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Learning to Eat French

Abstract Ferguson's *Accounting for Taste* reveals a gap in our understanding: How did French culinary discourse move beyond the bourgeois sphere in which it emerged in the nineteenth century? Picking up on her comparison of the Proustian synthesis of regional and national culinary culture in the *Recherche* to the project of national identity creation in the Third Republic's best-selling textbook, *Le Tour de la France par deux enfants*, this essay argues that the culinary model Ferguson describes was in fact widely disseminated through mass primary education under the Third Republic. Examining an overlooked corpus of primary school readers and textbooks, I show that food and cooking provided object lessons imparting practical and scientific knowledge to enlighten the masses, and textbooks canonized regional specialties as part of a new national geographic consciousness. At the same time, I underscore the limits of this consensual image of a national culinary culture, which collided with the class habits and horizons of the urban and rural masses attending *l'école républicaine*.

Keywords food in education, French culinary identity, nineteenth-century textbooks, food pedagogy, food and social class

“Quel bouillon! ah! c'est du vrai bouillon de bourgeois!”

—Marie Robert Halt, *Suzette. Livre de lecture courante à l'usage de jeunes filles*

Eymoutiers, Haute-Vienne, 1886. A young boy inks his pen's steel nib then writes as his teacher intones a *dictée instructive* from his class reader, Jean-Marie Guyau's *La Première Année de lecture courante*: “Nos ménagères françaises ont pour le pot-au-feu, chacun le sait, une prédilection marquée, et j'avoue qu'un bon potage, bien savoureux, a bien ses charmes” (454). Perhaps his stomach grumbles as his thoughts turn to the steaming bowl of *bréjaude* awaiting him at home, the broth greasy with crushed pork rind, *lou bréjou*, soaking into a thick slice of rye bread topped with stewed cabbage, carrots, and turnips.¹

The scratch of pens on student notebooks and the drone of schoolmasters dictating are rarely heard in histories of French culinary

identity. Instead, researchers look to texts ranging from “the most instrumental recipe, political directive, or religious interdiction to the essay and memoir, the restaurant review, the ethnography and travelogue, the literary work and scientific treatise, and not forgetting the philosophical disquisition” (Ferguson, *Accounting for Taste* 33). In accounting for the culinary model that developed in the first half of the nineteenth century, “an amalgam of haute and bourgeoisie cuisines” (34), Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson details a history of chefs (Carême), journalists (Grimod de la Reynière), essayists (Brillat-Savarin), philosophers (Fourier), and novelists (Balzac) writing for a bourgeois audience. But what about the working-class readers and oral culinary traditions of a much wider working-class population? Ferguson concedes that “the middle-class public for these texts stood at some remove from the urban proletariat and the peasantry, neither of which had the time, the pecuniary or intellectual resources, or the incentive for culinary innovation” (34). The concession is important, for the focus on documents written by and for a Parisian elite makes it difficult to explain how culinary models crossed regional and class lines to become consubstantial with French national identity.

Yet when Ferguson turns to a subsequent culinary model, stretching from the late nineteenth century through the interwar period and beyond, the classroom briefly echoes in her text, directing us to attend to mass education’s role in creating a national culinary culture. During this period, the dominant bourgeois culinary system refracted and subsumed regional cuisine—cuisines “invented” and canonized in regional cookbooks and the literature of gastronomic tourism; cuisines said to express the soul of France’s *terroirs*.² Ferguson opens this chapter of *Accounting for Taste* with an extended discussion of how Proust’s *Recherche* maps a “national culinary landscape that reconciles province and capital, periphery and center, a landscape in which the French recognize an idea of country” (112). The socially embedded creations of Tante Léonie’s cook, Françoise, and the Norman specialties served by Mme Verdurin appeal to an idealized vision of nineteenth-century agrarian France as seen from the central position of the Parisian elite. At the same time, they forward a cohesive conception of national identity through food: Proust’s “culinary landscapes fit within the project of creating, sustaining, and inspiring a national community” (120). It is this project that invites her provocative analogy to the iconic 1877 primary school reader, *Le Tour de la France par deux enfants*:

This work, used and venerated by generations of students, accorded the parts of France with the whole and harmonized the claims of the regions with those of the nation. On their ‘tour’ of France, the orphans from the Lorraine that had fallen into German hands after 1870 recognize that the

evident diversity of the country not only does not compromise, it actually strengthens the fundamental unity of the nation. The *Recherche*, too, gave France a text that balanced the part and the whole, the provinces and Paris, and it did so importantly through food. (121)

Her analogy crystalizes a cultural moment when syncretic culinary nationalism mirrored the Third Republic's "pedagogy of national distinctiveness through complementary difference" (127). The literary and educational elites of Paris concurrently mediated a new sense of what it meant to be French, tied to a dialectic of the national and the local.

Curiously, Ferguson does not detail the diverse culinary and agricultural riches the two orphans, André and Julien, discover on their trek across France: Granville oysters; Bresse chickens; the wines of Bordeaux, Burgundy, Saumur, and Champagne; Bergerac truffles; cheeses from Gex, Cantal, and the Jura; Agen plums; honey from Narbonne; and more. Every region they visit boasts some food product that is "renommé," and thus worthy of academic recognition—objects of both local *and* national pride. Written by Jean-Marie Guyau's mother, Augustine Tuillerie, under the pen name G. Bruno, *Le Tour de la France par deux enfants*, like the *Recherche*, engages in the work of reconciliation of periphery and center through food. While Gallimard published 23,300 copies of Proust's *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleur* in the year following its Goncourt prize (Laget 71), Bruno's *Tour* sold between 200,000 and 400,000 copies every year from 1883 to 1890 (Cabanel 153–54) and its readership was much larger at a time when textbooks were part of a *bibliothèque du peuple*, shared within families and across generations of children (Mollier 84).³ In other words, Ferguson gives us much more than an apt analogy. She implicitly invites us to open the door to classrooms where France's regional foodways could be part of an everyday lesson for millions of children.⁴

In this essay, I respond to the invitation by examining how mass primary education in the early Third Republic exposed "the urban proletariat and the peasantry" to a culinary paradigm in the making and thus set the table for a national culinary culture. I contend that the belle époque culinary model Ferguson describes suited particularly well the pedagogical premises and ideological goals of the reformers who established mass primary education during the Third Republic. Food provided matter for object lessons that imparted practical and scientific knowledge necessary for a productive and enlightened populace. Furthermore, the culinary culture disseminated in school embedded a canon of regional specialties into a new geographic consciousness that aimed to make the diversity and unity of the nation concrete. Yet, I will also argue that even as the Third Republic harnessed culinary discourse to its effort to forge a common

cultural identity in the 1880s and 1890s, the consensual image of a gastronomic nation it proposed collided with the social limits that constrained mass primary education at the time. Culinary identity as national identity had not only to overcome boundaries between the regional and the national, it also had to negotiate the claims bourgeois culture made *via* the culinary on the culture and habits of the urban and, particularly, the rural masses. The regional foods that educational discourse produced as icons of local identity often bore traces of their origin in old circuits of aristocratic and bourgeois consumption. For most schoolchildren, these were foods to be read, not eaten. Similarly, the culinary prescriptions and norms offered in widely used readers could not escape, “all the contradictions that inhere in a basically elite practice in a democratic society” (Clark, *Literary France* 212). As with popular education in general, textbooks sought to foster the conditions for culinary excellence as long as it remained within the “natural” limits of social class. If you are what you eat, you should eat what you are.

Two Schools

Schooling in France in the nineteenth century mirrored the culinary divide between the upper and middle classes on the one hand and the urban and rural working classes on the other. Well into the twentieth century, the state recognized two separate and nonsequential “orders” of education: a secondary order and a primary order. Simply put, the tuition-based secondary order educated the sons of the bourgeoisie in the classics and humanities from the elementary grades on, whether in the public *lycées* and *collèges communaux* or in the *petits séminaires* of the Catholic Church (Prost 245–57). Bourgeois girls had no public secondary option before the Camille Sée law of 1880 and typically attended religious schools. The cost of education prohibited almost all but the solidly middle-class from attending (Prost 34). In 1887, the secondary order (public and private) enrolled approximately 160,000 students in all grades, while the elementary schools in the primary order educated over 5.5 million children (Prost 45, 294).

By the late 1870s, the vast majority of French children were already receiving some level of formal education in schools typically controlled by local notables such as the mayor and the priest (Prost 91–92). Primary education, however, varied greatly in quality and reach until the Ferry laws of the early 1880s created a new system of mass primary education. These laws removed financial barriers to education that had previously existed in the primary order, made school compulsory from age 7 to 13, increased the percentage of girls in school, and wrested public education from the Church’s influence. In every department, the state trained primary teachers in newly constructed *écoles normales*. It modernized

the curriculum by adding new areas of study to the traditional subjects of reading, writing, and math. Moral education, civics, science, history, geography, and *travaux manuels* became required parts of the curriculum for both sexes in all grades for the first time. For Pierre Albertini, it marked “la victoire de l’Encyclopédie”: “les choses priment les mots, la raison individuelle est le fondement de tout science véritable, le savoir libère les individus et éclaire les citoyens” (63). From the optional *classes enfantines* (ages 5–7), through the *cours élémentaire* (ages 7–9) and the *cours moyen* (ages 9–11), to the *cours supérieur* (ages 11–13), public primary education aimed to create enlightened, productive, and patriotic citizens of the republic.

At the same time, the social conservatism of education reformers limited the progressive, egalitarian agenda for mass education. They did not remove financial or curricular barriers, notably the lack of Latin instruction in the primary order, that prevented these pupils from continuing their studies in the secondary order. They argued that the long years of classical studies in the lycée would not provide future workers, farmers, employees, and housewives with “une somme de connaissances appropriées à leurs futurs besoins” (“Arrêté du 27 juillet 1882” 4164). Such social destinies were made clear in a series of primary school textbooks published by Armand Colin in the 1890s: *Tu seras agriculteur*, *Tu seras commerçant*, *Tu seras ouvrière*, *Tu seras soldat*. Instead, the primary order sought to educate children to become the best possible farmers, merchants, workers, soldiers, and housewives through practical knowledge geared to the gender and the class prospects of its pupils. This tension between the progressive and conservative dimensions of republican education in turn informed the role food and cuisine occupied in the new curriculum. Even as food provided the lens for lessons that developed schoolchildren’s powers of observation and reasoning, pupils confronted the gap between the social and cultural norms this culinary discourse communicated and their everyday life.

Object Lessons in Food

To best address the intellectual, cultural, and social conditions of these students seen as less suited to the secondary order’s focus on classics and rhetoric, primary education promoted a pedagogy of the concrete. Ideally, through *leçons de choses* students actively applied intellectual intuition to their immediate surroundings: “En tout enseignement, le maître, pour commencer, se sert d’objets sensibles, fait voir et toucher les choses, met les enfants en présence de la réalité concrète, puis, peu à peu, il les exerce à en dégager l’idée abstraite, à comparer, à généraliser, à raisonner sans le secours d’exemples matériels” (“Arrêté du 27 juillet 1882” 4164). Being grounded in the pupils’ daily lives, it is not surprising that food served as a propaedeutic for this pedagogical journey from the con-

crete to the abstract.⁵ The month-to-month list of object lessons in pre-elementary *classes enfantines* rooted food in the seasons of rural life. In October, children studied wine, cider, and beer production and drew pictures of grapes, wine presses, bottles, and glasses. In February, they examined nutrition: “mets et boissons, boulanger, boucher, fruitier, épicier; faim, appétit, indigestion.” In June, they studied farmyard animals and milk products; in July, fruit; in August, bread and pastries; in September, hunting and game (“Arrêté du 28 juillet 1882” 4173–75). Teachers were encouraged to collect objects with their students and organize them into *musées scolaires* to use in object lessons.

Textbook publishers also sold ready-made collections with didactic brochures. Charles Saffray, author of primary school science textbooks in the 1880s, compiled a *musée scolaire* with over a thousand specimens, sold in an elegant cabinet by his publisher, Hachette (fig. 1). One series of trays contained samples of foods ranging from dried meats and bouillon cubes to dozens of examples of edible plants and condiments. Children could observe, describe, and compare them while the teacher developed these observations into lessons on science, agriculture, or domestic economy. One drawer in Saffray’s cabinet, titled “gymnastique des sens,” included vials of substances to exercise the sense of taste: baking soda, cinnamon, pepper, sea salt, tartaric acid, aloe, and sugar. Children were invited to compare the taste of tannin to that of unripe pears or to the fruit of the sorb tree and grapevine stems so that pupils could notice how in unripe fruit, “l’âpreté due au tannins se trouve tempérée par la saveur d’une certaine proportion du sucre et de mucilage” (3). This taste education, which recalls the “classes de goût” in vogue in today’s elementary schools (Garnier), both englobes the everyday (the pear, the grape stem) and inscribes a reflective and liberating distance to it. As Leon Sachs has argued, the focus on critical intellectual processes and autonomy within the “intuitive method” and object lessons posited that all France’s children could develop their critical faculties and intellectual autonomy through the tutelage of *l’école républicaine* (28–42). Moving from sensation to discourse, the object lesson models the more generalized exercise of reason necessary for an enlightened and democratic populace.

Food spoke to the daily world of the students while expanding on it, and textbooks used scenes of meals or food preparation and production as a narrative device to teach different parts of the curriculum in concrete and accessible ways. Guyau starts the section of his reader devoted to *connaissance usuelles* with an encyclopedic chapter titled “Le dîner bien gagné” (204–38). Monsieur Blainville celebrates the end of the school year with a dinner for his children and their friends. He warns that each child will feast on one condition: “C’est qu’il pourra m’apprendre d’où provient l’objet qu’il aura demandé et avec quoi chaque plat

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LEÇONS DE CHOSES
SCIENCES NATURELLES ET INDUSTRIE
COLLECTION COMPLÈTE
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COLLECTION COMPENDIUM
Le même meuble, recevant les cinq boîtes de la collection, plus une boîte de Physique et Chimie (*Compendium*), ou une boîte vide pour collections locales. 70 fr.

FIGURE 1. Charles Saffray, *Catalogue raisonné du musée des écoles*.

est fait” (205). Over the course of the dinner the schoolchildren—at least those who learned their lessons well—enjoy each dish as they source and expound on the beef and rice soup that starts their meal, the salt, pepper, and cloves that spice it, the mustard on the table and its medicinal use, the properties of the veal that follows and how it differs from beef. The children describe their preferences for and the origin of wine (“C’est du bon, c’est du Bordeaux”), beer (“C’est la boisson du Nord”), or cider (“C’est la boisson de la Normandie et de la Bretagne”), and specify how to produce each (216–17). They discuss how to make chocolate, the best way to roast coffee beans, and the different sources of sugar, as well as how to preserve fruits and vegetables through appertization (218–28). The pedagogical *mise-en-scène* references nutrition, physiology, national and colonial geography, agriculture, and industry. Scientific depth increases in the *cours supérieur*. In Marie Robert Halt’s 1895 reader, *Le Ménage de Mme Sylvain*, a young neighbor boy exclaims how delicious the heroine Suzette’s potatoes are. Suzette notes that unlike his grandmother, Ludivine, she



FIGURE 2. “Une leçon de lecture à la première classe de l’école de filles de Saint-Marcel.” Ca. 1900. © Réseau Canopé—Le Musée national de l’éducation.

does not boil them. The narrator explains that potatoes contain cells filled with an acidic liquid containing casein, albumin, minerals and lipids, and starch. As potatoes cook, the starch absorbs liquid and softens, so any addition of water denatures their taste and nutritional value (32–33). In this reader for girls, scientific concepts and analysis get folded into a narrative of culinary progress and excellence.

These textbooks, *livres de lecture courante*, were particularly well suited to the spirit and goals of republican education. As their name indicates, they aimed to give children practice in reading, from sounding out words in the earliest years to expressive reading in the *cours supérieur*. Pupils would read aloud from their texts (fig. 2) and teachers would ask questions to check understanding, clarify meaning, or correct pronunciation (Chartier, *L’École et la lecture obligatoire* 147). Some, like Guyau’s *Première année de lecture courante*, were compendiums of texts, poems, moral stories, and historical or scientific expositions. Others, like Bruno’s, followed an overarching narrative. Marie Robert Halt’s *Suzette* series featured a book for each elementary level that followed the arc of the protagonist’s life into young adulthood and marriage. They often advertised themselves as a “livre unique,” an all-in-one textbook, for they touched on all aspects

of the curriculum, from history to natural science, from moral education to geography, from grammar to civics. They served both to instruct, through “lectures pratiques,” and to educate, through narratives providing moral examples (Chartier, *L'École et la lecture obligatoire* 173–74). Any culinary topic could be harnessed to multiple instructive and educational goals. Chapters 35 and 36 of *Le Tour de la France par deux enfants*, for example, feature Gruyère production in the Jura. Pupils discover the technical aspects of Gruyère cheesemaking: the use of rennet taken from the fourth stomach of ruminants to curdle the milk, how the curd is then pressed and salted to expel the whey, then aged for months, and how the process differs for Brie or Roquefort. They learn that the villagers hire a communal cowherd, thus enabling their children to attend school, and that they similarly produce their cheese in association. The questions and answers the teacher’s edition provides suggest that the farmers’ enlightened cooperation is a model for national polity: “C’est ce qu’on appelle, en *économie politique*, *coopération* . . . ; en morale, *aide mutuelle et fraternité*” (124). Discovering the Jura’s emblematic Gruyère, pupils receive lessons in animal husbandry, biology, food production, and economics which inform an allegory of republican morality and politics.

Touring the French Food Nation

This pedagogically rich scene demonstrates how readers combine exposition of useful knowledge about and through food with the larger goal of teaching republican values. Paramount among these was the creation of a shared sense of national identity and belonging, an “imagined community” (Anderson), that could transcend differences in belief, language, and culture. In his study of geography education under the Third Republic, Dana Lindaman characterizes membership in this imagined community succinctly: “Being French is no longer inhabiting the French territory or paying one’s taxes to the French state. It is conforming to a historical identity—studying the canon of French authors, speaking the French language, adopting French principles, participating in the French myth” (15). Primary school textbooks such as Lavis’s best-selling history of France disseminated this republican myth across France (Nora 239). They did so in French, a language foreign to many of the students whose mother tongues ranged from Breton to Occitan, from Alsatian to numerous *patois* incomprehensible to a speaker of standard French.⁶ Vidal de la Blache’s departmental and national maps hanging on classroom walls inscribed the myth in space and taught pupils their organic interconnectedness to the local, and through the local, to the *patrie*.⁷

Recently, scholars such as Anne-Marie Thiesse and François Chanet have complicated Eugen Weber’s classic vision of peasants transforming into “French-

men” through a unidirectional process of modernization, assimilation, and normalization. They argue that mass education in the Third Republic worked to instill in pupils an idea and ideal of *national* unity as a superior synthesis of *local* differences, much like the culinary model Ferguson describes. Chanet traces the myriad ways primary school teachers leveraged their links to their *petite patrie*, through regionalist texts or *promenades scolaires* in the surrounding countryside, for example, to negotiate the gap between their pupils’ cultural horizons and the dominant French models the centralized curriculum promoted. Thiesse argues further that the discourse of French exceptionalism after 1870 rested on France’s natural diversity: “C’est le mélange des formes, des climats, des ressources naturelles, assurent les élites de la Troisième République, qui constitue le véritable trésor de la France. Par conséquent, servir la patrie, c’est d’abord connaître, faire connaître et cultiver la merveilleuse diversité du terroir national” (3–4). Regional food specialties, in this context, provide a particularly apt topic for students to appreciate the complementary diversity of France and see the contributions their “petite patrie” made to the nation.

The canon of regional specialties celebrated in schools did not emerge *ex nihilo* in the nineteenth century. Postrevolutionary France inherited a pantheon of products that had been central to the “imaginaire gourmand” of Parisian elites (Meyzie 25–28). The commercial literature of the ancien régime, such as the *Gazetin du comestible*, provided alphabetical lists of valuable products for the Paris market: cheese, wine, fruit, cured meats, fruit, confectionery. Their reputation among elite consumers characterized these products more than an inherent quality seen as resulting from their origin in a specific place (Meyzie 35). The Revolution, however, changed the meanings adhering to regional products by making them bearers of local identities that could be folded back into a nation recently carved into departments. Julia Csergo, analyzing the “pédagogies post-révolutionnaires du territoire,” cites Alexandre Deleyre’s 1793 project for an educative “patriotic garden” in the image of France’s departments, each represented by its characteristic produce: olive trees for the Bouches-du-Rhône, apple trees for Calvados, plum trees for Indre-et-Loire (826–27). At the outset, a pedagogy of place was tied to the project of representing the nation through food. Before the Third Republic, this culinary canon filled the pages of travel narratives and geography books for young notables attending the *lycée*. In Depping’s *Les Jeunes Voyageurs en France* (1824), a young bourgeois undertakes a formative national tour before marrying. He writes his fiancée a letter from each department recounting his discoveries, including local foods. A frontispiece illustrates each chapter, featuring a departmental map surrounded by emblematic products, such as madeleines and *dragées de Verdun* for the Meuse (fig. 3).

particulière” and regrets that “exquisite” meringues from Valence are too delicate to export (Caumont 207). Placed after the generic sections, “La Famille,” “La Maison,” and “Le Village,” and before the final section, “Notre pays,” these short compendiums of local geography, history, culture, and food expand outward to link through the possessive “notre,” love of the *petite patrie* to that of the *grande patrie*.

Textbooks based on the principle of the *tour de la France* attempted to generalize this move from the discovery of the local to identification with the national. Between 1877 and 1914, eighteen different *Tours* set children off on the discovery of the *patrie* (Cabanel 317). In her preface, Bruno asserted that travel narratives could make the abstract notion of *patrie* present to children: “La patrie ne représente pour l’écolier qu’une chose abstraite à laquelle, plus souvent qu’on ne croit, il peut rester étranger pendant une assez longue période de la vie. Pour frapper son esprit, il faut lui rendre la patrie visible et vivante.” Unlike the *Tours* earlier in the century that feature young men on the verge of adulthood or center on a man later in life who tutors his charges through travel (Cabanel 101–4), Bruno’s young protagonists, André and Julien, bookend the ages of their primary school readers. Schoolchildren could project themselves into these characters and their adventures, their pride in both the *petite patries* they visit and the *patrie* that contains them. The genre’s prevalence reflects both the editorial success of Bruno’s work and the effective way the conceit responded to the republic’s goal of inculcating a national identity that subsumes but does not negate regional specificity.

These readers in particular disseminated the national canon of regional culinary specialties to the masses. No longer of an aristocratic shopping list or a set of picturesque anecdotes for a bourgeois travel diary, the primary educational system valorized these products as exempla of national excellence. They could thus stock French culinary consciousness in the same manner that Lavissee’s pantheon of historical figures became part of the national historical memory. When the protagonists of Juranville and Berger’s *Troisième livre de lecture courante*, a widowed and ruined industrialist from Dunkerque, M. Vieuville, and his daughters Claire and Madeleine, visit Dijon, their host, “un vrai disciple de Brillat-Savarin” (288), boasts he can give them an excellent meal with only local products. They dine on Charolais beef, Dombes salmon, Bresse chicken and pork, Gevrolles lamb, drink Burgundy wine, and finish with Dijon gingerbread, and Gex cheese (288–89). Students engaging with such texts are given numerous points of access to an expansive gastronomic catalog. Teachers’ questions further valorize and typify these exemplary products: “Quelles sont les poulardes les plus délicates?—Celles de la Bresse et du Mans” (Bruno 147). Textbooks verge on a culinary catechism.

1° Les fromages fabriqués à froid dont la plupart sont de pâte molle, comme le Brie, le Camembert, le Livarot, le Mont-Dore, le Marolles, et d'autres de pâte ferme comme

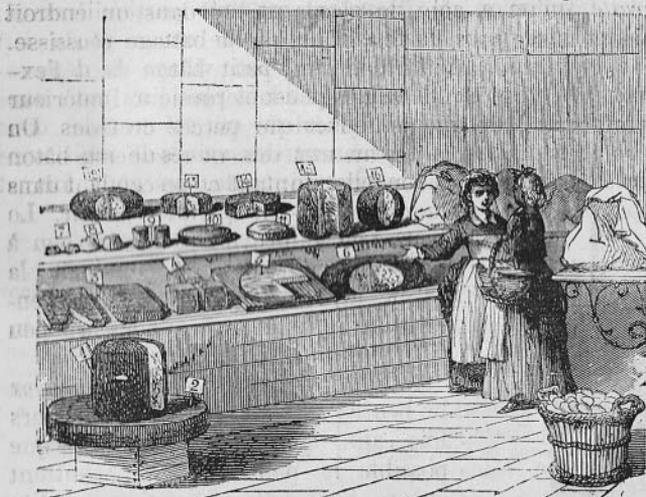


Fig. 21. — La Boutique de la marchande de fromages.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1° Fromage d'Auvergne. (Département du Cantal.) | 9° Neuchâtel affiné. (Département de la Seine-Inférieure.) |
| 2° Fromage de Gruyères. (Suisse.) | 10° Mont-Dore. (Département du Puy-de-Dôme.) |
| 3° Marolles en tuiles de Flandre. (Département du Nord.) | 11° Camembert (Département de l'Orne.) |
| 4° Marolles en pavé. (Idem.) | 12° Fromage d'Edam (Hollande) ou fromage rond de Hollande. |
| 5° Fromage de Brie. (Seine-et-Marne.) | 13° Roquefort. (Département de l'Aveyron.) |
| 6° Fromage de Gex. (Département de l'Ain.) | 14° Livarot. (Département du Calvados.) |
| Fromage de chèvre affiné. (Départements de l'Hérault, de l'Isère, etc.) | 15° Chester. (Angleterre.) |
| 7° Le même frais. (Idem.) | 16° Tête de mort. (Département du Cantal.) |

FIGURE 4. Caumont, *Lectures courantes des écoliers français* (103).

Narrative embeds these products more firmly in their place of origin. Alongside the protagonists, the *Tour's* young readers visit the “ferme bien tenue” where Julien and André buy Bresse chickens to sell in Mâcon and meet the model *fermière* who raises them as well as the clients who buy them. They listen to a cheesemaker explain the workings of a cooperative. At the same time, the local embeddedness valorizing Bresse chickens or Gruyère from the Jura enables these products to contribute that value to the nation. A common scene in these readers illustrates this dynamic: the visit to a cheesemonger's shop. Illustrations of the cheesemonger's stall gather France's rich culinary diversity into a single frame (fig. 4). Bruno makes this idea explicit in an oft-cited passage late in *Le Tour de la France*. As Père Guillaume extolls the wonders of his native Normandy, its *moutons de prés salés*, its fat steers sold in Paris, and its

famous cheeses, Julien wonders which part of France is really the most fertile, since others laud Burgundy, the wheat fields of Toulouse, or the wines of Bordeaux (395–96). Guillaume responds:

Petit Julien, . . . il n'est pas facile de donner ainsi des places et des rangs aux choses. Demande à un jardinier quelle est la plus belle des fleurs, il sera bien embarrassé; mais en revanche il te dira que le plus beau des jardins, c'est celui où il y a les plus belles et les plus nombreuses espèces de fleurs. Eh bien, petit, la France est ce jardin. Ses provinces sont comme des fleurs de toute sorte entre lesquelles il est difficile de choisir, mais dont la réunion forme le plus beau pays, le plus doux à habiter, notre patrie bien-aimée (396–97).

For Anne-Marie Thiesse, this conception of French unity in diversity put forward in textbooks of the Third Republic, “énonce la singularité des entités locales, tout en leur déniaut un autre mode d'existence que celui de l'intégration dans le national” (5). Like the diverse offerings of the cheese stall, France as a flower bed makes each local, individual specimen both essential and equivalent. It makes sense that regional specialties in these texts are so often enumerated in lists that make them at once different and interchangeable, like the choices on a prix fixe menu.

The Taste of Class

Thiesse observes that the long history of political, economic, and cultural centralization in France produced a homology between geography and class, between Paris and the “dominants” on the one hand, and the local and the “dominés” on the other (5). The celebration of regionalism in the schools of the republic, she claims, had the benefit of displacing the problem of class difference, shifting it to a geographical plane where the local was synonymous with the popular and the traditional (5–6). If by the 1930s, several decades of this discourse of unity in cultural and culinary diversity produced a culinary consensus to which both the Right and the Left could appeal (Thiesse 6–7), in the first decades of the Third Republic, “learning to eat French” engaged more directly with the social tensions inherent in the act of translating bourgeois culinary culture for a popular audience.

Class can cut against celebration of the local when textbooks narrate the process of assimilation to bourgeois norms. Visiting the Meuse, Madeleine Vieuville is shocked by the bad manners of a young coach driver they hired, François, and decides to teach him proper ones by example. As François digs into his lunch, he sings the praises of his *terroir*, of the “petit vin de Moselle” too fragile to export. Madeleine gently cuts short this paean to the *petite patrie* by proclaiming that what she enjoys is a soft napkin, unlike the rough one they have been



FIGURE 5. Juranville and Berger, *Troisième Livre de lecture à l'usage de jeunes fille* (58).

given: “Et François, pour voir, s’essuya naïvement avant de porter le verre à ses lèvres, ce qu’il ne faisait jamais” (Juranville and Berger 57). Throughout the meal, François follows Madeleine’s hints and “naively” tries any number of new ways of acting: eating his chicken with a knife and fork instead of his hands, gently spreading jam on his bread instead of eating it off his knife, carefully placing his napkin on the table when he has finished (figs. 5 and 6). Although he proves a docile student, “il pensa par devers lui que ce n’était pas si facile que cela de savoir manger comme il faut, avec des bourgeois!” (59). M. Viewille attributes François’s bad manners to losing his mother at a young age (57). François, instead, insists on the class divide separating him from his hosts, even if under the gentle instruction of Madeleine (or the textbook) this divide could be overcome through assimilation to the dominant model.

Class similarly undermines geographic unity in a recurrent motif found in these readers: the trip to the central market in Paris, les Halles. This encounter is often evoked in the register of sublime, gargantuan excess. Seeing the Halles, with its mountains of cabbage “hauts comme des maisons,” little Julien exclaims in *Le Tour de la France par deux enfants*, “ce Paris est un Gargantua” (449–50). In *Suzette*, the Halles are simply designated “le pays de Gargantua,” with the different markets making up its provinces. Recalling Zola’s *Ventre de Paris*, *Suzette* paints a vivid tableau of the market’s overwhelming profusion: “Des monceaux de poulets, de poulardes, d’innombrables quartiers de boeuf, de mouton, de porc, des poissons à croire qu’on avait mis à sec une bonne partie de la mer, des parcs entier d’huitres, des bancs de harengs, des tas blancs et roses de raies, de maquereaux, de turbots, de soles, de saumons aux écailles d’argent, de congres enroulés comme des serpents énormes avec leurs gros yeux noirs si brillants qu’ils ont l’air



FIGURE 6. Juranville and Berger, *Troisième Livre de lecture à l'usage de jeunes fille* (59).

d'être en vie!" (307). The Halles concentrate the bounty of France for the voracious capital, revealing that local cuisines and products required the center, Paris, as "a term of comparison, a cultural configuration against which they could be both defined and judged" (Ferguson, *Accounting* 129). Paris and the Halles compose the center toward which everything converges. At the Halles M. Vieuville details for his gobsmacked daughters the provenance of vegetables in the Pavillon des légumes: "C'est ici, dit-il, qu'arrivent de tous les points de la France les provisions et les vivres . . . la culture maraîchère des environs de Paris, les asperges d'Argenteuil, les artichauts de Lyon, le cresson de Senlis, les haricots de Soissons et de Liencourt, les melons de Coulommiers, les navets de la plaine des Sablons et, parmi les fruits, les cerises de Montmorency, les petits pois de Clamart, les chaselas de Fontainebleau, les pêches de Montreuil" (Juranville and Berger 321). *Le Tour de la France par deux enfants* extends the reach of the capital further. André and Julien's uncle, Frantz, explains how the extensive network of railroads, canals, and maritime routes converge on Paris to bring foodstuffs from all over France and the world. He says to Julien, "Voici des artichauts, penses-tu qu'il puisse en pousser un seul en ce moment de l'année dans les campagnes voisines de Paris? . . . Et bien, Alger où il fait chaud envoie les siens à Paris, qui le lui paie très cher. . . 'Oh!' dit Julien, 'que de monde est occupé en France à nourrir Paris!'" (450). The Halles become the microcosm of the riches of France and its colonies. Paris eats empire and validates the industriousness of the periphery that serves it.

Of course, the Halles do not feed all of Paris. Uncle Frantz does not mention who can afford artichokes out of season. Suzette's aunt reminds her that "malgré cette apparence magnifique des Halles, les vivres y sont rares puisqu'ils y sont

chers” and that many will not eat that day (313). The aunt unsuccessfully haggles for a beautiful bundle of *asperges d’Argenteuil*, but can’t get the seller below three francs fifty. Outside the Halles, she buys asparagus “peut-être un peu moins d’Argenteuil” for twenty-six sous (317–18). Economic realities come to the fore throughout these scenes. In another reader featuring two orphans, *La France en zigzag* by Eudoxie Dupuis, one brother indignantly observes a rich Parisian buy expensive jars of out-of-season strawberries. The other brother remarks that the rich man’s *gourmandise* provides work for both the merchant and the farmer (44–45). The scene reflects the historical reality of its peasant readers, whose labor produced goods—products we often associate with regional identity—for the market rather than for their own consumption.

Like Ferguson, Thiesse argues that external validation, such as that provided by recognition in markets and by educational leaders, helps bind the meaning of place and product. This is particularly true, she asserts, for famous men and wine, both of which express “la quintessence du génie local, sous sa double forme humaine et naturelle” (Thiesse 45). Thiesse cites examples from regional textbooks of the interwar years, but in the first decades of the Third Republic, textbooks still underscored the distance between pupils and the terms of this symbiosis. In Eugène Manuel and Levi Alvarès’s 1881 *Abrégé de la France*, the schoolteacher uses a large map of the departments to engage his students in a year-long virtual voyage across the *patrie*. The famous sons and products of each department are named and described. When the class reaches l’Aisne, Duval tells his pupils that it is perhaps France’s literary figures that bring the nation the most glory, writers such as La Fontaine and Racine, both born in the department. He has students take turns reciting a scene from Racine’s *Athalie*. Suddenly, he interrupts them:

Arrêtez-vous. Nous n’en lirons pas davantage aujourd’hui. Vous avez pu juger par vous-mêmes du naturel et de l’intérêt de la scène. Que serait-ce si vous pouviez apprécier le style, les vers, toutes les difficultés que le génie de Racine a vaincues! Mais ce sont des connaissances peu utiles pour vous, mes enfants; et il en est tant d’autres qui vous manquent! . . . Peut-être n’aurez-vous pas plus l’occasion de lire en entier des pièces de Racine que d’en lire de Corneille, dont nous causions à Rouen; mais est-ce une raison pour ignorer leur nom, quand on leur dresse des statues? Ils ont contribué à illustrer la France: c’est assez pour que tout Français les connaisse. (140)

While he admits they might be moved by the text, he sees no reason for them to learn to analyze it as a literary object. They only need to recognize Racine’s name. Similarly, when they arrive in Côte d’Or, Duval lists its famous wines: Pommard, Beaune, Romanée, and Clos Vougeot, “qui valent jusqu’à quinze francs la bouteille” (264). But once again, he cuts short:

Je m'aperçois, mes chers enfants, que j'ai prolongé assez tard notre entretien, et ce sujet, en apparence, ne vous intéresse que bien indirectement. Connaissez-vous jamais, autrement que de nom, ces vins que les riches seuls peuvent se procurer? Mais il y a du vin pour toutes les bourses; et le vin, en général, méritait d'attirer votre attention, puisqu'il occupe une si large place dans la production, dans la consommation et dans les revenus de la France. (264)

Certain cultural and gustatory charms remain perforce beyond the reach of working-class pupils. As successful as the ideology of timeless identity between local product and *patrie* became in the twentieth century, in the early years of the Third Republic the act of *identifying*, rather than *identifying with*, characterized the relationship between students and these two expressions of place. Through a kind of *mise en abyme*, the textbook becomes the *vin ordinaire* of bourgeois literary culture. Just as primary school neglected the study of literature for itself before the 1920s—anthologies and readers used short literary excerpts to teach other parts of the curriculum (Chartier and Purdue)—it anthologized and authorized the bourgeois gastronomic model as an object of recognition worthy of attention, not as a practice to be fully adopted in everyday life. A farmhand's daughter in turn-of-the-century Creuse might never taste the “dragées renommées” of Verdun or the champagnes from Epernay, “ces vins fameux dans le monde entier,” her reader, *Jean Felber*, extolls (Chalamet 28). Instead, its departmental supplement reminds her that her midday meals consist of buckwheat pancakes, potatoes cooked in ashes, and cheese; that her evening meal would be a thick soup, with wine and wheat bread reserved for Sundays and market days (Mathieu 46). Nonetheless, she would read and recognize these glories of the Meuse and the Marne that enrich France in every sense of the verb.

Conclusion

The first three decades of the Third Republic witnessed a transformation of mass primary education. Under Ferry, the pedagogy of object lessons promoted the exercise of observation and scientific reason. Schooling for the urban and rural masses aimed to develop enlightened and productive citizens, masters of a set of *connaissances usuelles* allowing them to fulfill their social roles to the best of their abilities. Textbooks served up a pantheon of local cultural icons through which to build a shared national culture. In all of these endeavors, food did more than add some local or exotic flavor to the fundamental goals of republican education; it provided a staple and accessible referent for republican pedagogical practice. In turn, whether through natural science, the geography of regional specialties, or the rational injunctions of nascent lessons in *économie domestique*,

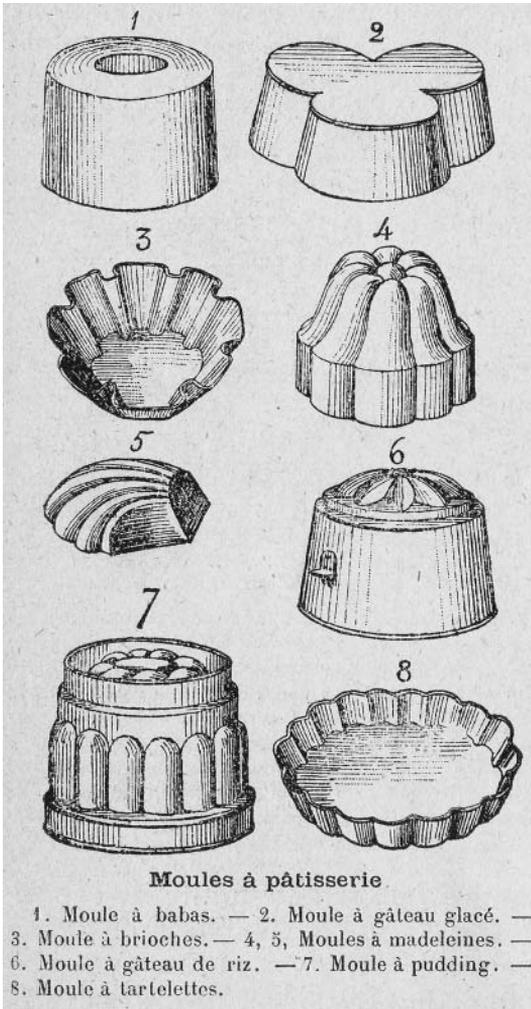


FIGURE 7. Robert Halt, *Le Ménage de Mme. Sylvain* (240).

mass primary education provided a key conduit to disseminate and thus shape the national culinary culture and sense of gastronomic exceptionalism that characterizes France to this day.

Toward the end of *Le Ménage de Mme Sylvain*, Suzette’s well-traveled cousin, Pascal, regales them with tales of eating in Russia, Italy, Germany, and England. He concludes nothing compares to French pastry, “si délicate, si variée, et qui, avec nos sauces et nos ragoûts, fait regarder notre cuisine comme la première de l’Europe” (239). The passage is illustrated by an engraving of fancy pastry molds (fig. 7) that were unlikely to be found in the homes of its readers. If the implements of *grande cuisine* should be recognized by pupils, time and again textbooks recommend more modest fare as appropriate for this popular audience. Caumont extolls simple home cooking, simply seasoned, “non pas de la cuisine de

luxe faite pour les gourmands, mais de la bonne et simple cuisine de ménage” (95). Readers promoted such thoughtful cooking, informed by knowledge produced by the habits of careful observation inculcated by the republican pedagogy of the concrete. When Suzette’s backward neighbor, Ludivine, exclaims that Suzette’s bouillon is a “bouillon de bourgeois,” Suzette patiently explains that her success results from technique, not from fancy ingredients: “Suzette dit bonnement, pour la vingtième fois, qu’elle faisait le pot-au-feu comme tout le monde, avec les ingrédients ordinaires de viande, de légumes et de sel; mais qu’elle veillait à n’amener que lentement l’ébullition, puis à la maintenir égale jusqu’au bout” (181). But neither Ludivine nor her daughter listen to the culinary object lessons school offers: “Il y a des gens ainsi construits; les facultés capitales d’écouter et de regarder, facultés sans lesquelles l’homme passe en cette vie comme un animal, et un animal très inférieur, semblent leur manquer, quoiqu’ils aient des oreilles et des yeux. . . . Et c’est pourquoi on ne mangeait jamais rien d’honnêtement préparé chez la voisine Ludivine” (182). Suzette’s pot-au-feu, a microcosm of a meal combining broth, vegetables, and meat, concentrates republican ideals for mass education: rationalism applied to the everyday, national cultural genius recognized and translated for a popular audience.

Ferguson observes that a recipe for *pot-au-feu* opens and structures Carême’s seminal *Art de la cuisine française aux XIXe siècle* (“Le pot-au-feu” 18). Placed under the dual sign of “une sagesse populaire séculaire” and “le savoir scientifique,” pot-au-feu, she argues, occupies a central position between tradition and modernity, the popular and the bourgeois; the female cook and the male chef; a position, she asserts, that makes it the national dish (15). Indeed, what distinguishes French culinary culture for Ferguson is precisely the way it consciously articulates such tensions (*Accounting* 147). Nowhere does this articulation play out more clearly for a mass audience than between the pages of primary school readers. There, republican education refines a humble Limousine *bréjaude* into the national pot-au-feu. It makes it an exemplar of “culinary republicanism” (146), logically delimiting the culinary aspirations primary education assigned its pupils in the first decades of the Third Republic and shaping the everyday national consciousness of generations of French children.

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NOTES

1. On *bréjaude*, a traditional vegetable soup flavored with bacon rind from the Limousin, see Poulain.
2. See Ferguson, *Accounting* 121–31; Csergo 831–38; and Parker 154–63.
3. *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleur* totaled 837,000 copies in print by the end of 1980, and *Du côté de chez Swann* 1,263,400 copies (Laget 71). Between its first edition in 1877 and 1947, Bruno's *Tour* sold almost 8,000,000 copies (Cabanel 153).
4. Ferguson makes a direct claim about the role of education when she points to domestic economy classes and “educational cookbooks” such as Richardin's *La Cuisine française* (128). However, their reach was likely limited to auxiliary classes in *arts ménagers* offered in conjunction with post-elementary education, which enrolled around eleven thousand young women at the turn of the century (Briand and Chapoulie 160). *Enseignement ménager familial* only became compulsory under Vichy, and then, only at the post-elementary level (Lebeaume 85–89). Cooking advice and recipes worked themselves much earlier into readers, especially those published for girls as part of a limited curriculum in *économie domestique*.
5. The article “Leçon de choses” in Buisson's *Dictionnaire de Pédagogie*, traces the prehistory of this pedagogical technique to chapter 23 of *Gargantua*, where Gargantua and his tutor, Ponocrates, “devisoyent joyeusement . . . de la vertu, propriété, efficace et nature de tout ce que leur estoit servi à la table” (Platrier 1528).
6. See Eugen Weber, 67–94. Weber estimated that “French was a foreign language for almost half of the children who would reach adulthood in the last quarter of the century” (67).
7. On Vidal de la Blache's organicist geography and its echoes in *Le Tour de la France par deux enfants*, see Lindaman, chap. 4.

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