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# Connecting the Adult and Child Worlds: Comparing the Significance of Food in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *Anne of Green Gables*

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Abstract:

Inextricably intertwined with feelings of security and love, the theme of food is prominent throughout the history of children's literature. Food is employed in both C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* and L. M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* to examine the child-adult power dynamic and to emphasize the moral evolution accompanying children's developmental transition into adulthood. Both Montgomery and Lewis suggest the significance of food in relation to adulthood and childhood in three ways: food as a dichotomic symbol for empowerment and oppression; the desire for food as a metaphor for sexual hunger and the coming-of-age; and food as a medium for didactic teachings. Although *Anne of Green Gables*, a domestic fiction, and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, a fantastical allegory, are from very different genres of children's literature, both convey moral lessons through their representations of food, and ultimately, distinguish the transition from childhood to adulthood by the reliance on others for nourishment in contrast with the ability to provide sustenance for oneself.

Keywords: Children's literature; Food; Growing up; Montgomery; Lewis

Inextricably intertwined with feelings of security and love, the theme of food is prominent throughout the history of children's literature, from the "prototypical food-as-temptation" Hansel and Gretel folktale (Honeyman 211) to modern storyteller Ronald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. L. M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, a domestic tale published in 1908 at the end of the Victorian era, often uses food as a manifestation of the protagonist's inner conflict. Food was a particular fixation at the time due to constant threat of rationing and starvation, perhaps inspired by the catastrophic Irish famine of the mid-nineteenth century that drove so many Irish to flee to Canada (Morash 157). Comparably, in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, C. S. Lewis's 1950 allegorical novel focusing on interpersonal conflicts, food fantasies reflect the real hunger likely experienced by the Pevensie children during World War II due to food rationing (Stephens 14). Edmund Pevensie's weakness, quickly discerned by the White Witch, is his indulgence in excess. Both Montgomery and Lewis suggest the significance of food in relation to adulthood and childhood in three ways: food as a dichotomic symbol for empowerment and oppression; the desire for food as a metaphor for sexual hunger; and food as a medium for didactic teachings. In both Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* and Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, food catalyzes discussion on the interaction between childhood and adulthood.

The control of food defines the power dynamic between the adult and the child. The child is dependent on the caretaker for sustenance, command over which represents access to a host of rights and responsibilities exclusive to the grown-up world. Although provided with food and shelter by the Professor, Lewis's Edmund craves parental guidance. Capitalizing on the role of the mother figure as the milk-provider, the White

Witch offers Edmund a “very sweet and foamy and creamy” drink (Lewis 37). Therefore, the White Witch embodies the “split between divine women who nurture through food and evil women who make food...parallel[ing] the traditional, patriarchal dichotomy of women as either Madonnas or whores” (Keeling and Pollard 43). As the “cannibalistic inversion” (43) of Edmund’s absent mother figure, Jadis utilizes typical parenting techniques on Edmund, promising “whole rooms full of Turkish Delight” (Lewis 40) as a reward while simultaneously threatening to “be very angry with [Edmund] if [he] came alone” (42). Enduring the chilly elements, Edmund’s dining solo with the Queen highlights her authority when contrasted to Mr. Tumnus sharing tea with Lucy in the comfort of his cozy home. Dramatizing equality, such a shared meal is a “covenant” (Nikolajeva 129). The breaking of communal bread invokes the peaceful imagery from the Last Supper before Judas’s betrayal of Jesus, foreshadowing Lucy’s impending ordeal at the hands of her younger brother. Thus, in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, food is both a symbol for friendship and an instrument of manipulation.

Similarly, while communal dining conveys harmony, control of food defines the mother-daughter relationship in *Anne of Green Gables*. Social events, such as teatime with Diana and Mrs. Allan, are marked by the thoroughly described preparation and presentation of delicacies. Ironically, a mother’s cooking impairs the daughter’s self-realization. Initially, Marilla stifles the core of Anne’s personality—her whimsical imagination and sentimentality—by refusing to indulge in Anne’s request to be called Cordelia, chiding, “Unromantic fiddlesticks! ...Anne is a real good plain sensible name” (Montgomery 24) and further ordering Anne to “never mind [her] imaginings” (32). The “unsympathetic Marilla” (24) antagonizes Anne to the point of “the depths of despair”

(26), declaring that she does not “want an orphan girl and if [Marilla] did [Anne] isn’t the style [she]’d pick out” (29). Anne’s initial rejection of Marilla’s supper symbolizes her refusal to acknowledge Marilla’s ownership of her as a mother figure. Since Marilla wields the power to determine Anne’s future by “dispatch[ing] her straightway back to where she came from” (29), the Anne can only demonstrate her limited power of choice, and therefore, dignity and independence, by refusing Marilla’s cuisine. Similarly, in the face of “long years of solitary imprisonment” (71), the “obdurate” (70) Anne disagrees with Marilla’s punishment by sending back her daily bread “not noticeably depleted” (71). In both *Avonlea* and *Narnia*, the mother figure controls the food, thereby yielding jurisdiction over the child; however, in both novels, the child retains the power of choice to accept or refuse the provider.

Reflecting the mastery of food as a coming-of-age ritual, the imagery of transforming raw ingredients to cooked fare recurs throughout *Anne of Green* as cooking for oneself and for others signifies the transition to independence. To undertake the act of cooking for the sake of nurturing asks girls to “ingest the maternal body and internalize its role, as if it were their own inner desires” (Keeling and Pollard 43). Anne subconsciously rejects the responsibility of cooking, “grow[ing] cold when [she] think[s] of [her] layer cake...[and] dream[ing]...that [she] was chased all around by a fearful goblin with a big layer cake for a head” (Montgomery 172). Her dream foreshadows her impending failure “as the girl who flavored a cake with anodyne liniment” (175), which reflects that she has not yet progressed into womanhood. Critics have suggested that Montgomery reinforces biologically determined stereotypes, where the woman is expected to sacrifice one’s own pleasure for the pleasure of others, via cooking at the

expense of eating (Keeling and Pollard 42), not unexpected given the era in which Montgomery is writing. Besides being a source of power, cooking is oppressive, as voiced by Anne: “There’s so little scope for imagination in cookery” (Montgomery 124), and, again, the provenance of P.E.I. at the turn of the century would not nurture creativity in cooking. Such a traditionally feminine duty suppresses Anne’s potential as an individual with many other strengths. Indeed, Anne later gives up her scholarship, and therefore, opportunity to advance her education and career choices to take care of (including cooking for) Marilla. Anne only earns the praise of being “a good deal more of the woman” than the girl (306) when she sacrifices herself. However, such a feminist interpretation may be premature, as Anne cites that her decision is based on her love for Marilla, not due to predetermined gender roles. Similarly, a grown and mature Gilbert cares for Marilla indirectly by forfeiting his position at the local school for Anne’s convenience. Therefore, Montgomery’s subtext is not only addressing the role of the girl as she becomes a woman, but rather how a child only truly transitions to adulthood in the role-reversal when he/she reciprocates care—in this case, by providing food, both financially and literally via hands-on preparation—to the parental figure.

While Montgomery approaches the bildungsroman theme by incorporating food as a recurring motif, Lewis symbolizes Edmund’s sexual awakening with the exposure to edible treats. His self-indulgence is linked to worldly desires (Keeling and Pollard 106). Unlike Anne’s gradual control of her food via the responsibility of cooking, Edmund’s lack of control over his food prevents his independence, and thus, grounds him firmly in immaturity. Jadis’s red lips symbolize cannibalistic and sexual intentions toward Edmund (Stephens), recalling the similar connotations with Little Red Riding Hood, where red

invokes imagery of a woman's menses and the loss of virginity (Hallett and Karasek 29). Edmund acknowledges his sexuality by freely choosing to accept the food from his temptress. Fulfilling Edmund's desires, Jadis uses sex, symbolized by the enchanted Turkish Delight, to manipulate her victim and lure him to revisit her again for her services, as a child predator would (Nikolajeva 128). By ingesting her offerings, Edmund literally internalizes her evil, and, from a Romantic perspective, becomes impure. Intoxicated by the instant gratification, Edmund begs Jadis, his dominatrix, "Please, please...please couldn't I have just one piece of Turkish Delight to eat on the way home?" (Lewis 42) The vivid description of how Edmund's "face had become very red and his mouth and fingers were sticky" (40) further reinforces the sexual imagery. Thus, Edmund's fixation on Turkish Delight could be interpreted as an adolescent boy's typical preoccupation with sex. Edmund's exposure to food is associated with sexual awakening (but not maturity), whereas Anne's taking on the responsibility of cooking is associated with the transition to adulthood. In both novels, mastery of food distinguishes the adult from the child.

In addition to the interactions between the child and adult characters within the novels, the authors exploit food for their didactic intent. Scholars have defended Anne as being not "one-dimensionally didactic" (Gammel 133) because Montgomery emphasizes "personal spirituality characterized by authenticity [and] questioning" (Howey 398). While Montgomery's subtle writing style certainly cannot be described as one-dimensional, she does present moralistic messages for her youthful audience. Anne's ultimate triumph in maturity may be seen as a product of the suppression of her authenticity and questioning, the byproducts of her imagination. Imagination is both

Anne's distinguishing strength and her greatest vice. In fact, her inner struggle to control her own mind is the central conflict. Distracted by "the loveliest story...such a pathetic tale", Anne forgets to add flour when making a "cake [that] was a dismal failure" (Montgomery 124). Similarly, "when [Anne] carried [the pudding sauce] in, [she] was imagining [she] was a nun...taking the veil to bury a broken heart in cloistered seclusion" (125), resulting in embarrassment to Marilla with spoiled pudding in the company of guests. The habit of yielding to her mental fantasies at inappropriate times can be interpreted as Anne's intrapersonal antagonist. Good food represents Anne's quintessential character, whereas spoiled food results from allowing her integral foe to consume her. Anne eventually learns to control her mind in preparation for the entrance exam, "dragging her eyes from the witcheries of the spring world, the beckoning day of breeze and blue, and the green things upspringing in the garden [to] bur[y] herself resolutely in her book" (256). A subdued Anne, who "[does]n't want to talk as much...[who does]n't want to use big words any more" (255), who has abandoned her charming story club, and who is wrought with distress over her studies because she has successfully reined in her wild imagination, is portrayed as the ideal Anne—one that Matthew voices "that [he's] proud of" (292). Therefore, although Montgomery celebrates the carefree state of childhood, she insists, with a pedagogic subtext related to spoiled food, that her protagonist must tame her childish fantasies and master her own mind in order to progress to adulthood and achieve her academic potential.

While Montgomery weaves edifying lessons into her novel through a relatable titular character, Lewis blatantly thrusts upon his intended youthful readers overt Biblical references throughout *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. The narrator addresses the



reader directly, commenting, “How Aslan [a Christ figure] provided food for them all I don’t know” (Lewis 108). The emphasis on the “miraculous” (Katz 194) nature of the situation draws parallels to Jesus feeding a crowd of “five thousand men, besides women and children” with “only five loaves of bread and two fish” (*New International Version*, Matthew 14:17-21). Likewise, before the White Witch’s rule, “the streams would run with wine instead of water” (Lewis 17). Hence, food and drink are associated with an utopian state of plenty, which is then linked to Aslan’s presence. Consequently, Lewis pontificates that to trust in God is to be blessed with plenty and security, embodied by endless provisions. However, Lewis is careful to distinguish between the wholesome and the overly sweet (Stephens 14). Mr. Tumnus serves Lucy three different kinds of toast, “sardines on toast, and then buttered toast, and then toast with honey” (Lewis 16), all modest and nutritious. Unlike the Queen, Mr. Tumnus is not a tempter—in his overwhelming guilt, he confesses his initial intentions of kidnapping Lucy and then begs for forgiveness, thus promoting the reader’s favourable perception of him. Analogously, the narrator deliberately interrupts the dinner scene at the Beavers’ (Stephens 34), directly addressing the reader: “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” (Lewis 80) to emphasize the distinction between wholesome meals and unhealthy sweets. The siblings enjoy nutritious food, followed by a surprise dessert of Mrs. Beaver’s marmalade roll, proving that rich foods can be responsibly enjoyed in moderation and as a supplement to, rather than a replacement for, nourishing food. The reader infers that sweets, which are empty calories, symbolize a lack of morality and heathendom, whereas nutritious foods, containing sustenance to fuel the children’s efforts against Jadis, denote

family life, morals and the Christian faith. Examining the Biblical imagery further, the Turkish Delight offered by Jadis which tempts Edmund is akin to the fruit of the tree of knowledge which tempted Eve, and subsequently Adam, at the suggestion of the serpent (*New International Version*, Genesis 3: 4-6). Moreover, Lewis alludes to Greek mythology, where the earth is doomed to six months of winter because Hades tricked Persephone into eating six pomegranate seeds from the underworld (Blackford). Consumption of the Turkish Delight, the fruit of knowledge, and the underworld pomegranate are all associated with humankind's fall from grace and acquaintance with evil. Because of his allegiance to the devil, Edmund "hadn't really enjoyed" the Beavers' meal "because he was thinking all the time about Turkish Delight" (Lewis 95). Lewis follows this description of Edmund's mental state immediately by preaching, "there's nothing that spoils the taste of good ordinary food half so much as the memory of bad magic food" (95), not trusting the child readers enough to draw this conclusion for themselves. Both Lewis and Montgomery infuse their works with the didactic morals of faith and self-discipline, respectively, through the use of food.

Food is employed in both C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* and L. M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* to examine the child-adult power dynamic and to emphasize the moral evolution accompanying children's developmental transition into adulthood. The adult controlling the food holds the power. The child only transcends the barrier to adulthood when he/she gains full control over his/her food, as demonstrated by Montgomery's Anne—failure to do so roots one firmly in childhood, as, too, with Lewis's Edmund. Moreover, both authors use food symbolism as a vehicle for moral lessons. Notably, both Lewis and Montgomery are writing before

the implementation of social welfare programs designed to prevent the threat of starvation from dominating everyday life. Although *Anne of Green Gables*, a domestic fiction, and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, a fantastical allegory, are from very different genres of children's literature, both convey moral lessons through their representations of food, and ultimately, distinguish the transition from childhood to adulthood by the reliance on others for nourishment in contrast with the ability to provide sustenance for oneself and for others.

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