

constitutional law. It does not mandate Breyer's own approach.

None of this means that Breyer is wrong. On the contrary, I believe that he is largely right. He is right to say that the free speech principle should be understood in democratic terms. He is right to say that where the Court lacks important information, it should rule cautiously and narrowly. He is right to resist the constitutional assault on affirmative action programs (an assault that, by the way, is extremely hard to defend in originalist terms). He is right to reject originalism. Above all, he is right to emphasize the importance of democratic goals to constitutional interpretation. The problem is that he underplays the inevitable role of judicial judgments in characterizing purposes and in assessing consequences. But no approach to interpretation can avoid the interpreter's own judgments. A fuller account than

Breyer has given here would specify the underlying judgments and attempt to defend them in far more detail. Such an account would have to show that courts are both willing and able to proceed as Breyer suggests; and it would also have to show that as compared with alternative possibilities, a democracy-centered approach of his preferred sort really would promote self-government, properly understood.

Active Liberty is a sketch, not a fully developed argument. But even sketches can change the way we look at things. With its modesty, its self-conscious pragmatism, and its emphasis on the centrality of democratic goals, Stephen Breyer's approach provides an eminently reasonable foundation for constitutional law. It is an approach that deserves a place of honor in national debates, now and in the future, about the role of the Supreme Court in American life. ■

tribute the public's love of the soup cans to an unconscious food fetishism.

Indeed, he believes that people perceive any pictured food that way, with a pleasure created by a general cultural fetishism, to wit: if fetishism is defined as the bringing of the uncontrollable under control by means of a psychological transformation of it into an object that can be manipulated—in this case, however, the non-psychological but actual transformation of beasts and plants into objects for human nourishment—then “it does seem that the fetishism of food—the replacement of a living thing with a dead object—is central to paintings of food. It is fetishism that gives food pictures their most enduring sense of pleasure.” But I should think that those soup cans were adored for the purity of their cannishness, and that the fetish in operation was what generates the deliciousness of all mass-produced goods. It is what makes the picture of identically sized pie-wedges delightful, precisely because it celebrates the machine-made perfection of each mouth-watering slice.

Anne Hollander Palette

FOOD IN PAINTING:
FROM THE RENAISSANCE
TO THE PRESENT
By Kenneth Bendiner
(*Reaktion Books*, 238 pp., \$35)

THIS INTENSE LITTLE BOOK'S brusque title is apt. Armed with strong feelings and forthright views, Kenneth Bendiner covers immense territory and makes no pretense at being exhaustive. He cares deeply about the way pictured food appears, because he obviously cares deeply about food itself. He is the champion of pleasure in food and of those painters of foodstuffs in whose works the satisfactions of food are rightly dwelt on, whatever else is happening. He disapproves of an artist who uses fruit or meat or bowls of soup primarily to embody other things—the sovereign power of art, for example—unless the

picture also displays food's own satisfying relation to eating.

He praises the traditional still life painters, beginning with the Dutch, who grouped together the components and the appurtenances of an eventual meal, to suggest its happy creation and later consumption. He especially loves those who painted inviting snacks—a plate of open oysters and a partially sliced ham, together with a casually bunched napkin and a nearby knife handle offered to the viewer. Painters who used ill-assorted eatables, utensils, textiles, and vessels only to create great compositional effects earn his scorn.

Bendiner sees Wayne Thiebaud's regimented ranks of multi-flavored pie-wedges as censuring capitalist mass production and commodification, and Andy Warhol painting his soup cans out of “moral disdain” for the way “packaging replaces nourishment” in a new soulless world. He marvels, however, at the way those soup cans were received with delight, often as nostalgic souvenirs of childhood, even while Warhol's pictures of electric chairs were rightly understood as social criticism; and he goes on to at-

DESPITE WHAT HE THINKS IS everyone's appropriate fetishistic pleasure in food painting, Bendiner feels he must be food's champion in the painted universe, because he believes it to have been generally despised therein. He points out that still life had the bottom rank as subject matter for painters during the long period when scenes of myth and history were highest on the list. Food was too familiar and necessary, too bodily and quotidian, to be exalted in paint—except, of course, in the founding religious scenes, the Fall of Man and the Last Supper. The eating that led mankind into sin and the eating that redeems mankind have merited plenty of attention from painters, but their images rarely emphasized the looks of the food, and they showed nobody placing anything in the mouth.

Painters tended, quite suitably, to make the Last Supper table resemble an altar, and to keep its food and drink out of the range of any viewer's mundane appetite, while emphasizing Jesus's transformative words. The Fall of Man scene, on the other hand, required emphasis on temptation. Painters rarely made the forbidden fruit itself look luscious, since two full-length, attractive nude bodies dominated the picture, and the story goes that the first temptation arose from the prohibition, not the fruit. Scripture only im-

Anne Hollander is the author, most recently, of the text for WOMAN IN THE MIRROR, Richard Avedon's last collection of photographs, scheduled by Harry N. Abrams to appear in October.

plies that eating the fruit led to the lusts of the flesh, but the link between fruit and sexual temptation is forever made by such images, which permit apples in particular to signify sexuality in later paintings. Bendiner's fifteenth-century example is the great *Adam and Eve* by Hugo van der Goes, who in fact makes Eve's two plucked apples look luscious, whereas Bendiner calls his slim, Netherlandish bodies "slinky," not really the best term for them. I think he means that their outlines are curvilinear although their flesh is not succulent; and he may be seeing their resemblance to the nearby rampant serpent.

The idea that the unspecified fruit in Eden was an apple got support in the Renaissance from the ancient Greek story of the Judgment of Paris, who awarded the golden apple marked "for the fairest" to the Goddess of Love. Paris rejected the power and the riches that wise Athena and royal Hera offered him, because Aphrodite promised him Helen of Troy for his wife. Many paintings exist of that fatally irresistible temptation, where Helen may be the prize, but we see Paris give Aphrodite the apple for her own sublime attractions. Bendiner says that later paintings of beautiful women with nearby apples carry a whiff of this legendary pagan tribute, right along with Christian suggestions of carnal sin—the Latin *malum* meaning both apple and evil. He might have added that for sin, at least among French-speaking painters, peaches make the same point because of *pêche* and *pêché*, in addition to that velvety fuzz and those blushing globes.

Bendiner tells us that fruit is by far the most common food in painting—more common, he says, in art than in the diet—and that the pictorial suggestion is repeatedly made that fruit is for the eye. This accords well with its ancient tempting and feminine associations; but he never admits that fruit in real life seems flirtatious, deliberately seductive, willfully inviolable in its bright, tight costume, seeming both to wish and not wish to be ripped, stripped or (help!) bitten. But fruit withers and spoils if not eaten, and realistic fruit-painting seems to have been invented in antiquity so that fresh fruit might keep its tempting beauty forever intact. Later Dutch painters, on the other hand, would add spots of rot to painted fruit on purpose, to show the transience of ripeness. Bendiner points out that most painters do not show fruit being eaten, except sometimes by kids

and boors, or maybe by mythical satyrs munching grapes.

Bendiner further emphasizes that most actual eating of any kind in painting is done by low lifes, often to excess, sometimes accompanied by vomiting and rude behavior and always presented as low comedy. As part of that mode, food can be used to bring out the crudest aspect of human animals. Bosch's humanoid monster in the "Hell" panel from *The Garden of Earthly Delights* shows the mouth that ingests in direct relation to the anus that defecates. Decorum usually kept such gross sights out of paintings, but extreme license was natural to the graphic arts, and European prints since 1500 show much more specific and unsightly eating and vomiting than paintings do—along with much more explicit excretion, copulation, torture, and slaughter. It's all there in black and white.

BENDINER DIVIDES WESTERN food paintings since the fifteenth century into three large, loose categories, beginning with "The Market," continuing with "Preparing the Meal," and culminating in "Meals," where he offers a large array of meal-pictures (some uninhabited) as diverse social and emotional mirrors—not excluding some more sacred references, as in Norman Rockwell's famous *Freedom from Want* Thanksgiving table, where he somewhat perversely finds Last Supperish flavors. But the market section begins even more perversely, with a fifteenth-century Netherlandish panel showing *The Gathering of Manna*, a painting which this impetuous author wants to label "an anti-Semitic diatribe."

Manna fed the Hebrews during their forty years in the desert, descending from on high as a rain of small, white wafers that rotted if they were not eaten the same day. The Flemish painter shows normally clad medieval men in recognizably Jewish headgear, some of them bearded, and wimpled, turbaned women with children, all holding out vessels and garments to catch the descending snow of wafers, or setting out tubs on the ground to let them fill. Moses and Aaron stand together at right exclaiming and praising God. All faces look sad and serious, maybe one or two with biggish noses. All wear the gear that shows the role they play, in the fifteenth century, pageant-related way of dressing legendary figures; but none have "gross, stereotyped physiognomies." Nor does the painting appear

"hateful, bitter and desperate," with the Hebrews deliberately shown displaying Typical Greed and Miserliness. All behave decorously, even the children who help to pick up the wafers and put them into pots; nobody is elbowing anybody else out of the way, or stuffing himself, or hiding the food from others. The figure composition is harmonious, symmetrical, and somewhat dance-like, as befits the re-enactment of a miracle.

But Bendiner is eager to have us feel uneasy about this image and find it reprehensible, mainly because it shows measured, ready-to-eat food freely dropping from heaven, instead of raw materials being plentifully set out for sale in the righteous atmosphere of fair exchange. He wants to contrast a disapproving response, generated by the "repellent" image of "a free meal," with the soothing satisfaction aroused by paintings of well-stocked marketplaces. There, money is exchanged for goods, just as labor and husbandry have first been exchanged for the good harvest and fine cattle that produced them; and nothing has come of nothing.

It is the wonderfully untidy abundance in market scenes that he wants to contrast here with the meager, evenly sprinkled manna flakes, to turn our minds to "the desperate tone that pervades the whole history of eating before the eighteenth century." He says that, according to the sociologists Norbert Elias and Stephen Mennell, "for long periods eating was a violent, unnerving swing between starvation and stuffing." The food supply was always local and therefore always uncertain, before the rise of trade and efficient transport permitted local shortages to be supplemented from elsewhere. On feast days everyone gorged, because who knew when the crops might fail or murrain strike the cows. Market paintings, Bendiner says, "seem to exist to quell anxiety."

Bread and water, mixed together and heated, made the gruel on which peasant life was sustained—perhaps more palatably if flavored with onion, and sometimes with butter or bacon when church restrictions allowed. Meat was the true standard of good eating, and the absence of meat and meat products in pictures meant privation or fasting. Thus butcher's stalls were the subject of the first market paintings, with immense sides of beef and legs of lamb, multiple pigs' feet, and many plump geese suggesting unbelievable feasting in the offing. A still life

picture featuring bread, fish, and a glass of beer, by contrast, could suggest not only ritual abstinence but virtuous self-mortification. Vegetables were always accessories, not rendered as primary no matter how handsome and tasty; and fruit was fruit, the same since Eden, often shown being sold by plump and tempting young women.

THE PAINTING OF FOOD-stall scenes and food still life became customary only in the middle sixteenth century. Some have surmised that painters then, inspired by Renaissance classicism, wished to reproduce the effect famously described by Pliny the Elder of the grapes painted so realistically by the Greek painter Zeuxis that birds flew in and pecked at them. Apart from such aesthetic possibilities, however, and in line with the iconoclastic impulses of the Protestant Reformation, a new secularization of painterly subject matter was then on the rise in Europe. Madonnas were losing ground, and frequently being burned. Peasant life was becoming an acceptable theme for large works, and the purveying of food was a large part of that life.

A retreat from religious subjects and the embrace of genre material are made very plain in Pieter Aertsen's unnerving work, four feet high and almost five feet wide, called *Butcher's Stall with the Flight into Egypt*, painted in 1551. The whole foreground of this big canvas is filled with a jumble of reddish dead animals and animal parts, beginning with an immense cow's head that stares at us, its jaw overhanging a tub of lard. Strings of red, white and yellow sausages snake around the big and disparate carcass pieces, which hang from a jutting pole or nudge each other atop a barrel, a covered basket, a low stool, a small table. Is this open structure with its red-tiled roof really a butcher's stall? We see a few lonesome fish, some pies, two pretzels, a half-wrapped cheese, and nobody minding the store, just a man outside carefully filling a jug from a bucket. Far out in back, however, where trees and turf meet the sky, a tiny Joseph leads a tiny donkey carrying Mary, who grips swaddled Jesus and leans to drop alms into a beggar's hat. Smaller figures troop off in the same direction, other miniature mendicants approach Mary, and we watch all this framed between a hanging pig's head and half an ox. What is going on?

In Nowhere

as pointless as a place
as a coastline moving through winter fog

*

and in no time

as dew point comes
again and again

*

what a state we're in

ice to liquid to vapor

O Hail—Rain—

Plain Light bent in primary tears O

Broken One

MURIEL NELSON

Some new contrast is being made between carnality and higher things, though it is not clear which one is being approved at the expense of the other. Earlier painters had built mundane food neatly into sacred scenes, such as the *Marriage at Cana*, or portrayed it as a luxurious part of noble feasts involving gold and silver plate. Bendiner also remarks that compositions of dead game had been painted as emblems of aristocratic prowess well before the rise of the new market mode. But now painters began celebrating only the abundant jostle of raw foodstuffs, as if to suggest the powerful commonality of basic fleshly existence, often giving the image an erotic or comic cast to keep the level low. In such pictures, the overwhelming vitality of the dead stuff itself is what painters made so striking, showing its obedience to a universal physical rule that transcends any authority of faith, church, or king.

These later sixteenth-century food painters also ushered in the great era of breathtaking still life largely associated with Dutch artists, who influenced all later breathtaking painters in the genre and finally gave food painting its authority and good name. The early seventeenth-century Dutch painters not only followed their own emerging tradition, they were also inspired (as were many in other countries) by the young Caravaggio, whose freestanding basket of over-ripe

and spoiling fruit from 1600 is said to be the first true still life. Just like the flower specialists, however, the later Dutch food painters often went beyond realistic Caravaggio—and well beyond unimaginative, myopic Nature—by ostentatiously combining perfect fruits and vegetables that ripened at different seasons, to create ravishing sights impossible in real life.

Going still further, Rembrandt with his *Slaughtered Ox*, which Bendiner eloquently compares to a crucified Christ, or Velázquez with his fraught and somber *Kitchen Scene with Christ in the House of Mary and Martha*, or Terborch with his hushed and delicate *Woman Peeling Apples*, were later able to convey a sense of accord between physical fact and moral or spiritual truth through the deft rendering of foodstuffs. This was the very synthesis that Aertsen and his circle had rejected a century earlier, when they aligned all human food with brute materiality. Only later, in both Catholic Spain and Protestant Holland, as still later in En-

lightened France, could the sheen on the onion begin to suggest inward, human illumination, even with no persons in the picture.

Bendiner considers the intense “majesty and concentration” of one of the jewels of the Rijksmuseum, a small painting by Adriaen Coorte from 1697, consisting entirely of a bunch of asparagus tied with twine, lying aslant a single loose spear on a cracked stone sill. “The lighting ... turns them into translucent tubes of paper-thin fragility, set amid a haunting Baroque darkness.” And he adds: “Coorte ... gave the ... subject such effulgence that one wants to see it as ... something symbolic of God or humankind as a whole—with relations of the individual to the group set out in problematic configuration. Rarely has the significance of the insignificant been so adeptly suggested.” This is one of the few times that Bendiner allows any painted food an anthropomorphic cast, unless it is a dead creature, such as Rembrandt's sacrificial *Ox*, or Chardin's pitiful *Ray*. They mainly serve him as exceptions to a generally satisfying effect that he always wants to see in food still life painting. He gladly describes painted food's sexual suggestiveness, with its sensual shapes and its perpetual assimilation by artists to the charms of the young; and he has a whole section on the way painters indicated the supposed aphrodisiac effects of oysters.

But he does not notice any painter giving personalities to pieces of fruit, or to a perfect pie or single loaf, making them display themselves with bravado, or timidity, or resignation, with artless naïveté or indeed with a keen awareness of their allure, as if they were sitting for their portrait.

They often seem to do just that, especially if accompanied by a bottle, glass, or jug posing as a fellow portrait-subject. Many painters must have attempted to convey a distinct personality for each loaf of bread or head of garlic, each cut of beef or chunk of cheese. Chardin certainly did. Bendiner does not feel this element in most of Chardin's still lifes; and Zurbarán's horizontal lineup of lemon plate, orange basket, and rose-decked cup and saucer, much too straight for any table, looks to him like an arrangement set out on an altar and not like actors taking their curtain call on a stage. Cartoonists and graphic artists, of course, have endlessly and shamelessly put legs and faces on foodstuffs, and given them speech ("I'm Chiquita Banana" and so on); and in the kitchen itself you sometimes think you can see the twisted pepper feeling ill at ease among his well-built fellows. But Bendiner will not permit the painter to raise the object up to human level. It would interfere with his fetishism theory.

PAINTED KITCHEN AND MARKET scenes naturally overlap, as the bought food lately set out for sale is taken into the house and set out again for attack. Sixteenth-century female cooks were painted as Michelangelesque amazons wielding heavy utensils against the disorderly horde of enormous cabbages and huge chunks of pork lately snared in the marketplace. We watch these tough fighters, and their colleagues in the following century, in battle among huge vessels that crowd the floor, gripping the necks of hapless geese to pluck them, heartlessly flaying supine carrots, and mercilessly grinding frail sprigs into powder or crushing turnips into mush.

Paintings from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries indicate that kitchens were the inconvenient and uncomfortable sites of hard physical work, none of it aimed at creating imaginative dishes that might seduce the palate. That dimension of cookery opened up only in the eighteenth century, along with a friendlier ambience in the scene of its efforts.

Then Bendiner's illustrations show that the warrior cook might even be absent while the kitchen maid, formerly a sullen, sleepy drudge, might now join all the sprightly, approachable shepherdesses and ribbon-sellers thronging the eighteenth-century pictorial scene.

Still life paintings without visible humans imply human society, and Bendiner is more interested in those implications than in the soul of any painted tomato. As part of his "Meals" section, he shows how seventeenth-century Dutch painters often crowded rich vessels filled with luxurious food and drink onto one corner of a table, prepared as if for one person alone—the viewer himself—to take possession of, rather than sit down at. He does not say this, but it looks as if such works illustrated the lines from Psalm 23: "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. . . . My cup runneth over." The high density of luxury flatters the client and whets his appetite for ample riches and ample dishes in the same image, which would include a suitable gratitude to God among his many pleasures.

By contrast, Dutch painters' methods were refined in eighteenth-century France by Chardin. He could create a radiant, contemplative aura around a pottery jug, a glass of water, a clove of garlic, and some heads of an unidentifiable spice, all about to figure in the perfecting of a rare if unspecified delicacy. Bendiner sees this as illustrating the final triumph of human agency over nature. Using similar components to create a very different atmosphere a century later, Monet painted his forthright *Still Life with Beef* using a pottery jug, a clove of garlic, and a big chunk of raw meat, as if thrusting upon us the basic facts of working-class life. Stewing beef was by then a staple of the poor, and meat was no longer a holiday feast or an upper-class luxury. Instead, the nineteenth-century upper classes were appreciating the refined flavors and textures deployed by skilled professional chefs—already implied by Chardin—and no longer relishing the crude work of athletic cooks.

BENDINER MOSTLY DEALS WITH painted meals attended by real and not implied people, beginning with the state dinners rendered in fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century illuminated manuscripts. There the ruler is the only person seated, except maybe for a Prince of the Church, at a

temporary table displaying ornate vessels and prepared dishes, with an honorific panel placed behind him. Many surrounding persons, both noble (rich garb) and humble (towel over the shoulder) stand by to serve him or feed the dogs, some of which jump up on the table. All present are male, except maybe the dogs. Precious plate is pointedly shown off on a nearby sideboard, but forks and spoons are nowhere to be seen, nor is any eating being done except by the dogs.

We learn that between 1400 and 1700, forks do not appear on any tables in art, but that a man usually had his own knife with him to use at meals. Most people of all classes, says Bendiner, ate with their fingers during the whole three hundred years, even sopping up soup with bread. At a banquet celebrating the Peace of Munster in 1648, recorded in a painting by Bartholomeus van der Helst, we find the food on the table nearly obscured by the hefty clothing of the many thick Dutch gentlemen around it. We do see one of them actually eating a slice of pie, apparently held up on a knife-point. No women are visible.

We see fine ladies, elegant trollops, and festively dressed village women interspersed with men in succeeding epochs, in images of increasingly congenial-looking

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and sometimes disorderly indoor dinner parties, or alfresco spreads during the hunt, or outdoor wedding feasts and all sorts of picnics, from Monet's cold chicken and champagne among hoopskirts on the grass in 1866, and among Tissot's bustles by the lake in 1876, on to John Sloan's hotdogs among bulky swimsuits on the beach in 1907. "The picnic stands as the ultimate vision of the artificiality of the natural ..." Bendiner observes. He points out that before the eighteenth century (once again) there was no special distinction between dining indoors or outdoors, and no fixed place was allotted to eating. A table would be set up specially for the individual feast, of the right size and in the best place.

Bendiner's sequence of illustrations records elegant people replacing formal display with conviviality and relaxation, and his descriptions suggest that ritual shows of rank were being wholly given up for pleasure's sake. He barely touches on the fact that formal seated dinners featuring rich clothing, attentive servitors, and a great emphasis on rank remained a constant element in ruling-class life all the way through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with the addition of multiple forks and other difficulties. But painters stopped using such events as subjects, and stiff formal dinners lost visual value except for cartoonists and satirists. Bendiner does include Diego Rivera's fresco called *Wall Street Banquet*, from 1928, where well-known white-tie-wearing tycoons and a bejeweled woman share a meal composed of a single serpentine length of tickertape, which everyone touches but nobody tastes.

We are also given Sir William Quiller Orchardson's *Marriage de convenance* of 1883, showing an ill-assorted married couple enduring formal dinner alone together at home. They both wear full evening dress, he in a stiff shirt with a high collar and white tie, she bare-armed and décolletée in a corseted dress with a bustle and train. They sit at opposite ends of a long table decked with crystal and porcelain, and a servant in evening dress pours wine for the master. The elderly husband leans forward over his plate to look down the table at his wife, who leans far back from her end, chin in hand, eyes down. Neither one is eating, but the man's right hand is on his knife handle. Bendiner uses this scene to exemplify the many extant meal-pictures composed as novelistic vignettes, although it seems more like a scene from a play, with stage

food. But he might well have compared it to his earlier illustration of the elaborate Renaissance meal where the isolated grandeur of well-served solitary royalty was portrayed. There, any possible emotional tension was omitted along with the presence of any ladies, and the free presence of the dogs added some joy. It is clear that this old gentleman should have dined with his dog instead of his dissatisfied wife.

AFTER THE MID-SEVENTEENTH century, painters of meals followed the Baroque taste for mobile and informal gatherings, a look the Baroque artists used as easily for sacred scenes as for secular parties. Restaurants, which came into existence during the eighteenth century along with so much else, made good settings for such pictures of casual groups. Nineteenth-century European painters could follow the old Dutch tavern scenes with modern French café scenes and Austrian pastry-shop scenes, or show Danish and Italian innkeepers serving pleasure-seeking foreign students along with big, local families. Relaxation and satisfaction infuse these works, even though food is not emphatic in them.

Bendiner includes a few equivocal pictures, too, such as Manet's celebrated *Luncheon in the Studio*, a lush and peaceable composition suffused with such ambiguous relations among the human beings, the objects, the food, and painting itself that pleasure stays in abeyance while we watch to see what develops. We also visit lone diners sitting before minimal fare in sad restaurants—Hopper is well represented here, backed up by Van Gogh and Munch—and emotional moments *à deux* across public tabletops. Providing such moments for lovers became a chief function of restaurants, and single diners in pictures tend to look deprived. Bendiner is particularly sorry for them, and he exaggerates their pain, using words such as "harrowing" to describe the image.

He wants to show how tension, alienation, and anxiety can be conveyed in restaurant pictures, and not just in the glum domestic meal scenes of which he has several examples; but he is quite unhappy with all such works, however true they may be to real life. More, he is deeply offended by Richard Estes's street-painting called *Diner*, done in 1971, where three empty booths each marked TELEPHONE mask the doorway of a metallic

eatory marked DINER—no entry, no food, no sight or touch of others. Bendiner seems to feel that the act of eating is being betrayed in all these paintings. Difficult solitary moments, distant forms of communication, and all detached preoccupations should never be shown to poison a setting devoted to the basic yumminess and chumminess of food.

He is therefore most offended by Cézanne, who single-handedly wrecked (he thinks) the integrity of the great still life foodstuffs that had sustained all the variations of food-painting after the sixteenth century. Cézanne did this by forever separating all future painted apples—or oranges, fish, cheese, cutlets, pastries, oysters, carrots, cherries—from their primal source of power over the appetite. Once a pear is made to sit on a swatch of brocade alongside an irrelevant violin and bunch of keys, say, and its distinctive looks are forced to combine obediently with those of the other things into a picture forged by the tyranny of a painter's will, the pear has lost its artistic honor as a pear. It has become part of a set-up, unfit for anything but future set-ups.

When Claesz. in the seventeenth century, Chardin in the eighteenth, and Harnett in the nineteenth put food on the table, it was always food—charged with multiple associations, drenched in centuries of changing custom, and forever compelling for itself. Those pictures, too, were supremely composed, but the food was kept in its gustatory and social context, whether suggesting constraint, riches, or worldly vanity. Bendiner hates post-Cézanne modernism for letting all that ancient power and significance wither for mere art's sake. He is somewhat heartened and cheered by the Pop Art period of post-modernism—the Thiebaud pie slices—because some of the old lusciousness again became primary, with the help of ad-art conventions. Indeed, how else? He acknowledges color photography as the great new vehicle of food beauty; which he insists mainly satisfies our "fetishistic sense of human control." That sense, of course, also went by the board during the sway of modernism; and not everyone has a fetishistic sense of artistic control.

Bendiner points firmly to the sixteenth-century food artists as great liberators, who allowed serious food imagery to provide an important channel that could bring the greatness of the Renaissance directly into the culture of the present. One way this shows is in the consistency of the

still life menu—the same apples and fish, bottles and lemons appear through four centuries. Brueghel is naturally one of Bendiner's food heroes, although he never fails to chide the painter for sneering at the poor by making them look extra stupid and foolish. In fact, one of Brueghel's great distinctions was that he never exaggerated and did not sneer. His essentially generous view of peasant life made his contemporaries laugh in recognition, because it all looked just right.

THERE IS MUCH MORE IN THIS book about different aspects of food painting, including pictures of families saying grace, and of children being trained in good eating habits. There are early sections on the way ancient medical rules affected the later composition of still lifes, others on the way precious spices were shown, and on drink in its relation to food in pictures; and there are separate sections on tea, coffee, and chocolate, all described by the author as refreshments usually taken between meals to produce a thoughtful calm. Caffeine is not here recorded as the vigorous stimulant that once kept students up all night either finishing overdue papers in little rooms, or else embarking on perilous love affairs in little coffee shops, alcohol being beyond the pocket-book; but of course, no paintings may ex-

ist of these historical subjects.

A final, dutiful-seeming chapter is about Surrealism, symbolism, and the decorative aspects of food painting. Arcimboldo's veggie-man profile heads are here, and Magritte's picture called *The Portrait*—aha!—in which a slice of ham on a plate regards us with a central, human eye, while a stalwart full bottle and a diffident, empty glass stand guard, and the adjacent fork lies on its face. This was standard fork-placement in Europe, but Bendiner sees its prone position as suggesting disorder. We look at Brueghel's *Land of Cockaigne*, wherein endless glutony is the fantasy, and at the curious cucumber and apple that lie prominently in the street outside Mary's door in Crivelli's *Annunciation with St. Emidius*.

No certain conclusions can immediately be drawn about these, nor about a great deal else in the way of meaning for the many food circumstances portrayed in this pungent book. Bendiner knows much about food history and continually enlightens the reader by giving sources; but he has the further virtue of not claiming anything absolute about his sometimes ridiculous but most often resounding interpretations of the paintings. This crisp introduction to a vast theme in art makes the reader long for more, and that may have been the whole idea, as with potato chips. ■

capture. I have no information full effing stop. I'm what you'd call an infidel and my husband called working-class. There is a difference you know. But just supposing I did clap eyes on you. Supposing I saw you driving a Nissan Primera down towards Shoreditch and grassed you to the old bill. Well. I wouldn't know how to spend 25 million dollars. It's not as if I've got anyone to spend it on since you blew up my husband and my boy.

That's my whole point you see. I don't want 25 million dollars Osama I just want you to give it a rest. AM I ALONE? I want to be the last mother in the world who ever has to write you a letter like this. Who ever has to write to you Osama about her dead boy.

The publication date of *Incendiary* in Britain was July 7th, the very day on which suicide bombers killed fifty-six people on a London bus and three subway trains. On the same day Chatto & Windus, the novel's British publisher, and Waterstone's, the English bookstore chain, withdrew *Incendiary's* advertising. Throughout the London Underground, posters promoting the novel were already in place. Like the book's cover, they depicted a burning London with the Thames turned red and above it a barrage balloon bearing a picture of a schoolboy. In some posters, there are quite a number of these blimps dotting the skyline. The surreal zeppelins communicate a satirical pseudo-future. No one could mistake the scene for reality. As for terrorism, it's hard to see any.

The same might be said of the novel. To be sure, dear reader has been replaced by Osama, Osama, Osama. Yet *Incendiary's* claim on the imagination, its literary power, if it can be said to have any, is its narrator's voice. The book is ungrammatical, poorly punctuated, tasteless, and hyperactively honest. Its roughness is supposed to vouch for its authenticity, I suppose. Its cultural references are from television and the tabloids. The narrator's husband, a "copper" for Scotland Yard's bomb disposal unit, is "a QUIET HERO." The narrator, who confesses at once her tendency to sleep around, is "a DIRTY LOVE CHEAT." And from this highly affected voice—for all these badges of authenticity do finally leave an impression of artifice—comes a mode of introspection that is fantastically misinformed and sometimes morbidly fascinating.

Lorraine Adams

Terror Fiction

INCENDIARY
By Chris Cleave
(Knopf, 237 pp., \$22.95)

AWORKING-CLASS WOMAN narrates Chris Cleave's epistolary novel. Suicide bombers have killed her husband, their four-year-old son, and a thousand others during a soccer match at a London stadium. She writes to Osama bin Laden, thinking that if she can make him see her son "with all your heart for just one moment," his

attacks will stop. The letter, and the novel, begins:

Dear Osama they want you dead or alive so the terror will stop. Well I wouldn't know about that I mean rock 'n' roll didn't stop when Elvis died on the khazi it just got worse. Next thing you know there was Sonny & Cher and Dexys Midnight Runners. I'll come to them later. My point is it's easier to start these things than to finish them. I suppose you thought of that did you?

There's a reward of 25 million dollars on your head but don't lose sleep on my account Osama. I have no information leading to your arrest or

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