grandpa Joe both see Mike’s return and hear of his imminent stretching on the taffy machine, but neither of their reactions is mentioned. After the scene is over, “little Charlie caught Grandpa Joe’s hand, and the two of them stood beside Mr. Wonka...listening to the Oompa-Loompas,” who sing that “it serves him right” if Mike can’t be transformed into his old self again (137, 141). Charlie cannot pass judgment on the other children, not because he is Christ-like, but because he serves as a blank vessel for the readers’ reactions for much of the story. Charlie works as the

eyes of the reader, but he does not need to provide an opinion of events because the reader will do that him/herself. Charlie must remain innocent by resisting temptation and only observing the misdeeds of the other children.

Charlie differs from Edmund and Alice in that he doesn't actually indulge in the tempting candy throughout the novel. Yet by not being tempted, Charlie makes the other children seem that much more flawed by comparison. Violet, Veruca, Augustus, and Mike are rendered useless, just like Edmund, sent away until the end of the novel, but instead of being redeemed as Edmund is when he fights against the White Witch, the children are defeated. Their punishment is visible, and their appearance permanently changed. Though some of the changes might be seen as good (Augustus Gloop is now thin), most of the side-effects are grotesque. For example, Violet Beauregarde is permanently purple, and Mike Teavee is "overstretched" (149). The children, with their disfigured and altered bodies, represent the consequences that accompany giving in to temptation.

Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*, though it differs from its predecessors, exists within the literary tradition of temptation stories. Coraline eats the tempting food offered to her, but does not wait to be rescued. She is the heroine of her story, more powerful than the evil force that lures her, as well as smarter than her parents and various other adults in the novel. By appropriating some tropes and altering others, *Coraline* offers a contemporary version of the food-as-temptation tale.

Chapter 3

Entrée: *Coraline* as a Temptation Story

In his 2012 Zena Sutherland Lecture, Neil Gaiman explained that *Coraline* was born out of a fear that his parents would forget him, “It could happen. Things sometimes slipped their minds. They were busy people,” and another family would replace them (“What the...”10). He feared the unknown: “And if they had moved away, what if other people moved in who looked just like them. How would I know? What would I do?” (11). Gaiman’s childhood concerns inspired *Coraline*, a novel that uses fairy-tale themes and patterns to tell a modern-day story. Comparisons to *Alice in Wonderland*⁵ have appeared frequently, but some scholars, such as Karen Coats, believe that *Coraline* is first and foremost a Gothic novel. Coats writes, “Certain Gothic motifs in [Gaiman’s] work, including big old houses with secret spaces, doppelgangers, dream-visions, and dark tunnels, operate rather obviously as metaphors for unconscious depths” (78). All of these Gothic motifs are seen in *Coraline*, making the novel a modern-day Gothic fairy tale, as it combines the didacticism of fairy tales and the recurring themes of Gothic literature. Regardless of *Coraline*’s fantasy or fairy tale themes, it is also a food-as-temptation story, and Coraline is the inheritor of food lust, a descendent of characters like Edmund, Alice, and, to some extent, Charlie.

The straightforward plot of *Coraline* lends itself well to the theme of temptation. After moving to a new house, young Coraline Jones, bored and unable to gain the attention of her busy parents, becomes dissatisfied with her life and longs for more of everything—more attention, more tasty food, and more entertaining neighbors. Coraline soon discovers a mysterious door that leads to a house eerily like her own, where her

“other” family resides, apparently ready to love her and make her desires come true. However, Coraline realizes that she loves her own parents more than anything, and life isn’t any better in the other house. Coraline’s adventure through the dark hallway that connects the two worlds, as well as her questions of identity throughout the novel, have led critics to apply psychoanalytic theory to the novel. For example, Richard Gooding focuses on *Coraline* through the lens of Freud’s concept of the Uncanny. He argues that the other world, with its “doubles, the dead, talking animals, toys coming to life...constant threat of blindness and mutilation...immediate wish fulfillment,” etc., seems distinctly uncanny to adult readers, but “children are theoretically less sensitive” to these details (394).

David Rudd also discusses the Uncanny, but additionally provides a Lacanian reading in “An Eye for an I: Neil Gaiman’s *Coraline* and Questions of Identity.” Rudd argues that Coraline “is trying to regulate her place on this border between the Symbolic and the Real; to find her own space,” and also her own identity (164). The Other Mother’s desire to replace Coraline’s eyes (symbolic of her soul) with buttons (“an eye for an I”) would essentially attach Coraline’s identity, her soul and individual self, to the Other Mother for eternity (Rudd 163). Obviously, Coraline does not allow this to happen, and even saves the souls of the ghost children she meets in the other world, but questions of identity in a shifting reality also apply to food. If traveling to the other world, and experiencing all it has to offer has serious consequences for Coraline, both in terms of her own identity and the souls of the ghost children, consuming the food of the other world might also have repercussions. While some myths—such as the story of Adam and Eve or Persephone and the food of the underworld— feature punishment for eating magical

foods, Coraline does not suffer any lasting consequences for eating the Other Mother's food. What happens to Coraline physically does not matter as much as what happens to her mentally and emotionally.

Coraline's relationship with her real mother appears distant at the beginning of the novel. Even though both of her parents are "home a lot of the time," they are "doing things on computers" in "their own study," separated from each other and their daughter (7). At the end of Coraline's very boring day, her father "stopped working and made them all dinner," which Coraline responds to, disgusted, "Daddy...you've made a *recipe* again" (9). The meal ("leek and potato stew with a tarragon garnish and melted Gruyère cheese") proves unappetizing to Coraline, and she promptly leaves the table to heat up frozen "microwave chips and a microwave mini pizza" (9-10). Coraline's mother neither prohibits Coraline's separate meal nor promotes the father's cooking, and it seems that Coraline's separate convenience food meal features regularly during in the Jones's dinnertime routine.

In "The Key is in the Mouth: Food and Orality in *Coraline*," Keeling and Pollard point out that the food Coraline eats and the food her father prepares are not all that different. Essentially, the soup that "Coraline's father makes uses as its primary ingredients two fundamental foods of the British Isles: potatoes and leeks. But he prepares them in [an] inventive style...Coraline, however, prefers her potatoes prepared as microwaved chips" (6). The father's "recipes" and Coraline's convenience foods share cultural origins, but differ in preparation style. Keeling and Pollard explain that convenience foods became a "fundamental part of the British diet in the 1950s," a comfort food for many families with working-class roots (6). Like Barthes' classically

French foods, Coraline's beloved microwave chips and fish fingers have strong British cultural associations, which connect Coraline to a certain class of people as well as with a certain country. However, it is not what type of food Coraline prefers that separates her from her family, but her preferred method of preparation.

While Coraline's father cooks full meals, Coraline's mother allows her to eat the pre-packaged, frozen foods, and even cooks from packets herself (when she does cook), which, according to conservative Brits, "violat[es] the values of female domesticity" (Keeling and Pollard 7). Keeling and Pollard argue that Coraline's true mother and Other Mother offer two sides of the British food debate by representing a working class sensibility about convenience foods and a "traditionally approved model of home-cooked meals," respectively (7). Barthes argues that myth reaches out towards humans, full of preexisting meaning and historical implications (124-25). The foods Coraline is concerned with have a cultural history that predates her. Her affinity for microwavable convenience foods hints to conservative British readers that Coraline's mother is not domestic enough or incapable of cooking for her child. This history of convenience food in Great Britain might inform readers about Coraline's family dynamic, but the sorts of foods Coraline eats and refuses hint at what she really wants: attention.

The other world—which is, as Rudd and Gooding point out, uncanny, a near perfect physical double of Coraline's own flat—fulfills Coraline's wishes and acts as an escapist fantasy for much of the book. During her first trip to the other flat, Coraline meets the Other Mother, who is "a little like Coraline's mother. Only... Only her skin was white as paper. Only she was taller and thinner. Only her fingers were too long, and they never stopped moving, and her dark red fingernails were curved and sharp" (27-28). The

Other Mother insists that she and the other father have been waiting for Coraline so they “could be a proper family,” and that Coraline’s presence in the other household is not only desired, but necessary for the family to function (29). The worrisome details of the Other Mother, such as her pale complexion and menacing fingernails, are overshadowed by the luxurious dinner she prepares for Coraline’s arrival. The Other Mother’s appearance—especially her paleness— alludes to another famous temptress: the White Witch.⁶ Like the White Witch, the Other Mother entices with food; for lunch, she makes “a huge, golden-brown roasted chicken, fried potatoes, tiny green peas,” a feast that Coraline “shoveled...into her mouth. It tasted wonderful” (28). Coraline determines that the meal includes:

the best chicken that [she] had ever eaten. Her mother sometimes made chicken, but it was always out of packets or frozen, and was very dry...When Coraline’s father cooked chicken he bought real chicken, but he did strange things to it...and Coraline would always refuse to touch it on principle. (29)

This comparison between the Other Mother’s food and the real parents’ food further points to the important role food plays in Coraline’s decision to journey to the other world and her choice to stay there. For Coraline, food does not simply mean that she will be satisfied with the taste or type of her meal. It means that her parents love her, that they pay attention to her wants and attempt to satisfy her appetites. Her real parents, by cooking out of packets or creating culinary masterpieces, do not appeal to Coraline’s simple, comfort food-oriented tastes, and therefore neglect her desires. The Other Mother works as part of Coraline’s Freudian family romance. Since she feels separate and unique

from her mother and father, Coraline must encounter her “real family,” the Other Mother and father who give her the love she thinks she deserves. But even though the Other Mother and father tend to Coraline’s desires by cooking delicious food for her and showering her with unlimited attention, Coraline can’t decide, when prompted, whether she should allow them to sew black buttons on her eyes (45). Even though the Other Mother says it’s just “a little thing,” and that the buttons will allow Coraline to live with them and be “one big happy family...for ever and always,” Coraline refuses to agree immediately (45-46). Instead, she journeys back to her own world, where her parents are missing.

Coraline wants attention, but she also wants the stereotypical family meal. The foods that the Other Mother provides are wholesome, simpler than “recipes” but more flavorful and complex than pre-packaged foods. The types of foods included in the dinner have a “social usage” that gives them special significance (Barthes 109). The traditional foods prepared by the Other Mother have, through repeated use in family gatherings and holiday meals, become comfort foods, giving them a special, almost cliché, status at the dinner table. By associating these foods with home and family, Coraline buys into the notion that proper families eat certain foods in certain ways, and that her family should reflect these social conventions. In *The Rituals of Dinner*, Margaret Visser writes that the dining room table “has for centuries been the locus of the typical household’s daily meals, and represents, as no other piece of furniture can, the family as a whole” (82). I would go farther than Visser and argue that beyond the dinner table is what dinner itself represents: a close family. Coraline wants an undivided mealtime where she and her parents can enjoy being with each other. She wants the attention that the Other Mother

and father give her. The meal the Other Mother prepares allows Coraline to eat uninterrupted by her usual preparation of convenience foods and untarnished by arguments with her father over “recipes.” Because they are comforting foods, the items prepared by the Other Mother seem more significant to Coraline, who usually eats unappetizing pre-packaged meals. Together, these foods represent the family meal, Coraline’s true desire, and act as a temptation for Coraline.

The ritualistic meal would not only lend a sense of routine and normality to Coraline’s life, but it would make her feel closer to her parents, as if they were a cohesive family instead of three individuals. Coraline’s desire to share meals with her family seems to be somewhat contemporary. While children might have wanted to dine with their parents in 18th and 19th century Britain, they were forced to eat separately in the nursery.

In the previous texts I’ve examined, eating with parents is either an impossibility or a chore. Alice is on an adventure and can’t be bothered to think too much of her family (she mostly thinks of Dinah, her cat, and what Dinah might do if she were in Wonderland); Edmund and the Pevensie children are separated from their parents by war and the wardrobe; Charlie’s family is starving, and while he eats with them, their meals are not pleasurable. For these characters, eating with one’s parents does not symbolize love or caring, so it isn’t a focus for them. But Coraline, with her working parents, longs for the unity a shared meal symbolizes.

Although Coraline’s food fantasies take place within the confines of a family, it is not the food that she truly desires—although she does long for food she enjoys—but the company of her parents, which seems unattainable. Coraline exists within the food

fantasy tradition of older works, yet her struggle to experience the love of her family seems more contemporary, set in a time when affectionate families are not always guaranteed, or even commonplace. Coraline is set apart by her desire for family. The other novels examined in this essay don't share this longing for a traditional family, or note that a completely happy family is also contingent on other things, like socioeconomic standing. Even though money may appear to be a nonissue (in terms of happiness) for families like Charlie's in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, luxury food items like tea and chocolate are desirable and longed for, leading characters to feel miserable because of their lack. In the end, Coraline must learn to compromise, accepting parts of her fantasy and parts of her reality equally, and ultimately rejecting the overbearing attitude of the Other Mother. However, no matter how much Coraline wants to hold her parents' attention, there are times when she also rejects their attempts to bond with her.

After Coraline returns from the other house, her mother offers to take her on a trip to restock the bare kitchen, which holds little more than "a sad little tomato and a piece of cheese with green stuff growing on it" (24-25). In a gesture meant to appease Coraline, and give her some of the attention and affection she craves, the mother tells her they will buy something she likes, "fish fingers or something" (25). This scene is an obvious attempt to please Coraline, yet she rejects her mother's offer—possibly as a punishment for not getting the back-to-school clothes she wanted. Coraline's mother never returns from the grocery store, which forces Coraline to "microwave herself a frozen pizza" when she gets hungry at night and eat "canned spaghetti for breakfast" when her parents still haven't returned in the morning (49-50). With her parents missing, Coraline is

unable to cook for herself, and is denied even the “recipes” that she hates. Regardless of Coraline’s love of convenience foods, she clearly does not like living solely on canned spaghetti and frozen pizza. Coraline’s dependency on convenience foods during her parents’ absence, and her unhappiness, further shows that what she desires is not food so much as attention and company. She misses her parents, her *real* parents, and the potential for mealtimes, even if those shared meals are not perfect.

Coraline travels to her neighbor’s flat in an attempt to find answers (or help), but also food. Mrs. Spink and Forcible give her “digestive biscuits, a glass of limeade, and a cup of weak tea,” but offer no help in terms of finding Coraline’s missing parents (they barely acknowledge Coraline’s worries of becoming “a single child family”) (50). Tea with Mrs. Spink and Forcible works as a parody of the family dinners Coraline dislikes. Neither woman listens to what Coraline has to say, glossing over Coraline’s explanation that her parents are “missing,” and continue with their conversation between themselves(50). Even if they don’t bend to her every desire, Coraline’s parents listen to her, as evidenced by her mother’s agreement to buy fish sticks earlier in the novel. Coraline initially enjoys the Other Mother’s attention, but when that attention becomes smothering, and when Mrs. Spink and Forcible demonstrate how absolutely clueless adults can be, Coraline’s goal shifts to finding and rescuing her parents. Unlike the Pevensie children, who operate under adult rule to some extent, and Charlie and Alice, who escape the world of adults for a brief time, Coraline desires a happy balance between adult authority and childhood freedom. She longs for some structure from her parents—such as the structure of a family meal—but she also wants enough independence to make her own decisions, in terms of food and otherwise. Part of Coraline’s fascination with

Mrs. Spink and Forcible is that they allow her to have things that her parents do not usually have, like limeade.

The limeade, which “didn’t taste anything like limes” and instead “tasted bright green and vaguely chemical,” reflects Coraline’s anxiety about her missing parents (50). Coraline finds comfort in the limeade from her neighbors, even though she doesn’t receive any real help from them, and is largely ignored. She buys more limeade at the supermarket near her house, along with a bag of apples and chocolate cake. On her own, Coraline is still obsessed with food, what kind she will eat and when. She eats with Mrs. Spink and Forcible, buys her own groceries, and even writes a story where a little girl named Apple turns into “sossajes” (51). Coraline’s fixation on food does not seem to revolve around the delicious food the Other Mother once prepared. Instead, Coraline is concerned—to some extent—with survival. She eats the apples to survive and drinks the limeade to comfort herself. Coraline comforts herself through food, but also by “climb[ing] into her parents’ bed” and crying, thinking of them and her own loneliness (52). The foods Coraline eats while alone exist outside of her normal routine, but still fall under the heading of convenience foods, things that can be bought and eaten without much preparation. Coraline begins to form her own food-identity by making her own choices, eating the foods she wants and not the “recipes” her father cooks, but picking her own food does not solve her root desire: to spend time with her family. In this scene, food and temptation are only the symptoms of a greater issue. Once Coraline sees the foggy message “HELP US” on the hallway mirror, she becomes determined to save her parents in an effort to fulfill her food fantasy of a complete family united around the dinner table. Although the mirror message is from Coraline’s parents and not from a mysterious third

party, it recalls the demanding labels of the foods Alice encounters throughout Wonderland, linking Coraline's journey in the other house to Alice's trip through Wonderland. Also like Alice, Coraline is led to the other side in part by curiosity and by food, but unlike Alice, the affection that food symbolizes is what entices her to stay—even if that affection comes from the dangerous other mother.

After Coraline makes the decision to save her parents, she again reminded of the Other Mother's tempting food, first in the real world, and then in the other house. When Coraline calls the police to report her parents missing ("I think my other mother has them both in her clutches"), the officer patronizingly tells her "You ask your mother to make you a big old mug of hot chocolate, and then give you a great big old hug. There's nothing like hot chocolate and a hug for making the nightmares go away" (54,55). Coraline is "not reassured" by the officer's words, and travels to the other house to settle matters herself (55). In the other house, the smothering Other Mother offers what the officer suggested, telling Coraline, "I'll make us a midnight snack. And you'll want something to drink— hot chocolate perhaps?" (61). Here, the Other Mother continues her role of temptress, offering Coraline whatever food she desires, including the sweet hot chocolate. Even though the warm drink is considered universally comforting—in the real world and the other world—Coraline doesn't want it, because it would not only be an admission of defeat, but an acceptance of and submission to the Other Mother's power.

The Other Mother echoes Lewis's White Witch in her urgency to provide sweets for Coraline, and her offer of hot chocolate can be compared to the Witch's frothy, sweet drink. Instead of giving in to temptation, as Edmund does, Coraline tells the Other Mother, "I don't need a snack...I have an apple. See?" (61). She defiantly eats the apple

with “an enthusiasm that she did not really feel” in an attempt to be brave (61). Coraline does, however, accept breakfast from the Other Mother the next morning. The meal—cheese omelets, bacon, orange juice, and hot chocolate—is yet another attempt to convince Coraline to stay in the other house. Instead of eating the breakfast in its entirety, as she did at her first meal in the other house, Coraline refuses to eat the most decadent component: “Even though she knew she would like it she could not bring herself to taste the hot chocolate” (93). It is her Turkish Delight, the comforting and sweet treat that she does not get at home. Although she must eat for survival (the breakfast), Coraline will no longer allow herself indulgences that might be used to keep her in the other world. Coraline’s food choices, including her use of the apples and her resistance to the Other Mother’s temptation, lead to her successful rescue of the ghost children’s souls, as well as the rescue of her parents. While more canonical food-as-temptation stories provide clear motivations for the villain’s motives, Gaiman complicates the role of the Other Mother in *Coraline*. Readers might clearly understand that the Witch needs to seduce Edmund in order to capture the Pevensie children and rule Narnia, or that Alice must eat and drink various foods to travel through Wonderland, but the Other Mother, who has no clear origin or motivation, might be harder to understand.

While the Other Mother works as an opposite of Coraline’s real mother, she also assumes the role of the *Belle Dame sans Merci*, as Jadis does in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. The Other Mother repeatedly tempts Coraline with food in an effort to keep her in the other house forever, but she uses supernatural powers to do so, placing her in the *Belle Dame* category. One of the ghost children even calls the Other Mother “Beldam,” a shortened form of *Belle Dame sans Merci*. The Other Mother’s powers seem

limitless. She created the other house, and the small world surrounding it, and she also created the other father, who ultimately turns into a dough-like substance. Since the Other Mother's primary abilities are related to cooking and other domestic abilities, she attempts to use Coraline's weakness for food—and especially food she likes—as a weapon. By creating a home that stands in opposition to Coraline's real house, the Other Mother lures Coraline with the promise of a life full of attention and love. The Other Mother never tells Coraline *why* she wants her so badly. She repeatedly claims that she wants Coraline to love, to be a “happy family,” but, of course, the Other Mother lies, and what she tells Coraline does not match with the stories of the ghost children (46). One of the ghost children says of the Other Mother, “She kept us, and she fed on us, until now we've nothing left of ourselves, only snakeskins and spider husks” (85). The Other Mother wishes to consume Coraline, just as she consumed the ghost children, to feed off of their energy, and perhaps their love. Just as the Other Mother uses food as a weapon, a tool to lure Coraline into the other house, she also desires food herself, albeit in the form of human children, much like the witch in “Hansel and Gretel.” The cat understands this aspect of the Other Mother, telling Coraline, “She wants something to love, I think...Something that isn't her. She might want something to eat as well. It's hard to tell with creatures like that” (65). On some level, love and food are equal for the Other Mother, as she is perhaps incapable of loving in the conventional sense of the word. She does care about herself, though, and seeks to nourish herself by consuming children. While many fairy tales feature the consumption of children,⁷ it is not a staple feature in the food-as-temptation narrative. Jadis does not seek to eat the Pevensie children, and no one, no matter how strange, tries to eat Alice while she visits Wonderland. However,

Coraline is in real danger of being eaten, which makes her daring rescue of her parents even braver.

While Edmund, Charlie, and Alice behave passively by letting their temptations overrule their better judgment, Coraline uses food as a weapon, appropriating the Other Mother's strategy for herself. Coraline first refuses the Other Mother's food, but denying the Other Mother's offerings is not enough, and Coraline must engage in tempting the temptress, reversing the role established for much of the novel. When Coraline returns from the other house, having saved her parents, who remember nothing, her interactions with food change. While she wouldn't eat dinner with her parents before, insisting that her father's cooking consisted of "recipes" that she didn't like, Coraline eats with them when she returns from the other house. Her father cooks pizza, but a different kind of pizza than Coraline would find in prepackaged form. The pizza is:

homemade by her father (so the crust was alternately thick and doughy and raw, or too thin and burnt), and even though he had put slices of green pepper on it, along with little meatballs, and, of all things, pineapple chunks, Coraline ate the entire slice she had been given. Well, she ate everything except for the pineapple chunks. (141)

Coraline compromises during this meal, eating some things that she might not have eaten previously—like the green peppers and meatballs—but pushes the pineapple chunks aside without making a fuss. The meal Coraline shares with her parents symbolizes her newfound maturity, but also her understanding of the importance of food, even food she does not like. By sharing a meal, Coraline communicates that she is content with her family, and their food, and no longer wishes for something more, something similar to

the Other Mother. This aspect of Coraline's narrative could be viewed as submissive or regressive—after all, Coraline takes a step backwards by obeying her parents—yet Coraline still shows her ability to choose by altering the meal, even if slightly. Coraline's parent's first accommodate her taste by making pizza instead of the less kid-friendly soup featured earlier in the novel. Then, the two parties compromise at dinner; Coraline likes pizza, so her father makes pizza, but she doesn't like *everything* on the pizza, so she discards the unappetizing bits (the pineapple) and eats only what she likes. Coraline and her parents negotiate dinner as a team, a family, instead of battling over recipes and microwave chips as they did before. This shows growth in the family as a whole instead of regression in Coraline alone. The family must learn to work together, with Coraline making decisions, too, in order to function as a cohesive unit. Her tastes haven't changed, per se, but she now values the meaning of the family meal more than the meal itself. Most importantly, Coraline's wish to be united with her family around the dinner table is fulfilled, but she must defeat the Other Mother, or, more specifically, the Other Mother's right hand (which has escaped to the real world), before she can rest easy.

To destroy the Other Mother's hand, Coraline uses food. She declares, "I'm going to have a picnic with my dolls today" and travels to the well near her house with the intention of staging a tea party (152-153). Coraline arranges the tea party around an old well, which she covers with a tablecloth and weights down with water-filled teacups. Although the hand does not want the food (or pretend food) presented at the picnic, the setting of a meal serves as bait, an innocent scene to tempt the hand into the open. Unable to resist the key, the hand jumps into the middle of the tea party and goes "tumbling down into the darkness of the well" (159). Coraline does not literally cook anything as

the Other Mother does, nor does the other mother's hand want real food, but the domestic setting of the tea party encourages the hand to reveal itself, and to jump into the middle of the tea set for the key. The party does not seem immediately threatening and there is nothing suspicious about a little girl having a tea party because Western society typically deems "playing house" acceptable. Coraline uses a domestic scene, complete with food, to tempt the hand, just as the other mother used food and good housekeeping to tempt Coraline earlier in the novel.⁸ This appropriation of the Other Mother's tactics works to Coraline's advantage, and she succeeds in destroying the hand.

Not only does Coraline rescue her parents and the ghost children, but she also defeats the Other Mother without assistance from adults. Like Hansel and Gretel, who free themselves from the witch's house and return to their father, Coraline is in control of her adventure, even when faced with temptation. At least one critic, Danielle Russell, argues that Coraline's real mother has some power, but that it "may be muted in comparison with the over-the-top actions of [her] fantastic [counterpart]" (165). Yet it is Coraline who saves her parents and not the other way around. Although, as Russell argues, the real mother has some virtues—most notably by having a life outside motherhood—Coraline is the heroine of the novel, and she ultimately saves the day by taking action, not waiting to be rescued.⁹

Although many things draw Coraline to the mysterious other house, including her own boredom, food tempts her the most and encourages her to stay there, perhaps even above the attention from the other parents. Just like Alice and Edmund, Coraline experiences joy and wonder when she eats the delicious food, but instead of letting it consume her, or sweep her away on a journey she did not ask for, Coraline refuses to let

the food overshadow more important aspects of her life, like the love of her parents or her concern for the ghost children. Coraline's independence and bravery makes her an exceptional heroine, one who is influenced by her literary ancestors, like Alice and Edmund, but not identical to them. *Coraline* represents a contemporary food-as-temptation story, one where the tempted party doesn't have to sit idly and wait for rescue, like Edmund.

Coraline's reasons for food fantasies and temptations are more complex than those of Alice, Edmund, and Charlie—and even Hansel and Gretel. While Hansel and Gretel and Charlie are literally starving at the beginning of their stories, Coraline is supplied with food she enjoys (her microwavable pizza). Alice cannot control Wonderland and does not understand the foods she finds. She eats because she is confused, to some extent, and to help her travel through the strange world. Edmund might eat because he feels isolated from his siblings, different and less chipper, but the enchanted Turkish Delight holds him under a spell. Jadis encourages Edmund by giving him selfish fantasies of being a prince, which would elevate him above his siblings. Coraline does not wish to overpower her family, as Edmund does, and she doesn't need food to navigate through the other house. She is not starving and doesn't need more food to survive. Instead, Coraline's food obsession, and her brush with temptation, are the manifestations of her desire for a cohesive family. Her food fantasies align with stereotypical “family dinners,” and her attraction to the Other Mother reflects her desire for unwavering parental attention. However, Coraline's true divergence from canonical food-as-temptation stories lies in her reclamation of her agency. No matter how much Coraline might *want* her parents to be in control—or at the head of the dinner table—they

cannot save themselves. She must travel to the other world, face the Other Mother, and rescue them without their ever knowing. *Coraline* is the inheritor of food-as-temptation tropes—like the *Belle Dame sans merci* or the use of sweet foods as a temptation—but it also diverges from older canonical works by featuring a child-protagonist capable of being tempted but also of saving herself.

Chapter 4

Dessert: Why Children's Literature Needs Temptation Stories

Temptation stories adapt to different time periods, retaining the same overall structure but changing their symbolism. For example, Hansel and Gretel's hunger for the witch's sweet house is based on starvation. Without eating the house, Hansel and Gretel might have died in the woods, but *Coraline*'s symbolic meal with the Other Mother is not about the types of food eaten, but about what they represent: family togetherness. Both tales are equally important in the big picture of food-as-temptation stories, but their differing symbolism fits their respective time periods.

In "Still Hot: Great Food Moments in Children's Literature," Linda Sue Park explains that food is an essential component of children's literature for four reasons: identification, setting, character development, and relationships (233-34). Food is a cultural signifier—as Keeling and Pollard note in "The Key is in the Mouth: Food and Orality in *Coraline*"—and can be one of the last traditions immigrants let go of, but it can also hint at more subtle character development, as in *Coraline*. In "Still Hot," Park writes,

Food choices and habits are among the clearest ways I know to establish personality traits and idiosyncrasies... With a food scene, it takes only a few deft brush strokes to delineate a character as fussy or careless or generous, with *action* rather than static description (233).

In part, this may be what makes food-as-temptation stories so successful. By showing characters' eccentricities and weaknesses through the distinct action of eating, authors can build complex novels with well-rounded characters. Park also writes that mealtimes demonstrate relationships in stories: "Want an easy way to put people together and get

them to talk to each other? Sit them down to a meal” (234). This is true enough in *Coraline*, where the relationship between Coraline and her parents is key, but Edmund also demonstrates his tense relationship with the other Pevensie children when they eat at the Beavers’ house. Many different types of relationships can be shown through both the giving and receiving of food.

The temptation aspect of these stories is equally as important as the food that serves as a lure. Food works as the ultimate temptation for children because it can be viewed as a stand-in for many different desires, including sex. In a pre-adolescent world, where sex may be understood but not quite a reality yet, food (and especially more decadent food) represents pleasure, but also the possibility of overindulgence. The power to resist temptation and indulge moderately can make a hero/heroine truly great.

In their 2005 study of self-control in children, Lauri A. Jensen-Campbell and William G. Graziano concluded that self-regulation is essential to the development of children in various cultures and social backgrounds. Children that could control their desires more effectively could also communicate with adults better than their more easily-tempted peers. Temptation stories blend the two extremes by showing readers characters that both give in to temptation and overcome it, or are forgiven for their transgressions. Alice both gives in to temptation by eating the various Wonderland foods, but she also acts as temptress, baiting other characters into uncomfortable conversations. Edmund uses food as an escape from his tense relationship with his siblings (and to potentially elevate himself above them socially by becoming a prince), but he is ultimately forgiven for his weakness, accepted by the other Pevensies, and allowed to be

a hero of sorts. Charlie, who never breaks Wonka's rules, watches as other children are systematically tempted and punished, learning from their lack of self-control.

In Carroll, Lewis, and Dahl self-discipline is highly valued, considering that characters cannot free themselves from danger. Coraline differs from the more traditional, gluttonous characters because she not only frees herself from the Other Mother's clutches, but also her parents. By the end of the novel, Coraline learns to compromise with her parents around the dinner table instead of sacrificing her independence entirely. Coraline's experience saving her parents gives her insight that the other children do not have. By becoming the heroine of the novel, Coraline assumes greater agency than the other children, saving her family and maintaining her independent nature. Coraline realizes her love for her parents, but not so much that she will blindly eat the pizza put before her without modifying it to her tastes. Coraline's willingness to eat the pizza is not entirely the effect of her being socialized into an adult way of thinking by her parents, but instead a sign that Coraline values her parent's affection—which is a balance between the smothering affection of the Other Mother and their previous dismissive attitudes early in the novel. While Coraline's quirks don't place her in a league of her own per se, they do separate her from characters like Edmund or Alice by highlighting her assertiveness.

To some extent, children's literature celebrates the quirky individual. Coraline is a spunky heroine with plenty of personality, as are other famous girl-protagonists, like Harriet (of Louise Fitzhugh's *Harriet the Spy*), but that doesn't exclude her from wanting to feel loved by her parents. Coraline's relationship with food hints at her desire to be part of a cohesive family unit, to be loved and accepted by her family, but not by

sacrificing her identity or personal taste. There's nothing wrong with this, according to the novel, and Coraline gets her wish when she eats pizza with her parents. Food-as-temptation stories appeal to the human urge to be a part of *something*, a group as simple as a family or as big as the Kings and Queens of Narnia.

Food-as-temptation stories are still being written, and will continue to be written. Food in the contemporary world—although it may not resemble the food of the past—is still an essential part of life. By examining symbolic meals in food-as-temptation stories, readers can track the progression of children's agency. While characters in older works might be limited in their independence, reliant on family or their surroundings for guidance, characters like Coraline break this tradition by acting independently and vanquishing villains on their own, with little to no help from others. Whether food tempts or excites, punishes or rewards, it will remain a fixture of literature, and especially of children's literature.

Notes

1. In *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature*, Perry Nodelman discusses nostalgia at length. He argues that the nostalgia seen in children's literature is most often a reflection of the adult author's desires, and that these adult authors perhaps do not remember how embarrassing and isolating childhood actually was (46). He goes on to write that "children's literature is a literature of nostalgia," a literature that focuses on the innocence and beauty that adult authors believe they left behind in childhood. (192). The nostalgia of children's literature authors can create a "doubleness" in child readers, inviting them to participate in an adult nostalgia for a childhood they are still experiencing and to learn how to perform their age according to rules created by adult authors (193).

2. Susan, in a later Narnian adventure, becomes interested in typical teenage matters, like boys, stockings, and make-up. Once she becomes aware of the sexual world, which entails thinking of Narnia as silly and perhaps unreal, Susan can no longer enter into the fantasy world with her siblings. There is no redemption for Susan, even though her actions are not evil, and could be considered quite natural.

3. While it's not exclusive to the food-as-temptation story, this passivity is seen in many such stories. Children are taught some lesson through their consumption after being trapped, either physically or mentally. They are not allowed to be the heroes of their own stories, even if they are the protagonists. Their control is limited.

4. However, the 1972 film adaptation of Dahl's novel features a naughtier version of Charlie who, along with Grandpa Joe, stops to enjoy a Fizzy Lifting Drink at his own peril. The film Charlie might still act as a Christ figure, though, because his "response is

unique among the transgressors,” because he “implicitly acknowledges his sin against Wonka by returning the Everlasting Gobstopper he has been giving as a gift” (Kachur 229). Kachur claims that Charlie’s dedication to honesty in the film makes him Christ-like, just as his abstinence from disobedience makes him Christ-like in the novel.

5. *Coraline* has also been compared to Lucy Lane Clifford’s “The New Mother,” which features a mother who threatens her children with abandonment. If the children are naughty, the mother tells them, “I should have to go away and leave you, and to send home a new mother, with glass eyes and wooden tail” (574). After the children are naughty, the mother leaves and the new mother arrives, dragging her heavy wooden tail behind her. Frightened, the children flee to the woods and live there forever.

Although *Coraline* features the Other Mother, whose button eyes echo the new mother’s glass eyes, the relationship between Coraline, her mother, and the Other Mother is more complex than that of Blue-Eyes, the Turkey, and the mother in “The New Mother.” Coraline does not have the happy relationship with her mother that Blue-Eyes and the Turkey have, and she is not particularly naughty as they are. Where Blue-Eyes and the Turkey are tempted by a mysterious girl who promises to show them a pear drum and a man and woman dancing, Coraline is tempted by the love and attention of the Other Mother. While in *Coraline* the Other Mother herself, with her domestic skills and smothering niceness, could be seen as a temptation, the new mother is a threat, a consequence for bad behavior.

6. The similarities are most likely not a coincidence. Gaiman has publicly discussed his love of Lewis’ Chronicles of Narnia, and particularly *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* in Laura Miller’s *The Magician’s Book*. About his obsession with the

novels, Gaiman says, “I would read other books, of course...but in my heart I knew that I read them only because there wasn’t an infinite number of Narnia books” (qtd. in Miller 23). Gaiman has also written a short story, “The Trouble of Susan,” which was featured in his collection *Fragile Things*, which explores what Susan’s life was like after the death of her siblings (or their eternal return to Narnia).

7. “The Juniper Tree” stands out as one of the most gruesome; a child is killed and cooked into a stew, which is fed to his father.

8. Hansel and Gretel also use their enemy’s tactics to save themselves, which ties these two texts even closer. Instead of being cooked themselves, they push the witch into her own oven and escape.

9. While Gaiman’s novel consistently portrays Coraline as strong willed and independent, the 2009 film adaptation alters the plot and reduces Coraline’s agency by adding extra characters and shifting focus from Coraline to these new characters. Although the film was reasonably successful, it alters the character of Coraline focusing equally on Wybie, a character created specifically for the film.

In her study of the film, Lindsay Myers argues that the film is more about the Other Mother’s desires than Coraline’s feelings or personal growth. She writes “Everything that happens...is not ascribed to Coraline but rather to the calculated machinations of the Other Mother” (247-248). Myers argues that, considering that the film’s focus is the Other Mother, Coraline has less responsibility for her actions (248). Wybie steals the spotlight from Coraline on numerous occasions, including the culminating scene, where he rescues Coraline and defeats the Other Mother’s hand. Henry Selick, the director of the film, has stated that Wybie “was introduced in order to

provide the heroine with someone ‘to share her thoughts with, and create a little more conflict’” (Stephen Jones qtd. in Myers). Yet Wybie emphasizes the film’s focus on external change as opposed to internal change while simultaneously making the film more like “Hansel and Gretel” by making Coraline part of a duo.

Bravery is a major theme in the novel, but the movie discards it entirely by placing Coraline in a more submissive, damsel in distress (considering Wybie must save her at the end). Ultimately, the film and the book must be viewed as two separate entities, complete with varying themes and motivations. Where the novel seeks, perhaps, to inspire bravery and introspection, the film emphasizes teamwork (between Coraline and Wybie) and, as Myers points out, a healthy evasion of “stranger danger.”

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