

**Think Piece: Jessie Hartland Presents a Culinary Icon in *Bon Appétit!*
*The Delicious Life of Julia Child***

Hartland, Jessie. *Bon Appétit! The Delicious Life of Julia Child*. New York: Schwartz and Wade Books, 2012.

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In her article “As Worthless as Savorless Salt? Teaching Children to Cook, Clean and (Often-times) Conform,” Jan Longone asks, “How do we in America teach our children about cooking, about food and the pleasures of the table? How do we transmit our culinary heritage?” (104). *Bon Appétit! The Delicious Life of Julia Child* reminds me of early domestic instruction books for children like *Six Little Cooks: or, Aunt Jane’s Cooking Class* (1877) or *Cooking Without Mother’s Help: A Story Cook Book for Beginners* (1920), books that taught girls autonomy through the mastery of recipes, cooking techniques, and the kitchen—an autonomy that allowed girls to preserve their family’s culinary heritage. Julia Child came from a family that didn’t have a culinary tradition. Instead, through her immense energy, imagination, dedication, and skills, Julia Child mastered a much larger heritage, French cooking, and passed it on to American culture, which still reverberates with its impact as evidenced through the ever-growing popularity of the Food Network.

Bon Appétit captures the outsized accomplishments of Julia Child by foregrounding the complexities and complications of her achievements, and it is this joy of mastery and the act of mastering that Jessie Hartland clearly finds most meaningful and worthy of recording and illustrating. The endpapers are wonderfully busy with simple pen and ink drawings, mostly of food and kitchen utensils but also other iconic images (the Eiffel Tower, a television, a romantic heart). The images are labeled in English (front) and French (back), and they function as a

montage. Their busyness is a fundamental trait of the entire book, a life crowded with signal experiences. Hartland begins drawing and telling Child's life as a spunky girl story. The book hits its stride, though, at the point when Julia (née McWilliams) and Paul Child are transferred to China and "try new restaurants together":

Paul: They have fish-head soup, ox tongue with tripe, snails, frogs, pig intestine, jellyfish with fish belly, pigs' ears with fish roe ...

Julia: Let's order it all! I'm hungry! (unpaged)

After this panel, food and its accoutrements (kitchen utensils, kitchens, and restaurants) come to fill the pages of the book, a kind of visual and narrative gourmandism. Hartland also pulls no punches for the sake of a limited American palate. Rather, she features a full panoply of what Julia Child ate and prepared, although she does make fun of adult squeamishness in one panel when editors of a publishing house are reviewing (and reject) an early draft of what was to become *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*:

The recipes are TOO complicated. Like the one for pressed duck: one needs a duck that was suffocated, not decapitated?

What if you can't find one?

You are supposed to use a decapitated one and substitute fresh pig's blood. Who's going to buy this? (unpaged)

Hartland clearly imagines that the audience for this book, child or adult, is open to, or at least capable of, appreciating the same exploratory nature that motivated Julia Child, a living tradition of gourmandism that acts as counterweight to the industrial food ways Child herself was combating.

In a book that has more fascinating aspects than I can touch on here (like its use of multiple languages: English, French, German, Norwegian), I want to focus on two more highlights. First, in a two page spread, Hartland adapts one of Child's most complicated recipes from *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, for a galantine, transforming it into thirty-two discrete steps, illustrated in small comic-book style boxes, sixteen to a page. Hartland, once again, does not pull punches, including in the recipe minced calf's udders and pickled tongue. More importantly, the boxes are a working recipe, following *Mastering* closely. Why include such a complex recipe, so meticulously detailed, in a picture book? Why not simply reference the galantine as a complex

recipe? Why reproduce that recipe in picture book form? It is so readers, in turn, can reproduce it themselves, exploring its complexities. Second, Hartland dedicates thirteen pages to the writing, revising, editing, submitting, and publication of *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. No part of Julia Child's life garners more attention (the PBS show *The French Chef*, for which Child is most famous, gets only five pages). Thus, for a portion of the book, the focus shifts from food and food preparation to writing about food as a parallel process of preparation. Here, Hartland also features the cooperative process—the greater community of people (friends, editors, agent, and husband)—involved in producing the book. Again, Hartland foregrounds difficulties and complications, showing the steps to the finished product rather than just the finished product itself, but this time with an array of people involved in the steps.

Perhaps it is the emphasis on steps and stages that makes this such a successful biography. In retrospect, a complex recipe metaphorically embodies a complex life. Finally, Hartland included a not-particularly-simple recipe for crêpes for the young reader, extending Julia Child's heritage through an invitation to cook, doing what French philosopher Luce Giard calls "doing-cooking," promoting a creative, communal aesthetic that focuses on the joy of food preparation with others.

Works Cited

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