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## Narrativizing Everydayness

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**Abstract.** Our paper focuses on identifying instances of everyday life that are relevant for the narrative evolution of the characters by the attitudes and beliefs they can generate, so that, ultimately they re/shape the entire picture of protagonists' personality/nature/dimensions. Everyday experiences cast a light on how authors absorb reality within their fictional works in order to inspire possible models of facing and coping with it. Food consumption as a cultural marker opens new lines of inquiry and study on one's individual, group, respectively, national identity, and as an everyday practice, it successfully renders the expressiveness of this act, as demonstrated in the texts we selected to foreground connections between daily life and commodities.

**Keywords:** everydayness, narrative, characters, life experiences, identity

Facilitating characters to disclose their daily routines, authors create an extended environment for the formers' narrative evolution in a way in which this intentionally constructed space both moves away from and gets closer to the real life, thus legitimizing the fact that fiction can give meaning to the world in its particular way. Rendering reality through everyday experiences might be seen as a tactic, an operational procedure in the process of their narrativization aimed at foregrounding individual creativity, or even subcultural resistance in certain examples (see Moran 11) so that the category they belong to becomes a site that brings together "lived culture and representation in a way that makes sense of and also obscures, the reality of cultural change and social difference (13).

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## **Juxtaposing fiction and reality**

Everyday practices and the objects employed in their performance may “offer guidance for charting the breadth of cultural change and the minutiae of its working” (Collaredo-Mansfeld 144) as they represent a successful instrument for juxtaposing fiction and reality in a constant attempt to equate the individual’s daily life with their consumption of commodities (see Moran 10), a life that is organized “by space and time”, and is structured around “daily itineraries with rhythms imposed by patterns of work, leisure, week or weekend, or by the repetitive gestures of commuting or consumption” (Crawford 45).

Since the everyday is a map of the interrelations between practices and their representations, the stories they activate emphasize the way in which it stands for “the real space in which we lead our actual lives” (Moran 169) and how by the novelists’ art of saying things, it becomes the textualized valorization of the quotidian rituals, among which eating habits and food itself are of major importance as they are “the first of the essentials of life” (Belasco et al. 2), as the cardinals see them when having their meals in the Conclave, served by the nuns:

They had finished their soup and had moved on to antipasti. Loneli sat down opposite the Patriarch of Venice and accepted half a glass of wine. For the sake of politeness, he also took a little ham and mozzarella, even though he had no appetite [...]. The main course was of veal scallopini. (Harris 94)

Even when foods are selected by tradition, they imply creativity and diversity, as they are objects of a “considerable concern and dread” (Belasco et al. 2), since what we eat and how we eat becomes “a highly condensed social fact and a marvellously plastic kind of collective representation”, significantly indicating “who we are, where we came from, what we want to be”; it reveals “our soul [and] the connection between identity and consumption”. Thus food reaches to a central role in the creation of community we end up belonging to acknowledging the fact that “We are what we eat or don’t eat. Our diet conveys images of public identity (...). To eat is to distinguish, incriminate, include, exclude” (Belasco et al. 2).

Detective Lottie Parker chooses to have her meal at Cafferty’s pub on Gaol Street, situated “two hundred metres from the council offices, a simple repast consisting of a “thick soup, with lumps of chicken and potato soaking in it, warming her from her toes up” (Gibmey 28), whereas Hemingway celebrates his birthday enjoying an extravagant meal, artfully prepared by Fuentes, his cook, consisting of

the following:

The appetizer was a spaghetti dish (...); a chicken (...) cooked it in a special broth made with beef and pork bones (...). Fuentes then took some Galician ham and chorizo – a type of Spanish sausage - and ground that as well. He mixed that with the ground chicken and simmering broth, added paprika, and cooked everything over the low flame of a tiny stove [...]; the main course [consisted of the] swordfish (...) large slices [for which] Fuentes melted half a pound of butter and [fried them] over a low flame (...). He would squeeze lemon of the slices and turn them to keep them evenly brown. The aroma was amazing, better than steak cooking. The he set each slice on a plate, added a pinch of salt, and served each plate with fresh salad and vegetables he had been simmering. For Hemingway, he had made a side sauce made with peppers, parsley, black pepper, raisins and capers, cooked next to the swordfish in a frying pan with very finely chopped asparagus. (Simmons 207-8)

At a full reading, one may discover the placement of the food on the table, the size of dishes, silverware, drinking glasses, or the size of the serving bowls, an entire tablescape which impact the characters' behaviour and attitude as any “tablescape of a meal seems like a meaningful detail in the daily drama of our lives” (Wansink 56).

### **Local food experiences**

It is acknowledged that every personal story is, in fact, “a travel story, a spatial practice” as space is “a practiced place” (De Certeau 115 ). And a place is regarded as being “the order in accordance with which elements are distributed in relationship of coexistence”(117); consequently, stories of the quotidian are such “treatments of space”(122), as rendered by Peter Mayle's consumer experiences during his first year in Provence:

Living in France had turned us into bakery addicts, and the business of choosing and buying our daily bread was a recurring pleasure (...). At Chez Auzet, so they said, the baking and eating of breads and pastries had been elevated to the status of a minor religion. When the weather is warm, tables and chairs are placed on the pavement outside the bakery so that the matrons of Cavaillon can sit with their hot chocolate and almond biscuits or strawberry tarts while they give proper, leisurely consideration to the bread they will buy for lunch and dinner. To help them, Auzet has printed a comprehensive bread menu, the *Carte des Pains*. I took a copy from the counter, ordered coffee, sat in the sun, and started to read. (Mayle 53)

Behaviours, as noticed above, are related to places of daily experiences - work or leisure - and can be located in public or private spaces, thus delimiting a place as being one's own or of the Other's: they can generate specific practices depending on "an ensemble of procedures" (De Certeau 43), as identified in the same protagonist's advancement in his French education:

Not only did it introduce me to breads I had never heard of before, it told me with great firmness and precision what I should be eating with them. With my *aperitif*, I could choose between the tiny squares called *toasts*, a *pain surprise* which might be flavored with finely chopped bacon, or the savory *feuilletés sales*. That was simple. The decisions became more complicated when the meal itself was being chosen. Supposing, for example, I wanted to start with *crudites*. There were four possible accompaniments: onion bread, garlic bread, olive bread, or roquefort bread. Too difficult. (Mayle 54)

There is no doubt that "food is a great pleasure of our life" (Wansink 10), engendering "much human behaviour: kinship, language, technology, morality, politics" (323) and turning eating into an "act of self-identification, into a significant part of the differential definition of social groups and individuals" (Friedman, 1994: 104), and food habits, into cultural curiosities as recorded by the British observer of one of French families' special events:

Enjoyment is contagious, and this is perhaps best experienced during one particular meal of the week. Here you will see children, parents, grandparents, and occasionally the family dog; young couples giving themselves a treat; elderly ladies and gentlemen poring over the menu as if the pages held the secret of life; local families dressed to kill, and visiting Parisians decked out in full rural chic—a mixture of generations and social backgrounds, gathered together to observe another tradition that shows no sign of dying out: Sunday lunch. (Mayle 19)

The everyday practices of food consumers display the particular tradition dictating their careful that the latter can successfully complete the process of self-identification, so significant in the "differential definition of social groups and individuals" (Wansink 104), as recorded during a rich Sunday lunch with a French family:

Aperitifs have been served—pastis or kir or white wine or, on red-letter days, champagne—and menus are being read with the concentration of a lawyer going through a page of fine print. Suggestions and

countersuggestions go back and forth across the tables. The carpaccio of fresh tuna? The *soupe au pistou*? The asparagus flan? And then what? The cod in a herb crust? The stew of veal and peppers? Or *pieds et paquets*, the Provençal recipe that elevates humble mutton tripe to new heights? (...). For five or ten minutes, conversations are muted, gossip and family matters are put aside, and everyone in the restaurant is mentally tasting the dishes on offer. You can almost hear the flutter of taste buds. (Mayle 19)

The culinary habits, as some of the most deeply ingrained forms of human behaviour, can be seen as a fundamental distinction for one's cultural identity, generated by a specific lifestyle configuration, mostly when contrasted with Others' traditional ways, as seen below:

When we lived in England, olive oil had been a luxury, to be saved for the making of fresh mayonnaise and the dressing of salads. In Provence, it was an abundant daily treat which we bought in five-liter *bidons* and used for cooking, for marinating goats' cheeses and red peppers, and for storing truffles. We dipped our bread in it, bathed our lettuce in it, and even used it as a hangover preventative. (One tablespoon of oil, taken neat before drinking, was supposed to coat the stomach and protect it against the effects of too much young pink wine.) We soaked up olive oil like sponges, and gradually learned to distinguish between different grades and flavors. We became fussy and no doubt insufferable about our oil, never buying it from shops or supermarkets, but always from a mill or a producer, and I looked forward to oil-buying expeditions almost as much as trips to the vineyards. (Mayle 61)

The valorization of one's/characters' way of life through the everyday, that is, "the real space in which they lead their actual lives" (Moran, 2005: 169), grants an "implicit identification between daily routines and cultural values that conceals the intimate relationship between most mundane aspects of lives" (167), such as food consumption and eating habits, so relevant for their roles in the individuals' sustenance and pleasure, being one of "the most taken-for-granted aspects of life" (Atkins, Bowler VII).

In their attempts to explore and re/create social identities, authors employ the everyday space as an adequate "connective tissue that binds daily lives together" (Crawford 345) into a screen on which society can "project its light and shadow, hollows and planes, power and weakness" (345); when narrativizing the quotidian, they activate specific stories that prove that "the 'real' is what, in a given place, reference to another place makes people believe in" (De Certeau 188),

obtaining a simulacrum from the relationship of the visible to the real, as many theorists have consented to the observation that “today fiction claims to make the real present, to speak in the name of facts, to cause the semblance it produces to be taken as referential reality” (187). Writing and reading of the everyday can be sometimes problematic but it is most often rewarding because daily life and practices constantly invent themselves on both levels, real and textualized, apparently seeming “to exist outside historical change” (Moran 163).

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