



Food and Drink Symbolism
in Some Selected Poems by
Wallace Stevens and Ibtisam Barakat

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Abstract

Food is not only an essential means to survive; it is also an essential means to preserve identity, keep history, and transmit culture. It is, therefore, used as a marker or a signifier of a certain society. The connotations that food and drink imply are prevalent in poetry. Wallace Stevens and Ibtisam Barakat are among those poets who tackle serious topics through the use of food and drink symbolism. In spite of the cultural, social, and religious differences between them, both have themes in common. Firstly, Feelings of estrangement and longing permeate their poetry; secondly, for both of them the world is either chaotic or brutal; thirdly, both find refuge in imagination to escape the anarchic savage world. Finally, both have been affected by radical influences; World War II left its impact on Stevens' works whereas occupation influenced Barakat's poetry. Affected by philosophy, Stevens finds in food stuff the nexus he seeks between reality and imagination. Barakat, on the other hand, finds in food the means to stick to her memories, identity, and history.

Key Words

Food – identity – culture – marker – connotation – occupation – Wallace Stevens – Ibtisam Barakat

المخلص

لا يعد الطعام وسيلة فقط للبقاء على قيد الحياة ولكنه يعد أيضاً وسيلة للتعبير عن الهوية والحفاظ على التاريخ. ولأن الطعام يتجاوز كونه نشاطاً إنسانياً حيوي إلى الحد الذي جعل منه محدداً للثقافات ومميزاً للمجتمعات فقد استخدمت رمزية الطعام في الكثير من الأعمال الأدبية على اختلاف أشكالها وتعدد أنواعها على مر العصور. ويحظى الشعر بنصيب لا بأس به من تناول الدلالات المختلفة للطعام وربطها بالواقع الذي يعيشه الشعراء، ومن بين هؤلاء الشعراء الذين استخدموا الطعام لمعالجة قضايا شائكة وموضوعات مهمة في مجتمعاتهم نجد والس ستيفنز وإبتسام بركات. وعلى الرغم من إختلاف الخلفية الثقافية والاجتماعية والدينية لكلا الشاعرين إلا أنهما قد جمعتهما سوياً بعض المؤثرات الجذرية المتشابهة والتي تركت ظلها على أعمالهما. فنجد أن مشاعر الإغتراب والحنين تجتاح أعمالهما كما نجد أن كلاهما إتخذ من الخيال وسيلة لتحقيق غايته فإتخذ ستيفنز طريقاً للوصول إلى الحقيقة من منظور مختلف كما إتخذته بركات كسبيل للهروب من الواقع القاسي. وكما ألقى الإحتلال بظلاله على شعر بركات فقد تأثر ستيفنز بما إجتاح العالم من فوضى بعد الحرب العالمية الأولى. وبعمق فلسفي استخدم ستيفنز الطعام لتعميق تلك الروابط التي طالما أكد عليها في أعماله بين الحقيقة والخيال بينما إتخذت بركات من الحديث عن الطعام والقصص المرتبطة به متنفساً للعودة للذكريات والوطن وأهله حتى وإن كانت هذه العودة في خيالها فقط.

الكلمات الدالة: الطعام – الهوية – الثقافة – محدد – الدلالة – الإحتلال – والس ستيفنز – إبتسام بركات

Wallace Stevens (1879- 1955) is one of the most prominent American poets in the twentieth century. "*Harmonium*", "*The Man with the Blue Guitar*", and "*The Auroras of Autumn*" are among the well-known works. The impact of imagination on man's life is the dominant theme in Steven's works.

Ibtisam Barakat (1963-.....) is a Palestinian-American poet, author, translator, artist, and activist. She was born in 1963, Beit Hanina-East Jerusalem. In 1986, she travelled to New York where she got her Master's degree in journalism and then another master's in human development. She writes in both Arabic and English. Most of her works have been translated into many languages. "*Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood*" (2007), and "*Balcony on the Moon: Coming of Age in Palestine*" (2016) are among the most well-known works that won about forty awards including the International Reading Association's best book award. Other works include "*The Jar that Become a Galaxy*", "*A Present for The Letter Hamzah*", "*The Letter Ta' Escapes*" which won the Euro-Mediterranean Anna Lindh Foundation's best book award for children's books in Arabic, and "*The Lilac Girl*" (2019) which won the 2020 Sheikh Zayed Book Award for Children's Literature. Most of Barakat's poems and stories have appeared in magazines "*The Nations*" and "*The Washington Post*" and have been anthologized in "*Teaching Powerful Writing: 25 Read-Aloud Stories*" (2001), "*The Flag of Childhood*" (2002) and "*Shattered*" (2002). Peace and liberty are the most dominant themes in her poetry.

Eating is not only an essential human activity for survival; it is also a fundamental means to understand man's identity, beliefs, and social function. Although eating is a human - and consequently a universal - experience, eating habits and practices and the kinds of food as well are unique to



different cultures, food creates a distinction not only between the various societies, but different regions within the same society. Food thus, can help preserve the self and the nation's memory, history, culture, and identity. Like literature, music, and the other kinds of art, food is a culture marker. In his article "food, self, and identity" Claude Fischler states that "food not only nourishes but also signifies" (276). Food as a signifier is simply expressed in the spontaneous statements people often use; in defining themselves or other peoples they can say: we eat spicy food, they do not. We eat beef, they do not. We do not eat pork, they do. We do not eat frogs, they do and so on. This is why the French lawyer and politician Brillat-Savarin said "tell me what you eat and I will tell you who you are" (Wilson 14). Stressing the same notion, David Sutton said "we are what we ate" to trench the belief that food is not a signifier of people's present time but a signifier of their collective heritage as well. The inextricable connection between food and place is emphasized by Bill David and Valentine Gill who said "we are where we eat" (Wilson 15).

Food far exceeds being an alimental necessity; it can never be seen separately without taking into consideration the different aspects of man's life. Terry Eagleton states that "it is never just food, it is endlessly interpretable, materialized emotion" (204). Food noticeably can tell much about man's memory, history, culture and even religion. Apart from the cultural and the territorial identity that food can distinguish and preserve, religious identity is intricately associated with food. Many examples help foster this association; there are "religious food taboos" (Tannahill 8). In Islam for example, eating pork, dead animals and all kinds of food formerly offered to deities are prohibited. In Buddhism, it is forbidden for monks to eat solid food in the afternoon (*Religious Ethnic Food* 45). Equally important are the religious

food symbols – bread for Christ and eggs for the Resurrection of Christ (*Religious Ethnic Food 46*). More apparent are the religious food rites including the number of fasting hours, the way people fast, the time they eat and many other matters that distinguish the different religions and sects. An obvious example of the relevance between food, religion and place can be found in Eastern Europe when women go to the churches in the eve of Easter with baskets filled with different kinds of food to gain the priests' bless (*Religious Ethnic Food 46*). Another example can be found in Hinduism as people are accustomed to feeding animals and birds on religious occasions (*Religious Ethnic Food 46*).

Socially speaking, food stands for togetherness: sharing food with family members, friends, or work mates implies love, warmth, and felicity. People who sit together and break bread with each other are supposed to be loyal to each other - a prevalent practice in Arab countries. Because bread is called "the staff of life" (Almerico 10), the person who earns money to support his family – the breadwinner – is an incarnation of honor and manhood. Food remarkably permeates man's social life. Therefore, food exists on different occasions. Feelings of hatred can be simply expressed through "I cannot stomach someone" whereas admiration can be found in "eye candy". To describe ease one says "a piece of cake" while "bread and butter" stands for necessities of life.

The connotations that food and drink embody are prevalent in poetry. Wallace Stevens and Ibtisam Barakat are among those poets who tackle sensitive and serious topics through the use of food and drink symbolism. Although different, belonging to two cultural, religious and social backgrounds and even different eras, Stevens and Barakat have themes in common. Both, for different reasons, were alienated from their birthplaces. Stevens left for New York City

where he studied, worked, and lived with his wife whom he married against his parents' will. Complaining to his wife, Stevens said that he yearned for "the familiarity and natural surroundings of home" (Janssen 992). Barakat as well left her homeland, Palestine, against her will because of the occupation. Feelings of estrangement and longing for her country and people permeate her letters and poems. Like the occupation which left its great impact on Barakat's poetry, World War II left its effect on Stevens' works; as an old man – 60 years at the wartime – Stevens did not fight but he was able to convey the chaotic state which prevailed the world after the war. Imagination was a way for both of them; Barakat used imagination to escape from the brutality of the real world and Stevens used it to convey reality from a different perspective.

Stevens' use of food and culinary terms is remarkable. His relation with food far exceeds a mere connoisseurship of a certain dish or drink; food in his works is used for a deeper philosophical meaning; for dealing with and conveying reality from a different perspective. His letters teem with references to food. Describing himself, he says "a week ago my belly was swaggering with strawberries" (Stevens 1996, 38); elsewhere, he says "today I bought a box of strawberries and ate them in my room for luncheon. To-morrow I propose to have a pineapple; the next day, blackberries; the next, bananas etc. While I am on the subject of food I may add that I dine with Russell Loines at the Harvard Club to-night" (Stevens 1996, 39). To escape from too much eating, he resorts to walking as the only refuge (Stevens 1996, 69). In his *Adagia*, he describes the poem as "a café" (Stevens 1997, 909). A poor poem, according to him, becomes "cabbage" instead of "crisp lettuce" (Stevens 1996, 214). Elsewhere it is "a very rancid butter" (Cook 47) Critics, similarly, refer to Stevens' poetry using food terms: describing Stevens' poetic maturity,

Harold Bloom uses the word "ripeness" (Bloom22). Blackmur refers to Stevens as "the free master of the fresh and rejoicing tongue" (Blackmur 216) adding that his poems look like a "pie" (Doyle 217) that is marked for dividing into pieces.

As a Palestinian woman, Barakat's culture and identity are associated with certain kinds of food like olive, bread, cheese, Falafel, Mesakhan, bread layers with olive oil and Sumac – Megadara, a dish which is primarily made of lentil – Baklava and some other kinds of food and even spices like thyme. In Palestine, food, identity, memories, history, and resistance intersect. About the stories the Palestinian children of her age heard as a part of their identity, Barakat, referring to one of these stories, wrote "Who among us lived his childhood in Palestine with the taste of thyme, almond and the songs of the revolution did not know the story of Gobbayna (or cheese)! My grandmother, mom and aunt told me the story. I listened carefully and asked them to tell me again. Then I grew up, and forgot all the details except what was mentioned in the title; that this girl was white skin like cheese" (*Barakat, My dear grandmother do not tell me the story of Gobbayna*). Food permeates the stories they tell their children to let them know their culture and preserve their identity.

This study, therefore, focuses on selected works by both Stevens and Barakat in order to answer the following questions: what do food and drink stand for? What are the main similarities and differences between the two poets? Do religion and culture affect their use of food and drink symbols? To what extent is food a signifier or a marker?



In his poem "The Emperor of Ice-Cream" (Stevens 64) Stevens presents the drastic opposition between life and death. The ice cream which is always described as desirable and delicious is summoned to stand for life which is also desirable and ephemeral. Ice cream melts away speedily and so does life; it passes fast. Life is not cold like the ice cream but death is. Ice cream, therefore, symbolizes this dichotomy of the enjoyable life and the cold death. In two stanzas, through the use of concrete images, Stevens visualizes life with its vitality and pleasure and death with its silence and immobility. From the very beginning of the poem, a confident voice is ordering other people to carry out certain tasks for the sake of an old woman's funeral. The events of the poem take place in two separate rooms at the home of this dead woman; the kitchen where the ice cream is being made and the bedroom where the corpse of the woman is being prepared for the funeral. In the kitchen scene, a man whips up the ice cream to be served in kitchen cups, girls linger in their ordinary dresses, and boys carry flowers wrapped in old newspapers. Nothing in the scene is sorrowful, nothing alludes to a funeral. On the contrary, the scene seems vibrant; the image of the girls in their dresses at the same place with the boys carrying flowers implies romance. The use of such words as "muscular", "wenches" and "concupiscent" are intended to stress the lively human desires and activities. That the ages of the girls and wenches in the kitchen are not known intensifies the sense of a disorderly lustful scene. The supremacy of the ice cream that is declared at the end of the first stanza, "The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream", is because the symbolic connotation of the ice cream as a token of pleasure.

The poet abruptly turns from the vitality and abundance of the kitchen scene to the lack of motion in the death scene. The confident voice of the first stanza orders a man to take a sheet from a dresser to cover the body of the dead

woman but the sheet is short, so her stiff cold feet stick. The glaring light on her body shows how calloused and lifeless she is. Nothing in the death scene has to do with the kitchen diction of the first stanza, but the poet ends up the bed room scene of death with the same idea affirming the supremacy of the ice cream. The ice cream stands for the inextricable bond between life and death. Therefore, reality has to be accepted as it is; one has to slurp the ice cream before it melts away, enjoying its taste and confronting its coldness.

That the attendees of the old woman's wake do not show interest in the dead woman gives the ice cream a deeper meaning; it stands for human selfishness. The people in the scene are busy enjoying and eating the ice cream even when the mourners direct the glaring light on the woman's body, perhaps because of a feeling that she is important, they overlook her quickly to remember that "The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream". The indigence and the simplicity that mark everything in the scene even the attendees themselves trenches the sense that those people represent human nature; they represent the simple common people we meet everywhere.

Critics use "the Emperor of Ice cream" to exemplify Steven's disbelief; but on delving into his works, one is left confused as for his beliefs, one cannot determine if he is an atheist or a believer. His era was marked by an absence of conventional religious belief (Franke 1). Stevens – affected by such philosophers as Epicurus, Lucretius, and Nietzsche – was excluding "divine agency from his worldview" (Coffee 12) and favoring imagination over belief "modern reality is a reality of decreation, in which our revelations are not the revelations of belief but the precious portents of our own powers" (Franke 5). Certain other times, he was disbelieving. Commenting on "the Emperor of Ice cream", Ronald

Sukenick affirms that "there is no more to death than what physically appears to be" and that "no soul leaves the body; no reincarnation takes place" (Anderson 79) – the same idea was stressed by Epicurus who said "death is nothing to us" (Coffee11). No reference, therefore, can be found to the after-life; people, consequently, focus on their profane life with its immediate pleasures.

Like "The Emperor of Ice-Cream" in which ice cream far exceeds being a mere kind of sundae or dessert, the two pears in "study of two pears" (Stevens 196) are also given a philosophical meaning that goes beyond a mere fruit. The two pears on a table, which is an ordinary recurrent sight, stand for the natural beauty and the imaginative reality that one can reach when one looks beyond the physical world. For Stevens, imagination can show the truth that the poet attains through the senses. He believes in freeing the physical world from the conventional confined meaning. "In Steven's world, there are no actions and no speeches, merely ways of looking at things and nothing for mimesis to imitate except old poems and the movements of the mind transposing and reconstituting what is seen" (The Wallace Stevens Journal 27) The two pears, therefore, are not restricted to a previous limited definition or an old identified paradigm; they prove to be something far beyond the observer's ideas. "The pears are not seen / As the observer wills". Resisting the familiarity that can deprive the natural objects of its beauty and uniqueness, Stevens refuses to describe the two pears through analogy with anything else "The pears are not viols, / Nudes or bottles. / They resemble nothing else". They are peerless; they cannot also be defined in terms of paintings "They are not flat surfaces / Having curved outlines". They are depicted in terms of form and color --"yellow forms / Composed of curves" "Bulging toward the base" "touched red" "are not flat surfaces / Having curved outlines" "round / Tapering

toward the top". The farther from the traditional descriptions of pears, the more unprecedented the objects become. They are exceptionally given "bits of blue" and uncharacteristic yellow which "glistens". "It glistens with various yellows / Citrons, oranges and greens". This process of resisting the mind's endeavor to dictate its ready models reaches its climax toward the end of the poem when the objects finally lose their familiar appearance: "The shadows of the pears / Are blobs on the green cloth. / The pears are not seen / As the observer wills". Stevens's attitude and tone stress the uniqueness of the two pears; firstly he is inspired by them, then he is in awe of their beauty and finally he declares that they are beyond the physical eyes; they can only be seen through the inward eyes. Such inspiration and infatuation on the behalf of the poet does not suit such a simple occasion of seeing two pears on a table, but rather they can suit the beauty man always finds in the simplest things if he looks deeper. Stevens neither invents a new image of the pears nor does he deconstruct an old prototype of them, but he attempts to objectify them, depicting them as an abstraction. Rather than seeing the pears as just types of fruit, he permits his meditative mind to see the details instead of the whole. While the word "study" enhances the objectivity and the abstraction the poet adopts in looking at the pears, the word "composed" stresses the mind's creative power to assemble parts to reach reality from a different dimension. The pears that are on the table are different from any other pears. Their physical outer appearance is influenced by his subjective inner eye.

The objectivity and the abstraction Stevens adopted in his "Study of the Two Pears" is absent in depicting the "Dish of Peaches in Russia" (Stevens 224). As the title suggests, it is not an ordinary dish of peaches, it is a different dish with the Russian flavor. The identification of the place "in Russia" implies a subjective tone; it may arouse such questions as:

why Russia in particular, what makes the Russian dish of peaches special, what do the peaches represent for the speaker? Subjectivity, therefore, permeates the poem. From the very beginning, Stevens cannot detach himself to describe the dish objectively. He says "With my whole body I taste these peaches / I touch them and smell them". One cannot taste any food with his whole body. This exaggeration as well as his attempt of intermingling with the peaches through his different senses- taste, smell, and touch - give the scene a deeper meaning than just one eating a dish of peaches. In an extended simile Stevens likens himself eating the peaches to "the Angevine Absorbs Anjou". His encounter with the peaches is depicted as a lover seeing his beloved. The happiness he feels is that of a "young lover seeing the first buds of spring" and of a guitarist excitedly playing music. Even by giving a detailed description of the peaches' shape and color, Stevens is subjective as the peaches are emblematic of his village.

The peaches are large and round,

Ah! and red; and they have peach fuzz, ah!

They are full of juice and the skin is soft.

They are full of the colors of my village

The peaches far exceed being a mere fruit, this technique is used to embody the speaker's yearning for his homeland and stressing his sense of belonging. As a Russian exile, the peaches are a part of the speaker's past and consequently of his identity. Seeing the peaches reminds him of his "village", the "fair weather", "summer", "dew", and "peace". The atmosphere around him suits the beautiful nature that the peaches summon "The room is quiet where they are / The windows are open. The sunlight fills the curtains". Nothing distorts this peaceful day dream except "the drifting of the curtains". The poet ends his poem with a confession that his

self is torn; he is divided between identifying with the peaches and seeing them objectively and similarly between his homeland and the place where he feels at home "I did not know / That such ferocities could tear / One self from another, as these peaches do".

The poem ends abruptly on the "ferocities" and violence of one self torn from another. In the personal focus of Stevens himself that I am attaching to the poem's speaker one can only recognize a painfully divided self. He is one who longs for the identity of the Angevine of Anjou or the black Spaniard of Spain, but instead is a Russian exile, one separated from his native land. (Lensing 308)

Like food, drinks are also used by Stevens to bridge the gap between reality and imagination. Tea in particular occupies much of Stevens's interest. His "Tea" (Stevens 112) and "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon" (Stevens 65) that are placed at *Harmonium* reflect some of this interest. On reading his letters, one can easily notice that tea is a recurrent word, that his adoration of tea is something which far exceeds a mere connoisseurship of a beverage; it is a source of happiness and inspiration. In his book "A Reader's Guide to Wallace Stevens" Eleanor Cook describes him as "tea fancier" (85). For Stevens, tea is an emblem of nature and a marker of culture. Stevens seems as one of the "tea-masters" who strive "to be more than the artist – art itself", believe in perfection and its presence if we decide to recognize it (Okakura42), have a tendency towards simplicity and modesty, seek "to be in harmony with the great rhythm of the universe" with readiness to "enter the unknown" (Okakura43).

Although the word tea does not appear except in the title, each line in the short free verse "Tea" refers to tea and its impact. Through a number of condensed images and strange comparisons, Stevens stresses the reality-imagination bond. Tea which is a mere plant and a customary commodity is linked with other elements in nature. On portraying tea in its different stages, the tea leaves that wrinkle because of coldness are compared to the "elephant's-ear" that "shrivelled in frost", and the boiling leaves in the pot are compared to running rats. Visual images are then summoned to depict tea as a lamp that throws light on the speaker's pillows in reference to the stimulating effect of tea. Tea shades and consequently protects us exactly like the "umbrellas in Java". Figuratively speaking, drinking tea is used as "a metaphor for reading" (Cook 85). The reference to Java, a place which is well known for planting tea, is considerable because it "once had a sophisticated court culture; its subtleties and appreciation of artists made it the kind of culture that Stevens specially liked" (Cook 86). Java, which was a Dutch colony, is stressed as an illuminating civilized place which gives Stevens both beauty and happiness through tea.

The first half of the poem which depicts the chaos of the wild nature with its animals and chilling weather may suit the chaos of man's mind before reading. Then comes the second half to trench this depiction of tea as a symbol of reading; tea is described as a lamp that throws light, which is an emblem of knowledge. Tea or rather knowledge is a shade or an umbrella that always protects. Tea, therefore, is not a mere beverage; it is the border that splits chaos and order, ignorance and knowledge, wilderness and civilization. In his article "Wallace Stevens and the World of Tea", Nico Israel refers to tea as both a "raw product of nature and a refined product of culture" (3). For Israel, the park of the first line symbolizes the western order, rationality, and urbanization



but the animals in this park as well as the cold weather distort the offspring of this civilization and create the sense of a disconnection or rather a conflict between nature and culture. Stevens, therefore employs tea to bridge this gap between nature and culture and make a kind of reconciliation in this dichotomy. The binary opposition between East – represented by Java – and West represented by the park – is also reconciled through tea.

When the elephant's-ear in the park
 Shrivelled in frost,
 And the leaves on the paths
 Ran like rats,
 Your lamp-light fell
 On shining pillows,
 Of sea-shades and sky-shades,
 Like umbrellas in Java.

(Stevens 112)

Somewhat similar is "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon" (Stevens 65) which is also placed at *Harmonium*. The poem is Stevens's contemplation on what tea will do to someone like Hoon. Philosophically speaking, tea is associated with self-knowledge and truth. The speaker, or Hoon, therefore embarks on his journey of self-discovery by descending "the western day" through the "loneliest air". The place where he finds himself and all he hears and sees there are of his own invention "I was the world in which I walked, and what I saw / Or heard or felt came not but from myself". Believing in solipsism and trusting his mind, Stevens depicts Hoon as the controller of everything, he depends on his self and mind to reach truth and order in a world teeming with chaos and uncertainty. The second stanza is therefore a series of questions that are assertively answered by the one who asks himself in the third stanza.



**What was the ointment sprinkled on my beard?
 What were the hymns that buzzed beside my ears?
 What was the sea whose tide swept through me there?
 Out of my mind the golden ointment rained,
 And my ears made the blowing hymns they heard.
 I was myself the compass of that sea:**

Under the spell of imagination, Hoon is surrounded by a majestic self-made universe; his mind is the source of all of its details, the "golden ointment" that disperses on his beard and the hymns that he hears. How tea can bind reality and imagination and how it can split anarchy and order is stressed through the depiction of the sea with its rapturous tide and the shelter he can reach through the compass or rather mind. "The poem juxtaposes the limitless vagrancy of the sea with a kind of temporary placement or refuge (as well as, perhaps, luxury) associated with a palaz and with tea, which placement entails finding oneself in and as a world" (Israel 5). Imagination, for Stevens, is powerful enough to rescue man from the destructive real world. That the chaotic atmosphere of the poem refers to the devastation the First World War left behind is also implied but the poet finds peace in resisting the circumstances. Amid the strong tide he finds his way, he himself becomes the compass. Instead of submission and defeat, he becomes in control of the scene. The use of tea to symbolize order, relief, and rescue is in accordance with what Kakuzo Okakura mentions in "*The Book of Tea*" about Teatism "Teatism is a cult founded on the adoration of the beautiful among the sordid facts of everyday existence. It inculcates purity and harmony, the mystery of mutual charity, the romanticism of the social order. It is essentially a worship of the imperfect, as it is a tender attempt to accomplish something possible in this impossible thing we know as life" (1).

From a different perspective - but of equal significance – tea is summoned to Ibtisam Barakat's poetry. In her poem "singing in key", tea is reminiscent; it revives memories, stirs emotions and carries a dream. The poet is repeating to herself the musical keys mi, fa, sol, la and when she comes across ti she is swept away by bygone days: she remembers her tea in the garden when the guards are gone. A constellation of images are united to depict such a previous childhood memory as a lively present scene. She runs "across memories" in order "To smell a flower that /Blooms inside a story" her grandmother "gave" her before. Tea time, therefore, stands for the old childhood memories with its warm familial gatherings, safety, and peace of mind. For an exile, however, it can stand for yearning not only for the home land but also for the people there. The images of tea in the garden, the family meeting, and the grandmother's stories are, therefore, combined to signify larger themes of togetherness and belonging.

Tea in the garden

When the guards are gone

And I run across memories

To smell a flower that

Blooms inside a story

My grandmother once gave to me

(Basem 40)

In "tea invitation", a direct association is made between tea and peace. It is not an invitation to have tea but rather an invitation to have love. The setting, where the host welcomes her guests, is her heart which becomes a country. She makes this setting spacious by emptying it from fear as if it is a crucial step to have tea or rather enjoy peace. Again tea

is mentioned with stories but unlike the old childhood stories of the grandmother, the stories here are "my story and yours". Tea, therefore is not only a means of togetherness but also of reconciliation and consequently peace. The theme of estrangement in exile spans throughout the poem. From the very beginning, Barakat yearns for her homeland, for a peaceful country where there is no place for fear or dispute, where she can do the least matters like drinking tea safely. That they "come from one family / but to one another do not speak" intensifies this sense of estrangement; for generations, members from the same family cannot meet because of exile and it is tea which makes them closer. Tea again like in Stevens's poems makes this bond between reality and the imagination. For Barakat as well as for Stevens, imagination is powerful enough to save man from the brutality of the real world. It is logical therefore to end her poem with this nostalgic tone asking the invitees "do you like your tea with sugar" as if they actually responded to her invitation.

In her "Stirrings" Barakat uses food and drink to represent the daily activities that one performs without forgetting the great goals he seeks as freedom. It seems as if he eats to sustain himself to achieve this goal. The juxtaposition between stirring sugar into tea/ and lemon into lentil soup" and stirring freedom in the chests stresses the significance of man's binary entity. Food and drink are fundamental to survive and so is freedom. Sugar is totally absorbed in tea and lemon in the lentil soup and similarly freedom is totally absorbed in man's chest; it becomes a component of his being. In their way to reach freedom, women are of two kinds; those who speak and defend and others who serve food silently while having freedom in their chests. Both, the poet emphasizes, help in conquering the long road, both feed the ground in order to make it stronger. Food imagery is used again to stress that food is a means not an end; we eat to live and the



women feed the ground to be strong. The women who speak feed the minds, while those who serve food feed the bodies. Both help the seeker to reach his end and to be a master of his spirit.

I thank the women
 who came before me,
 who as they stirred sugar into tea
 and lemon into lentil soup
 had stirrings of freedom
 in their chests. . .
 Some spoke of that,
 and some served the food
 silently. . .
 But all the longing
 conquered the long road,
 fed the ground,
 until it grew strong
 for me now to stand on it. . .
 Stand my ground,
 stand,
 walk,
 and run my ground
 as a master
 of my spirit . . .

Such a combination of tangible and intangible images is intensified in Barakat's "a poem made of bread" (Araujo 30-31). As the title suggests bread stands for words or rather knowledge as the poem then asserts. The poet's use of the eye rhyme between bread and read stresses the viewpoints she always believes in and calls for. Learning and knowledge are crucial to rescue humanity; she states that "not knowing cre-

ates fear" (Araujo23) and fear can lead to prejudice or hatred and may ignite a war.

Although the word "read" is a Qura'nic imperative, Barakat uses it to address the different people from different cultures and religious backgrounds. She states that in the middle of a loaf, whether it is American, French, or Arabic; flat, white, or full-grain, you will find the word read. That bread or knowledge is eternal like rain implies a number of connotations. Rain revives lands and similarly knowledge revives minds and souls. Rain falls from the sky which means that it is divine and learning as well is a divine order in the various religions. The use of grain to describe the drops of rain suggests that bread is a divine reward for those who learn and seek knowledge; it may also imply that earning one's living depends on the effort one exerts in gaining knowledge. To confirm the inextricable connection between bread and learning, the poet describes those who do not read as "the hunger of this world". The use of the noun "hunger" instead of the adjective can imply that those people who do not read are the source of hunger and the closely related problems as poverty and illness. Similarly the word dinner does not mean the meal itself but it can also stand for wealth and prosperity and the like words that are associated with knowledge. "And dinner will not be ready/ until they can read /Dinner will not be served /until all can read". The plea for reading and learning is not restricted to the young who should sleep on their books as if they are pillows; it also extends to include the old who are about to leave the profane world to the afterlife; they should take books as gifts to the reading angels who yearn for human bread. The divinity of learning is stressed from the very beginning of the poem and the poet, therefore, ends the poem by depicting angels as readers and books as precious enough to be presented to such sublime creatures.

In her poem "curfew" Barakat uses food imagery to express the amount of confinement Palestinians feel under occupation. In an extended metaphor, she compares her city to a jail where one can find the children's faces replacing the "flower pots on window sills". Because of the iron bars of the window, the children are bound; unlike any other children, they cannot enjoy playing. Therefore, they enter "A spit race" and "the one whose spit / reaches farther is freer". Amid this state of boredom and sequestration, the children's questions are also imprisoned; they look, therefore, to the sky to squint them. They long for the sun and so they imagine they are holding their kite with a sun ray. They cannot see its light except in their bedtime story. All of their questions remain in their chests like yeast; they are constantly increasing but with no answer.

Turning to the images of food that the land fructifies, Barakat uses olive in "The song of Zaytoon trees" as a part of her national identity. An association between olive or Zaytoon and identity is made clear from the beginning of the poem "Tell me who you are / And what your heart loves / I will tell you who I am and / Who my father was". This association is intensified by using o'live to imply live; her father builds homes where they live and he loves "Zaytoon trees / O'live, o'live, forever o'live". Both olives and homes are everlasting. While her father builds homes, she builds hope, tends the grove, and preserves the song of Zaytoon. It seems as if it is a duty to defend both their homes and their Zaytoon trees throughout the different generations.

Olive is also summoned in "My People's Story" to stand for the solid root of her people "We once lived rooted / Like the ancient olive trees". In reference to the effect of the occupation on nations, a comparison is made between the stability of her people in their homeland and their roaming as

exiles in different regions. They were deeply rooted as the old Zaytoon trees but now they are birds moving from a place to another, chanting songs of yearning for the homes they miss. Away from their homes, only circumstances decide their addresses.

We once lived rooted
 Like the ancient olive trees
 Now we're birds
 Nesting on songs
 About homes we miss
 Storms and distances
 Decide our address

(Barakat, Introduction)


Affected by her religious background, Barakat in her poem "Break-fast at night" talks about "the Muslim month of Ramadan"; how Muslims fast from dawn to sunset; how children are eager to fast; how they count the hours and minutes to have their food; how they look after Ramadan – thinner but filled with light like the moon. Away from fasting which is, certainly, a part of her identity as a Muslim, the theme of patience to be given a precious reward is also implied. Palestinians struggle in patience to gain their freedom; but it seems that patience is not a simple matter and this is why children are told that they cannot fast until they become stronger.

Both Stevens and Barakat use food and drink to handle serious topics. While Stevens tackles food items from a philosophical perspective – reaching reality through imagination – Barakat employs food from an emotional perspective; telling about her estrangement and homesickness as an exile. For

Barakat, food is the nexus with the home land; it is a marker of her identity. In short free verses, stories about food are combined to express larger themes of diaspora and longing.

The association between food and identity in Barakat's poetry can be grasped through the concept "cultural memory". Because of the wide use of the term in such different fields as history, mythology, and sociology, the term is used in an ambiguous way. However, it can be defined as "the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts" (Young 2). All matters in one's personal world and social world are combined to form this memory, giving it an "identity-index" (Assmann 36). One's personal memory is, therefore, a part of social structure that is built up through communication with others. With the passage of time, this memory becomes "collective" and moves from a generation to another to distinguish a certain society. Cultural memory is not taught or kept by individuals or even groups. It is formed through communication. Various items as images, food, or monuments do not have memory; they function as reminders. Only man has a memory and through his mind, he gives such items their value as signifiers through practice in a social context (Assmann 37).

In Steven's poetry, on the other side, the representation of food and drink can be interpreted through the theory of imagination. In his book "*Biographia Literaria*", Coleridge differentiates between two kinds of imagination: the primary imagination and the secondary imagination. The primary imagination is the faculty by which one recognizes the external world. It is an involuntary act that realizes objects in their parts and as a whole. Through order, the impressions that are received from the external world are categorized so as to form a clear comprehensive image of objects. Unlike the primary imagination which is possessed by all human beings,



the secondary imagination is possessed by fewer people who have the ability to exert mental effort consciously in order to create new different objects of beauty. It uses the information that is provided by the primary imagination and through re-shaping, remodeling, and reorganizing it creates original objects. It has the power to fuse one's personal experiences with the outside world. It bridges the gap between the subjective inner views and the outer material reality. Stevens uses the secondary imagination and through dissolving, assembling, and remodeling he gives food deeper meanings than they are in the physical surface reality.

Unlike Barakat who attempts to stick to her home land and her Eastern identity, Stevens seems unwilling to belong to the western world. He sees himself as detached from all the ruin and anarchy that are associated with that world. On the contrary he tends to glorify the eastern world, praising its culture, and reviving its language. Exotic experiences as well as exotic diction are apparent in Steven's poetry. This may be due to his dependence on the imagination to reach far places and odd regions. Barakat, on the other hand, holds on preserving her native culture and regional diction; she uses certain words as they are uttered in Arabic as a means of asserting her national identity – the word Zaytoon is an obvious example.

Although her poems teem with feelings of estrangement, and homesickness, simplicity marks Barakat's poetry. It seems that she finds in short lines, simple language, direct expressions, straightforward comparisons, and word play the most appropriate means to her nostalgic tone. Neither ornament nor extra words are used in order to get in the message she conveys. A combination of tangible and intangible images is therefore used to make her message comprehensible by people wherever they are, not only in her homeland. On

the contrary, Stevens's poetry is complex for the populace. His interest in both philosophy and painting affect his poetry. Exotic culture, strange language, obscure comparisons are summoned to his poetry. The complexity of his verse may stand behind his attempt to involve all readers into his stories; make these stories pictorial. All senses are, therefore, addressed in his poems. Various visual, auditory, and kinesthetic images are united to facilitate reading his poems with their philosophical tone. About *Harmonium*, [Harriet Monroe](#) said "If one seeks sheer beauty of sound, phrase, rhythm, packed with prismatically colored ideas by a mind at once wise and whimsical, one should open one's eyes and ears, sharpen one's wits, widen one's sympathies to include rare and exquisite aspects of life, and then run for this volume of iridescent poems" (28).

Notwithstanding that Barakat is a Muslim and the effect of her religious background is apparent in her poetry. She incarnates the Palestinian culture, the Islamic as well as the Christian. The bread and olive she uses in her poems are among the most dominant symbols in the Bible. Bread is used to represent Christ whereas olive is used more than hundred times. Ecologically speaking, Palestine is well known for different kinds of bread and olive. The olive trees symbolize peace and stability that Palestinians struggle for. Because the trees are resistant to dehydration and can grow in poor farming conditions, they stand for Palestinian durability and resistance. Because they can live long for centuries, they stand for Palestinian history and permanence on land. Unlike any other crop, the season of harvest is not an ordinary agricultural activity; it is a special socio-cultural occasion as family members go to harvest the trees as a kind of connecting to their ancestors who had cared for these trees a long time ago.

On the other hand, one cannot trace any religious affiliation in Stevens's poetry. On the contrary, critics use such

poems as "the Emperor of Ice cream" to exemplify Steven's atheism; but on delving into his works, one cannot determine if he is an atheist or a believer. Infidelity and absence of conventional religious belief marked his epoch. Affected by such philosophers as Epicurus, Lucretius, and Nietzsche, Stevens chose the supremacy of imagination over creed and agreed to exclude the divine mightiness from his worldview. Death, therefore, is nothing to man; the souls do not leave the bodies. No reference can be found to the afterlife; people, consequently, focus on their earthly life enjoying its immediate pleasures.

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