The Ways of Small Things in the Memoirs of Austin Clarke

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I would like to pay tribute to the immense work Professor Michel Fabre did to render African American and Caribbean letters accessible, approachable and meaningful on this side of the Atlantic and elsewhere. In his apparently effortless and easy manner, Michel Fabre made these literatures palpable, visible and worthy of the critical attention they duly deserve. He opened many critical routes for a number of us and I was always impressed by the smooth ways in which, starting from ordinary and often funny issues, he would then move on to more crucial matters of literary and historical density (Fabre, 1991).

In the following pages, I would like to trace some of the ways of small things in Austin Clarke’s writing by reflecting on the culinary motif in his memoirs Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack – A memoir and Pig Tails ’n Breadfruit – Rituals of Slave Food: A Barbadian Memoir. I want to posit that the culinary can serve as useful epistemological tool for apprehending aspects of contemporary Caribbean literary imagination and for mapping out a zone of critical dialogue and encounter with letters at large.

Pig Tails‘ n Breadfruit – Rituals of Slave Food: A Barbadian Memoir published in 1999, is meant to be many things at once, as its ample title suggests—a cookbook tracing the development of Barbadian cuisine, an essay touching on anthropology, history and commerce, as well as a scrapbook collection of various materials (cooking instructions, economic data, slave words and memories, and pieces of community gossip). It is also a life story, a “memoir”, a term that Clarke prefers to the term “autobiography”, arguing that the memoir is less constricting in terms of format, texture and time frame (Clarke/ Birbalsingh, 96). All in all, Pig Tails stands out as a medley book, an “espèce d’ouvrage” to borrow from Francis Ponge’s meditation on the poetic potential of the fig fruit (Ponge, 54), which unravels in 17 chapters, the titles of which, except for the last one, all refer to food.
Pig Tails is a void filler; it mends Austin Clarke’s first memoir, Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack: A Memoir, giving an altered version of the self, recomposing it via the detours of food. The two titles bounce against each other, foregrounding the discrepancies and variations between the two books. In Pig Tails, the food reference forcibly displaces British rule and regimentation and the adjective “Barbadian” gives flesh and regional flavour to the otherwise generic term “memoir”. The mid-part of the title also enlarges the second memoir’s sphere, pointing to the intimate history of slaves as it discretely manifests itself through food travels, rituals and modes of preparation. From the outset, two poles are highlighted—the pigtail motif, the cheap piece to be cooked, transformed and tenderized by the cooking process, and breadfruit, the staple food imported by James Cook and William Bligh, among others, from the Pacific islands to provide cheap food for slave labour (Benghiat, 59; Davidson, 113, 123). Thus, the title encompasses two conflicting stances: the know-how of slaves and their descendants, and colonial enterprise and travels on the other hand. This in turn heralds the emphasis of Pig Tails on the collusions, tensions, clandestine and official changes generated by food, its passages and the ways in which they may have affected the personal and global domains (Toklas, 49). It so happens that breadfruit is one of the narrator’s favourite foods. As such, its eponymous presence aptly foregrounds the growing and maturing of the “I” into an experienced cook and storyteller in the course of the narrative.

Growing up in an island—a leitmotif in the beginning of Pig Tails—is, as the narrator puts it, an improper variation on the Canadian idiom “growing up on an island” (my emphasis). This slight distancing from the lingua franca indicates early in the book that Pig Tails is intent on modifying the ways of “growing”, as symbolized in Growing Up, and on filling the gaps left open in the first memoir. The cookbook gives free space and form for the subject to retrace the local asides, and to dismiss the constraints imposed by what everyone on the island refers to as “Away”, i.e. Britain, Canada, and the USA. Indeed, Pig Tails tries to depart from the straight lines of “Away” and to delve into the local sphere located off institutional grounds and practices.

The name of Clarke’s village, “St. Matthias”, appears at the onset of the book; in its second occurrence immediately thereafter it is promptly modified into “Sin-Matthias”, a small change gesturing nonetheless at the power of the locals to deviate. The village is bordered on one side by a hotel for English tourists and by a lawn which has been converted into a football and cricket field, on another side by an Anglican church, and on yet another side by a village and a hill, the community niche, where local boys play their own games or hide to eat the fruit they have stolen—“duncks” (Pig Tails, 7). From the beginning, topography and naming clearly delimit alternative “food” spaces and territories of pleasure that aren’t part of the Empire’s icons.

From 1980 to 1999, the first-person narrator has changed places and stances, moving from being a high school pupil to a more sure-footed apprentice cook and learning subject. In Pig Tails the “I” now meanders around freely within a bigger, less codified time and space frame—where times of slavery commingle with the present as well as the time of myths. The classroom, with its time periods and rituals (Growing Up) is offset by “food” time and related events (Pig Tails). Each day of the week is now redefined in terms of the dish and the specific cooking rituals that go with it, and learning just settles in that new frame. Significantly enough, Pig Tails dispenses with the textual framings of Growing Up and its intrusive italicized quotes borrowed from Latin or British school classics which set the directions of “learning” (Growing Up, 5).
The second memoir returns to and repairs an early writing placed under visible signs of constraints in order to reconfigure the contours of self, memory and narrative. The narrator is now placed in a hybrid location where several viewpoints, registers and genres co-exist and “mix” (Clarke/Birbalsingh, 99). The book is a miscellaneous mix of culinary instructions and data about food, as well as a series of rambling thoughts on language, history and culture. As the pregnancy of the term “travel” suggests, the book follows various culinary routes the better to re-enter individual and collective story and knowledge. The crude account of community gossip on how breadfruit was supposedly introduced to the Caribbean is an example of how Clarke uses food to create incongruous and comical venues into the region’s past (115). The author’s often humorous introspection into local food usage shows his desire to probe the culinary dimension in order to bring unsuspected views on history, literature and science (botany) to the fore. In this process, the conjunction of the mundane and the comic, which prevails in the narrative, is a way of defusing painful memories and of highlighting other creative practices and spaces of learning.

Food and cooking map out alternative territories (“geography of food”, 84) and provide unacknowledged domestic material for the voice to rise and write, or more simply for the subject to apprehend space. In a chapter entitled “Oxtails with Mushrooms and Rice” the narrator gives his culinary instructions and advises the willing reader/cook to brave the harsh winter in Toronto and go all over the city for the best oxtails. To that end he needs to follow an unfamiliar route through the city to obtain the specific ingredients required for the preparation of the dish. This food experience and travel, which include “cross[ing] the threshold” of the “Meat Market”, are also an encounter with various languages other than English—Bajan language, Russian, Chinese, Italian—typifying the unusual ways and postures that cooking may require. Thus, on a humorous mode, the narrator makes it clear to the prospective buyer that he must not hesitate to engage his body and to use sign language if he wants to be understood and get an adequate piece of oxtail (198-200).

The kitchen (often located outside) is an open laboratory in which one can “experiment” and create. The intimacy between cooking and the writer’s labour is ingrained in Clarke’s language—the literary drips into and melts with the ways of the kitchen, “[w]hen you are satisfied; when the contents is smooth; when the colour is a nice yellow or cream; when you can see the little pieces o’ pig tails punctuating the breadfruit, then you know she done. You just made breadfruit cou-cou!” (Pig Tails 123-124).

The repetitions, along with the juxtaposition of semicolons, and the emphasis placed on colour, texture and content demonstrate the long process of making things and how the culinary impregnates writing and vice versa.

Austin Clarke uses the detour of a somewhat uncanny personage to comment on creative issues. The figure of the Barbadian butcher with his unorthodox manner of cutting up meat seems to embody the odd ways the artist must adopt to carve out unchartered material and pursue innovative practices. “I going to depart from custom” (Pig Tails 145) says the narrator, a statement which might allude to his desire to do, like the Bajan butcher, with irregular shapes and improper assemblages, or to find shifting angles, lines or points of entry into his material.
The Kitchen Poets

For Austin Clarke, writing a *culinary narrative* means “trespassing” and setting foot on a territory and within a genre which have been often occupied by female writers. In the introduction to *Pig Tails*, Austin Clarke devotes much space to the family cooks, the “Kitchen Poets” as Barbadian-American writer Paule Marshall once called them, and the “ways” in which they have contributed to his formation as a cook and a storyteller (*Pig Tails*, 12, 18; Clarke 1996, 22-24). Dismissing the constraints of the recipe, the mothers have encouraged the narrator to master the art of improvisation in cooking and to engage a challenging and personal contest with language and books (*Pig Tails*, 3, 10, 157). Hence learning how to cook and to eat with the virtuoso mothers is not just leisure or a domestic activity but an exercise in language and learning, helping the apprentice cook to gain entry into the “inside” stories and the stories from “Away” (89). The book reads as a praise to the mothers and claims a personal textual space in which to acknowledge the solid core that cooking and eating have provided for the beginning storyteller. In the kitchen, the narrator learns to assess the varying effects of the Andersen and Grimm tales he has *read* and the even more frightening mothers’ tales he has *heard* (13). The cooking sphere stands out as a domestic workshop for the ear and the eye in which to evaluate the stories from the canon and the vernacular lore and to fuse the “lil ways of cooking” with one’s ability to construct a personal view on narrative issues – variation, diction, imagery, form and tone.

The mothers’ culinary art and presence help the narrator to “accommodate the possibilities” of cooking and writing (Truong, 28). The long introduction to the book ends with what Clarke alternatively calls, using his mother’s words, “our version” or our “ways of cooking” (41, 246). One of the questions raised by *Pig Tails* is how the culinary can resonate with writing and telling in terms of twists, cadence, phrasing or texture. The narrative flow is frequently interrupted by the doubling or tripling of the same word. These recurring terms, interjections or *patois* words relating (most of the time) to food claim space in Clarke’s sentences reflecting the imprints of the culinary on language. Indeed, the writer seems to mimic the cook’s practice of slitting meat or fish to put seasoning in. It seems that Clarke’s ambition lies there, in the modest ways in which the culinary might offer ways of differently dwelling in words and of showing the “labour” of language. One can wonder then if “Chicken Austentatious”, the whimsical title of one of the mid chapters and the name of a chicken dish revisited by the author, does not ironically and ostentatiously display the writer’s presence and writing enterprise.

What does the writer’s *alterego* see and learn in the kitchen’s domain? One partial response is given by the heavy descriptions of *ingreasements* that go into one single dish, its various modes of preparation and cooking. The overwhelming lexical visibility of “one”, “same”, “identical” refers to the scarcity of food or implements at certain periods in the island of Barbados, but it might also signal the various ways in which the writer must create despite the odds (74-89). He must do with what seems to be identical and cheap and turn it into something innovative, rich and dense for the body, the mind and the soul. As the recurring preposition *into* suggests, the culinary memoir puts to the fore the ongoing transformative process that cooking sets into motion. Hence the abounding culinary “details” which might sound repetitive or anecdotal function as means of
inviting the reader to think about creation in process and to reconsider the contact zones between craft, writing, local knowledge and established writings.

“And a sweet potato is not a sweet potato, like a carrot is a carrot or a rose is a rose. Oh no! Some sweet potatoes are ‘six weeks potatoes’, some are “eight weeks,” and so on” (Pig Tails, 71). Clarke’s ironical borrowing from and distortion of Gertrude Stein’s poem “Sacred Emily” tells about the circuits of food. The sweet potato modifies and displaces “Rose” and “a rose” (“Rose is a rose is a rose”, Stein, 1922). The figures and time references that accompany the sweet potato point to historical and economic restrictions and how such contingencies can shape one’s way of creatively relating to the world. Here Clarke’s use of qualifying words seems to go counter Stein’s dislike for interjections and adjectives. Such revising of Gertrude Stein’s line via the “sweet potato” points to the critical passages and spaces to which the culinary may lead.

Foodstuffs do open up vistas to think about the nature of reading as in Growing Up, when the narrator walks away from the little colonial town to the sea. In order to get access to the seascape the narrator goes through a “natural wicket gate”, a threshold which leads the character to the unripe “sea grapes” and to the raw “sea eggs” that he can now consume despite what the law says. Coming to the sea is a troubling confrontation with books—the narrator walks on remembering his school classics and affiliates himself with the “foot prints” of Crusoe’s Friday and the shoes of Keats’ persona in “A song about myself”, all the while “wondering” about his own awkward positioning on the island and in the world:

I can see footprints on the sands of time. And I stand on the black pipe, sucking rows from the shell of the sea egg. There is no one but the fisherman and me. I am Tom here; or Austin Ardinel Chesterfield Clarke, a Cawmere boy, a running fool. And I think of a line in a poem, written about a boy I do not know and may never meet, on this beach or elsewhere, who stood in his shoes and he wondered, he wondered; he stood in his shoes and he wondered... (Growing Up, 132)

The tension between immobility and running that characterizes the narrator Tom, the emphasis on the foot image, and the ponderous intertextual presence all tell about the self’s deep ambivalence in relation to established knowledge. Pig Tails nuances and alleviates such a predicament. The point is not to eat raw stuff and to walk along with the classics, but to compose with them and move beyond. Pig Tails offers another “food” response and “arrangement” to the narrator’s anxiety in Growing Up. The mango tree provides a local study where one can read school assignments, but it is also a place of departure, an in-between location from which the narrator can elevate and spring onto an imaginary plane once he has absorbed and reshaped the classics into his own thing (Pig Tails 24).

The fish head motif that circulates in the two books also tells about the “gap” separating the narrators—associated as it is with cleanliness and the gutter on one side, and with pleasure and diversity on the other:

The street is empty. And clean. I step from the surface of the melting hot road and stand on the cement slab which is a footpath built over the gutter and running free, with no green moss, and no fish heads. I look down on the hot tar road and see the prints left by my feet. I dip my feet in the water of the gutter, and I feel the relief. And I think of walking on the beach, leaving larger footprints in the sand. I think of Robinson Crusoe whom I read about in books which do not say definitely that Barbados is the island on which he landed. (Growing Up, 129-30)
Fish head. What a bounty! What a delightful feast, with its various tastes, some parts reminding you of beef, some of lamb, some, naturally, of fish. [...] What a culinary microcosm of Wessindian succulence is the fish head! (Pig Tails, 32)

20 Food and cooking encode the local in the heart of words and provide a lexical, symbolic reservoir to “account” for Caribbean “reality” and for the dual self caught between worlds. As such, the “fish head” well resonates with the idea of “duplicity” and “double entendre” that Clarke summons up to refer to Barbados’s creative ways of dealing with historical in-betweeness (Clarke in Caribana, 32-33, Pig Tails, 56).

21 The culinary works as a mode of assessing one’s own voice and positioning vis-à-vis other texts. Clarke’s narrative proposes substitute entries into collective memory and myths. The account of the origin and destinies of the flying fish (92) in Barbados and the Caribbean at large in a chapter entitled “King-Fish and White Rice”, or the passages on how to make black pudding (157) or pepperpot (175), are illustrative. Food is the concrete shifter allowing the narrator to digress and reinvent a burlesque cosmogony for Barbados and the neighbouring islands, to ponder on contemporary issues of origin and citizenship. Indeed, the “king-fish” tale particularly lifts the veil over the bonds as well as the tensions among the islands. Austin Clarke’s probing food is to be read along with the larger constellation of works by a number of Caribbean writers who, in their respective ways, draw on the culinary and food images to address issues of coming to and surviving in writing, thus mapping out a shared imaginative landscape.

Pan, can, pot and tot

22 One of the most emblematic objects in Pig Tails is the “can”, also referred to as “tin can”, “tot”, or “buck pot” (16). This item, which has been recycled and deviated from its initial function (oil or kerosene can), enters the kitchen sphere and literally becomes a trademark (97). The tot is placed at the centre of three big stones arranged in a triangle that serve as a stove. This versatile utensil also finds its way into the musical field becoming a steel pan in Caribbean steelbands (Shange, 62, 65). Much can be made in this one container despite economic restrictions. As such, it epitomizes the multiple variations and innovations generated by cooking. The can and its contents may emblematize a Caribbean text, which has often been defined as being hybrid, irregular, imported or “borrowed”, placed as it were in the midst of diverse and conflicting influences and demands (Naipaul 2000, 36; Benitez-Rojo, 9-11). It encapsulates the ways of writers for whom borrowing and recycling are absolute imperatives to write on (Pig Tails, 105).

23 Recycling or rather accommodating oneself to “leavings or left-overs” is a common image in Pig Tails as the vignette about the flour bag imported from Canada shows (47). The flour bag, once bleached after a long local process, is transformed “into” a brand “new” cricket shirt. The name “Canada” now erased, the “white” colour seems to be very pure, but this is all elusive since the blue colour can unexpectedly come out and bring shame to the cricketer. This light story from “old times” no longer prevails as the narrator humorously puts it, but it illustrates the unpredictable destinies of food and its branching out in various domains—music, sports, literacy and vernacular usage (89). Far from V.S. Naipaul’s anguished tone in The Middle Passage, Clarke uses comic relief in the flour bag episode to figure the turmoil of the Caribbean artist who must create with “borrowed” tools (Naipaul 1960, 68-69).
The grammatical and often abrupt shift in pronouns to designate the narrative voices ("I", "We", "s/he") or to refer to food itself ("it", "she") signals the power of the culinary to modify postures and positions. *Pig Tails* oscillates between the imperative mode of the recipe, the questioning mode of the storyteller convening the audience to participate, the disruptive patois interjection “bram”, and the more detached tone of the essayist. In addition, the numerous similes turning food into human beings or vice versa embody the interchangeable mutations that food brings about—“People began flowing out of houses, alleys and lanes like peas spilling across a linoleum floor” (43).

*Pig Tails* re-explores some of the routes of foodstuffs before, during and after the *Middle Passage*, and brings to the fore the substitutes that the slaves and their descendants had to devise (89-90). The purpose, however, is not simply to describe the eating habits of slaves and Barbadians, but to probe the ways in which the “migration of subjects” as Carole Boyce Davies would have it, of foodstuffs and other items (books, clothes, soap) has shaped the Caribbean people, their creativity and their response to language and art.

Describing the freight cargo bringing imports to the island, the narrative voice enumerates pell-mell a list of goods in which books and foodstuffs collude and cohabit in a disorderly manner. Food and “knowledge” are irreverently aligned next one another; the cargo thus images the control that “Away” may exert on the islanders through food and books of all sorts, but the islanders have their own local ways of assimilating, transforming or discarding what is imported. Hence the consuming process becomes a form of creation as well as a process of resistance as the islanders typically un-name and rename foreign food and fruit, establishing their own ranking and classification of food and showing some measure of empowerment through the practice of word formation (*Pig Tails*,15; *Growing Up*,29; Mühleisen, 71-73).

Questions of travel and transportation permeate the whole of *Pig Tail*—circulation within the island/s and to and from the island/s. The travels of the foodstuffs that are imported, exported, transformed or consumed are embedded in every little detail. Chapter one, entitled “Bakes”, starts with the difficult ascent of a mule going up the hill carrying a huge load of cheap imports. The painful progression of the mule is rendered in one long sentence hovering between standard and vernacular language as the shifts from “high price” to “lil price” reveal (42-43). The chapter then expands on “bakes”, i.e. the delicacy flour cakes family cooks make, and on how such poor quality flour is processed and magnified in the kitchen, a concrete sign of the possibilities of Barbadian repertoire and the cook/artist (*Pig Tails*, 44-45).

Following the “idiosyncracies in food” (Toklas, 1) and the family cooks of his youth who could do wonder with “remains”, Austin Clarke tells about cooking, tasting, eating, all those practices that prevail in everyday practice and nurture creativity. Despite its light, sometimes far-fetched tone, this is a book commenting on artistic “labour” and “travail” (6), on the relevance of local subject matter and material (Clarke, *Caribana*, 20). Just as writer Kamau Brathwaite argues, he has been able to find the poetic rhythm he needed by borrowing from the ways of the market women walking at the end of the parade, distorting the official rhythm of the band march—“overriding the riddim” doing their own side steps. Austin Clarke finds creative side ways in the not so “strict” ways of cooking of Barbadian cuisine (*Brathwaite*, 5-6; *Pig Tails*,141).

In a chapter devoted to plantation life, Austin Clarke writes about slave “piracy”, highlighting the virtuosity and know-how of slaves during the stealing process which required perfect knowledge of the lay of the master’s field and plants. One is tempted to
establish a bond with the figure of the writer, an ex-colonized subject, an artist who, by necessity, has had to borrow, and “copy” colonial texts, and to negotiate with vernacular and imported languages (Pig Tails,89-90; Growing Up, 125). Reflecting back on his youth, the narrator twice qualifies himself as a “thief” as he tries to “steal” food from the mothers’ pot (Pig Tails,15, 85). Interestingly enough though, the textual processing at work shows the arrangements that come into play in Clarke’s culinary narrative. As with the figure of Crusoe’s Friday, which is erased and modified into something else, Pig Tails now lays the emphasis on the “Friday night thief”, the one slave thief who had to excel in the art of piracy because of the “dark-dark-dark” of Friday nights (70).

“Talk” and “conversation” come up quite often in a book where the narrative voice frequently addresses an unnamed addressee “you”, as if the memoir were a kind of hosting space in which everyone could place one’s own voice or make additional remarks (Pig Tails 87). Clarke’s memoir is not just a “word with the cook” as Alice B. Toklas has it (Toklas, 1) but a conversational space (41) that the storyteller-cook expands on to rethink the issues of what comes into creation (Clarke in Caribana, 26; Theophano, 12). The culinary memoir ultimately emerges as a common locale and a meeting-place where cooks of all sorts, laymen, professionals, artists and readers can gather, share local knowledge and knowledge across the boundaries within a hybrid prose meant to be “in motion” (Clarke/Birbalsingh, 90; Walcott 1997, 76).

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BIBLIOGRAPHIE


NOTES

1. Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack (1980) and Pig Tails ’n Breadfruit – Rituals of Slave Food: A Barbadian Memoir (1999). The following abbreviations will be used to refer to these books: Growing Up and Pig Tails. Austin Clarke is a fiction writer from Barbados. He emigrated to Canada in 1955.

2. See Tobias Döring and the current tendency to explore food as ordinary, domestic material to comment on issues of knowledge and artistic creation.

3. The last chapter is slightly nostalgic and devoted to the narrator’s mother. It is entitled “Frozen in Time” in reference to times gone by and, in line with the culinary touch, it is also probably ironical, alluding to the possibility to keep everything in the freezer.

4. The choice of breadfruit is not incidental. It was one of the plants transported on William Bligh’s the Bounty ship, famous for its crew mutiny on the way back from Tahiti, an event that Pig Tails re-appropriates (113-14). Also Pig Tails alludes in many places to Derek Walcott’s œuvre and namely his poetry collection The Bounty. According to Allsop “breadfruit swapper” refers to a person of very low social status in Barbados.

5. Breadfruit can be cooked in countless ways, which is in line with the versatile narrator of Pig Tails.

6. In Growing Up one portion of the village is referred to as “St Matthias Gap” (127).

7. The following passage concerning “pork chops” is indicative of the differences between the moulds and formats of “Away”, as opposed to what the narrator has experienced in Barbados: “I am always puzzled and intrigued when I buy pork chops in North American supermarkets. All the pork chops in the same package are almost identical in shape and size, as is they came from the same mould. Not the pork chops in Barbados, not the ones cut by the neighborhood `butcher’” (Pig Tails, 130).

8. “Duncks” also spelled “dunk” is a local Barbadian appellation for jujube also called “crabapple” or “coolie plum” on other islands (Davidson, 113, 118).

9. Food and games have become the standard ways of measuring time in Pig Tails, whereas school time is relegated in the margin as the use of the dash might suggest: “This was a time of playing all day—even in school where I was bright. A time of games. And in between playing games, during the day and in the early evening, it was a time to be summoned by the high-pitched voice of an aunt: ‘Food!’” (Pig Tails, 13).


11. The narrator uses terms like “aesthetics of food” (14) and a number of others related to literacy—“epitome”, “version”, “form”, “comma”, “punctuate” … On the intimacy between cooking, writing and the body, see Maryline Desbiolles, La seiche, p. 34. On food and identity, see what Smart-Grosvenor says about her recipe for “cou cou or turn corn”: “Cynthia serves the steamed cod with something she calls turn corn or cou cou. Depends if she feels like being from Boston or Barbados” (Smart-Grosvenor, 121).

12. “The butcher is still silent and methodical. He starts cutting up the flesh into pieces, hacking off any part of the pig in any way, according to whim and fancy, and to suit the desire of the customers. He will cut up the pig to the last bone to suit any impulse, and therefore not in the anatomically strict manner in which butchers in Canada and Amurca, graduates of some authorized pig-butchering course who follow a diagram, are schooled to do.

When Gertrude becomes strong enough to face the blood and entrails and the transformation of her ‘pet’, the butcher has already chopped off the legs, the head is severed from the rest of the body, and the blood is caught in a pail” (Pig Tails, 141).
Gertrude’s figure, who is present throughout the chapter, “Killing a Pig to Make Pork Chops with Onions and Sweet Peppers”, stands as a foil to the butcher. Earlier in the book, a line is borrowed from Gertrude Stein (to be discussed later) and it seems that the subsequent use of the name “Gertrude” to refer to a figure who is not in line with the butcher’s and the narrator’s ways is significant. The frequent use of the term “geography” in Clarke’s memoir also corroborates the intertextual nod to Stein. Vertamae Smart-Grosvenor makes a passing reference to Stein’s apartment in her cookbook (Smart Grosvenor, 61).

13. See P. Marshall, V. Smart-Grosvenor, N. Shange, and A. Toklas. Paule Levy (University of Versailles–St-Quentin) aptly referred me to a novel by Monique Truong, The Book of Salt, which fictionalizes the life of one Gertrude Stein’s cooks when I presented part of this paper at the University of Versailles–St-Quentin for the conference entitled “Mémoires des Amériques. Journaux intimes, correspondances, récits de vie. XVIIe–XXe siècles” (Prof. A.M. Brenot, P. Lévy and A. Savin, organizers).


16. Here are some of the words which “punctuate” Clarke’s syntax—“bun-bun”, “fish, fish here!”, “cook sweet-sweet-sweet”, “good-good”, “clean-clean-clean”.


18. On the links between walking and creating, see Thierry Davila, Marcher, créer (2002).

19. The “sea grapes” motif is probably an allusion to Derek Walcott’s poem, “Sea Grapes”, which ends with a qualifying line about the classics, “The classics can console. But not enough.”

20. See Condé, Chamoiseau, Agard, d’Aguiar, Senior among others. Austin Clarke makes explicit reference to the works of Guayanese writers Jan Carew, Wilson Harris, Fred D’Aguiar and Paule Marshall (Pig Tails,175). See also Meredith M. Gadsby on the pregnancy of the food motif in Caribbean women writers’ works.

21. On the poetic use of pan, see John Agard, “Pan Recipe” in Man to Pan, 118.

22. Austin Clarke uses the image of the “piranha” and the “parasite” to define storytellers (Clarke in Caribana, 27). I am particularly indebted to Michel Fabre’s generosity here; he offered this Caribana issue to me a couple of years ago when I was working on a paper on Caribbean literature.

23. On the ways in which food fuels word formation and creation, see Mühleisen, 71-88; Clarke in Caribana, 22-23; Pig Tails, 17. Many thanks to Jennifer Merchant for her time and critical remarks.