

Food as a Literary Device in Lucy Diamond's *The Beach Café*

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Introduction

“There is no sincerer love than the love of food”, said George Bernard Shaw. It is true that food is not just something that people and animals eat for survival. It, in fact, binds a society or a culture together. It is closely related with the harmonious existence of various people, bringing them under the same taste preference.

Eating a wide variety of healthy foods promotes good health and helps us to protect against diseases. It has been given a very significant place in our lives because it is our primary requirement and basic need. Thus, the importance of food is incontestable. Yet, because it is so close and obvious, we often fail to pay attention to it. Food, in many cultures, brings people together and connects them on multiple different levels. For example, the tradition of eating with the family around the table represents togetherness with one another. Therefore, food itself could symbolize something greater than what it is. Many contemporary dietary practices are shaped not only by culture, but also by religious beliefs. Across the world, people make the choice to eat or avoid certain foods based on the laws of these beliefs, leading to a vast collection of fascinating, culturally and theologically significant foods.

This very same food often appears in literature and it cannot be dismissed as something trivial. The tea-party in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1866) is clearly uncivilized, but lets the protagonist come to terms with the new world. Similarly, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) describes the gathering and cooking of the food in anticipation of a party and how the party becomes the cause of the family's 'fall from grace'. Hence, themes related to food are common among all types of writing. The writers use food and eating to symbolize issues of acceptance, resistance, and preservation of culture, as well as memory, emotions, history, relationships, power, and consumption.

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Food plays an important role in our lives, not only in the physiological, but also in a psychological sense. Emotions are also closely connected to our eating habits. Food has been a constant source of inspiration in literature, hence portraying human emotions vividly through parties, dinners and feasts. In this sense, it is interesting to examine a literary work regarding the element of

food involved in it. *The Beach Cafe* (2011) is a similar work, revolving around food, which has the aroma and taste of British beach side dishes.

Written by Lucy Diamond, the novel is about Evie Flynn who inherits a cafe on the Carrawen Bay in Cornwall. The first-person narrative begins with how Evie is considered as the 'black sheep' in her family. She is a wild spirit and fails to keep up to the expectations of her family. Her sisters are married and settled with kids, whereas Evie still struggles to carry on with any job. When her aunt, Jo, passes away, she inherits her cafe. She tries to manage her career in Oxford as well as the cafe. Finally, she decides to follow her heart and runs the cafe. Though she has to labour in the beginning, she gets to bring the whole village community together through her cafe and eventually, makes it up to her parents.

When Evie's family comes to know of the accidental death of Jo, they are grief stricken. In association with the tragedy, the family drinks to commemorate Jo. This is a custom seen in many cultures when death strikes. When Evie comes to know that her aunt has left her the beach side cafe, she is dumbstruck, just like her family. Her sisters suggest her to put it on the market, but she is doubtful. Her career, meanwhile, goes downhill. She hates her superior, who is a pervert, and her ungrateful colleagues. Her only solace is an occasional beer with her best friend, Amber. Here, the drink serves as a stress remover. Moreover, she loves the time being spend with Saul, her live in partner's son. They enjoy reading sessions with food. It is a way by which she relives her childhood and enjoys the company of the kid.

Once Evie quits from her job, she heads to Cornwall. She finds the cafe in a state of degeneration. The chef, Carl, is selfish and does not care about the cafe, while the other two staff are not up to the mark. While Saffron steals food for her buddies, Seb is a novice in table service. Evie badly needs a reviving coffee to lift her up but is disappointed with the café. She decides to cook for the café. Her scones, initially, are disasters. But, the third batch seems to be yummy. She becomes confident as she feels that she can bring up the café. However, she bakes a carrot cake forgetting to have any icing at home. This shows how inexperienced she is with cooking. She manages to get hold of some icing before bringing the cake to the café, but it is accidently dropped down by Seb. Evie is much disheartened as not even she could have a taste of the cake. She has to be the chef and waitress when her staff is late. Her bacon rolls are not up to the mark, though she manages to keep smiling at her customers.

Evie finds running the café a nightmare. The rumour that she is going to sell the place is heard by her when Ed, a newbie to the village, comes to the café. She serves him bacon rolls and he is quite specific with the toasting and right amount of butter. The crispy looking rolls taste better than her previous ones and are appreciated by him. She tries to bring more variety into the menu much to the displeasure of Carl. Once she is invited to her home by Annie, Jo's friend, she gets to know more about the village people. Here, she tastes Annie's chocolate cake with hazelnut and chocolate icing. The sweetness of chocolate, the crunch of the hazelnut and the fluffiness of the sponge cake hit her taste buds, leading her to recruit Annie as the cake maker of the café. We see how tasty food can

influence people in taking right decisions. This right decision to have Annie on board makes the café to attract more people, serving them the true taste of sundry cakes and cookies.

Evie returns to Oxford as Matthew, her live in partner, and Saul beckon her. She joins a pharmaceutical company, but it never works out. She realises with a broken heart that Matthew has accustomed to a life without her. More sadness creeps into her life as her whole family, including Matthew, pushes her to sell the café. She decides to run the café and break away from Matthew, but her love for Saul makes her keep mum about this. The final nail in her coffin is Matthew's decision to break up. She is heartbroken and is nursed back by a slab of Dairy Milk from Amber. Chocolate, especially the dark variety, is known to be a good stress reliever. It is found to keep Cortisol, the stress inducing hormone, at bay. Evie's brunches and lunches with her friend let her introspect. She tries to find her true self in these occasions. This is where food acts as a catalyst in looking into oneself. To her dismay, she finds that Carl has quitted without giving her any notice and the café has been closed. Annie's cakes lie as sole survivors in the deserted café. She, then, gears up to her café with Amber as her sidekick.

Evie and Amber try hard to run the café, after firing a thieving Saffron. Evie, later, meets Ryan, her love from the past, whom she had met in her teens while waitressing at Jo's. It was a stable one with the delish pastries and mellowness of flapjacks. It is interesting to note that she had met Matthew too over food. Things become more compelling when she finds that Ed is a chef. He fills in Carl's position and cooks delicious dishes for the customers. Annie's cakes return with more complaisance, while Rachel and Louise come in as the new staff. Evie gets interested in cooking and baking more than ever with Ed by her side. Her true love blooms amidst creamy coffees and toffee crunch ice creams. The café turns to be a place for Jamie's painting exhibition and where the book group meets as does the local band. Visual treat, music and literature blend in with food. It begins to hold a regular "girls' night in" for the women of Carrawen Bay.

Once Evie and Ed break up, the food loses its magic touch. Her grief takes a toll on her cooking as Ed leaves the café. To spice up the tragedy, the café is damaged in a heavy storm and the ceiling falls down. A disheartened Evie cheers up with the whole village working tirelessly to resurrect the café. Ed returns and the couple mend things. They serve Cornish pasties and sandwiches to the village people as they bring back the café within a short time.

Conclusion

The novel, *The Beach Café*, is all about Evie Flynn and her self-realisation through food. The woman who knew nothing about the intricacies of food was considered as a failure. But, as she learns to survive in the café, she becomes able even to be a chef. The food that she serves undergo a lot of transformations. When she has Carl as her chef, the dishes are not that best. He is interested only in preparing curries and spicy food, only to serve his poker friends. With Ed, things change. A wide variety of dishes by Ed attract tourists as well as the locals. Wendy comes in as a temp chef adding a wildness and vigour to the café.

Rachel and Leah become waitresses and fall in love with the food. Phoebe, a run-away kid, is taken under Evie's wings. The teen helps her in ways she could in managing the café. She reunites with her parents and friends in the shelter of the café. It is uplifting to see the girl becoming considerate with hot chocolates and cheese toasties. Florence, an old widow, apprehends peace at the café and makes new friends over Victoria sponge. Jamie gets to exhibit his paintings and earn money through the café, while it becomes a centre for the book club, local band and women.

Evie and the café were disliked in the beginning, but once good food rolls out people become affectionate. Here, food brings in a good change among the villagers. It brings them together when adversity dawns. They learn to forget and forgive over food. It is really lovely to see the warmth of fellow-feeling emerging slowly. Food encompasses music, paintings and literature, here. Art reflects through food and it enhances people's connection with food. Loneliness disappears with palatable food and friendship flowers. It becomes not merely a means of employment for Rachel and Leah, but also something that brings in love and life. Hence, food is a great element in modifying people and stories.

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