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THE SEMANTIC ASPECT OF FOOD AS PUNISHMENT AND COMFORT IN THE WORKS BY L. CARROLL, CH. DICKENS AND P. TRAVER

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with the semantic aspect of food functioning as punishment/reward and lovelessness/comfort in the English literature of the XIX and early XX centuries in the works by L. Carroll, Ch. Dickens and P. Travers. The research investigates the food motif as a means to reflect eating traditions of a particular historic period and a social marker for the protagonists. The author explores how the writers use eating habits to express acceptance, resistance, emotional affection, taboo behaviour, power and celebration traditions. It is suggested that food imagery is positively related to cultural identity which includes various issues from social position to gender issues. It is shown that the presentation of food in literature can mirror the writers' own preferences allowing them to tap on their personal experience in the works, thus giving "food" for bibliographers. Recent literary culinary studies have stimulated the development of gastronomic tours on the pages of the renowned writers, the so-called food trails, and theme fests such as the Great Dickens Christmas Fair and Victorian Holiday Party or Whitby's White Rabbit Trail as part of niche gastronomic tourism in Great Britain. So, the present interdisciplinary research may be of great interest not only for philologists but also for students specializing in tourism and country studies and the general public.

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Introduction.

The relevance of the research is determined by the importance of the coverage of classical fiction related to such an area of human life as gastronomy, the study of which gives an idea of the English culture and social relations of the XIX and early XX centuries. The functions of culinary details are quite varied. *The research aim* is to examine gastronomic images and identify the functions of food codes as punishment/lovelessness and comfort/love in the works by Lewis Carroll, Charles Dickens and Pamela Travers, which serve *the research material*. The article explores food as a recurring motif of punishment in the absence of love. Food also plays the function of comfort and love when it represents the expression of grace to those in need. It also symbolizes power manifested through social relations.

Materials and Methods.

The object of the study is the scientific works of researchers of the XX-XXI centuries on the English literature such as N. Anderson, P. Hunt, G. Lathey, A. Hogarth, food historians A. Broomfield and R. Foss and present gastronomic literature-related trails. The following *methods* are used in the work: interpretive analysis, comparative analysis of original and translated texts and introspection. *The hypothesis of the study* is that gastronomic tastes and tendencies are not only a means of revealing the characters and a "tool" for symbolizing the fictional images but also a reflection of the author's idea of

the everyday life and traditions of the whole epoch. Andrea Broomfield, a food historian, notes: "The function of food in literature is certainly symbolic. Because we are what we eat. With food, as a rule, we either retell the story in one way or another or organise the story" [1, p. 2]. Food becomes an artistic detail. English food has a bad reputation, completely undeserved but well-established. But the English cannot be denied an interest in food, and this keen interest is also peculiar to all English literature. We don't just find out how and what the characters ate; food is often a way for them to assert themselves, to climb the social ladder, to console some and humiliate others. Sometimes food even acts as an instrument of repression or a comforting pill. Food codes are an important structural component of a literary text and its cultural meaning system. Culinary semiotics makes it possible to discover social signs in each dish, which together form a socio-cultural system that reveals the specifics of the national mentality, to discover new semantic layers, to understand the cultural, historical and aesthetic features of the author's artistic world.

Results.

In Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) [1], food is commonly accentuated, most of the time in a negative connotation. The main character Alice finds herself at a Mad-Tea Party, where one of the characters, the Dormouse, begins to tell her the tale of the three sisters who lived in a well. Naturally, the first question Alice asks is, "What did they eat?" A question typical of an English girl. The answer that Dormouse gives sounds very different in different translations [3, p. 24; 4, p. 39; 5, p. 82] (Table 1).

Table 1. Parallel Ukrainian translation of an extract from Chapter 7, *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll.

by Halyna Bushyna (1960)	by Valentyn Kornienko (2001)	by Volodymyr Panchenko (2007)
<p>— <i>А як же вони там жили?</i> — <i>запитала Аліса, яку завжди дуже цікавили питання їжі та питва.</i></p> <p>— <i>Вони їли патоку,</i> — <i>сказав Вовчок, подумавши хвилину чи дві.</i></p> <p>— <i>Це неможливо, розумієте,</i> — <i>дуже ввічливо заперчила Аліса,</i> — <i>вони б захворіли.</i></p> <p>— <i>Вони й були хворі,</i> — <i>промовив Вовчок,</i> — <i>дуже хворі.</i></p>	<p>— <i>І що вони там їли?</i> — <i>запитала Аліса, яку завжди цікавили проблеми харчування.</i></p> <p>— <i>Мелясу,</i> — <i>сказав Сонько,</i> — <i>хвилину подумавши.</i></p> <p>— <i>Не могло такого бути,</i> — <i>лагідно зауважила Аліса,</i> — <i>адже вони всі були б недужі.</i></p> <p>— <i>А вони й були недужі,</i> — <i>сказав Сонько.</i> — <i>Дуже недужі...</i></p>	<p>— <i>А що ж вони там їли?</i> — <i>спитала Аліса: їй завжди було цікаво, що люди їдять або п'ють.</i></p> <p>— <i>Патоку їли,</i> — <i>відповів Вовчок, хвилини зо дві подумавши.</i></p> <p>— <i>Хіба це можливо?</i> — <i>зауважила Аліса.</i> — <i>Вони б давно захворіли!</i></p> <p>— <i>А вони й були хворі,</i> — <i>пояснив Вовчок.</i> — <i>Дуже хворі!</i></p>

In the translations by renowned Soviet literary scholars, children's English literature translators and writers, we encounter the food name rendered as 'кисель' by Nina Demurova (1978), 'сироп' by Boris Zakhoder (1972), 'желе' by Leonid Yakhnin (1991) [6].

Where do these discrepancies come from? In the original, the sisters are doomed to eat **treacle** [2, p. 118]. Strictly speaking, it is very thick and sweet syrup. Here is not just a pun but also an inside joke. By treacle, Carroll referred to a particular well at St Margaret's Church in the village of Binsey,

Oxfordshire, a fascinating part of local lore and history. The story of the well is steeped in myth and legend, but there are some historical facts to back it up. According to legend, the well gained its name because it was believed that treacle, a sweet syrup made from molasses, flowed from the ground here. The story goes that the treacle was a gift from God, intended to heal the sick and wounded. The legend of the Treacle Well is thought to have originated in the Middle Ages. At this time, St. Margaret's Church was a popular pilgrimage site, and the well was believed to have healing properties. The church was dedicated to St. Margaret of Antioch, a patron saint of childbirth and pregnant women, and it is thought that the well may have been associated with her healing powers. Over the years, the story of the Treacle Well became more elaborate. According to another story, the well is dedicated to St. Frideswide, the patron saint of Oxford, whose prayers are said to have brought forth healing waters which cure blindness. Despite the fanciful stories that have grown up around the Treacle Well, there is some evidence to suggest that it was indeed an important source of healing water. In the 19th century, a chemical analysis of the well water found that it contained high levels of minerals that were believed to have therapeutic properties. One of the obsolete meanings of treacle is 'antidote, potion, remedy'. That's Carroll's pun: Treacle Well is both a healing well and a molasses/sugar syrup well. Today, the Treacle Well remains a popular attraction for visitors to St. Margaret's Church. Although the well is no longer in use for drinking water, visitors can still see the well itself and the plaque on the nearby wall which reads: "The treacle well, famous in Lewis Carroll's 'Alice in Wonderland', is to be found within the grounds of St. Margaret's Church. The well was a source of healing waters and inspiration for the author."

It must be said that Lewis Carroll (Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) himself was very particular about food. He taught mathematics at the Christ Church College, Oxford, and lived there – at that time many of the teachers lived at the college, and everyone ate together at a big table in the refectory. The colleges had very good food, and Christ Church was one of the wealthiest colleges: you can still see the old kitchen there with three huge hearths where meat was cooked for students and teachers. Teachers could also invite guests into their rooms, and Carroll was very fond of inviting guests. As a methodical-to a point of madness-man, he wrote down everything they ate each time so that the next time they did not serve the same thing. Or if a guest liked something very much, on the contrary, so that they could be treated to it again.

There's a character in *Alice in Wonderland*, the White Knight, who keeps saying, 'It's an invention of my own' – such an ironic self-portrait. Carroll was a great innovator. And for his dinners, he invented a new way of seating guests. In those days, seating arrangements were a very serious undertaking: never a husband and wife sat side by side, each man had to lead the lady to the table in a specific order. This was usually done by placing name cards on the table and the host telling each gentleman which lady he was leading to the table. Carroll came up with a way to rationalise this. He would give each guest a seating chart indicating which couples were going to the table together.

As for the word *treacle*, it sounded terrifying to an English child. The fact is that brimstone (sulfur) has been considered a universal healing remedy since the 17th century, and children were given brimstone mixed with treacle to improve their health and punish them at the same time. This idea – combining punishment with benefit – was very popular in the Victorian era. Another example was a special posture stick, mainly for girls. It was placed under the arms of the shoulder blades. It was painful and uncomfortable, but it also taught humility and corrected posture. Just like with brimstone and treacle: useful and educating at the same time.

English literature touches on this sad subject more than once. Charles Dickens, in his novel *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* (1839), Chapter 8, gives the children at Mr Squeers' dreadful school just brimstone and treacle. The mixture of brimstone and treacle was thought to have positive medicinal effects and is mentioned in Charles Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby* as a remedy for hunger. And Mr Squeers' wife explains the custom in this way [7, p. 103]:

They have the brimstone and treacle, partly because if they hadn't something or other in the way of medicine they'd be always ailing and giving a world of trouble, and partly because it spoils their appetites and comes cheaper than breakfast and dinner. So, it does them good and us good at the same time, and that's fair enough I'm sure.

This potion was disgusting to the point that there was a real riot in the school, which Dickens enjoys describing. When Mrs Squeers enters with a bowl of brimstone and treacle and a spoonful of this remedy, the pupils attack her and force her to eat the treacle herself [7, p. 939]:

Before that estimable lady could recover herself, or offer the slightest retaliation, she was forced into a kneeling posture by a crowd of shouting tormentors, and compelled to swallow a spoonful of the odious mixture, rendered more than usually savoury by the immersion in the bowl of Master Wackford's head...

It is clear that Dickens is entirely on the side of the pupils, because already in the days of Carroll and Dickens in the XIX century, the treatment of brimstone and treacle was generally considered outdated, and the punishment was cruel.

But despite the condemnation, we encounter brimstone and treacle in the XX literature as well. In *Mary Poppins* (1934) by Pamela Travers [8], Banks's childhood governess, Miss Andrew, otherwise known as the Holy Terror, appears. She sees that the children are completely out of hand, not like in her day, when children were to be seen but not heard. She applies her cruel methods of raising children, primarily punishing them with a tonic of her making called "Brimstone and Treacle". After Mary Poppins returns and confronts the wicked nanny. During the encounter, she frees a caged bird and both figuratively and literally gives Miss Andrew a taste of her own medicine before locking her into an oversized birdcage that goes "down below".

The most famous scene in Charles Dickens's novel *Oliver Twist* (1838) also has to do with bad food and rebellion. It takes place in a workhouse. Workhouses were places where poor homeless people worked, were fed and housed in return. The implementation of "The Poor Law Amendment Act" in 1834 aimed to transform workhouses into a means of discouraging idleness. The prevailing belief was that poverty resulted from laziness, and that people needed to be punished for this, hence the need for workhouses to serve as a deterrent. So, people in workhouses were deliberately treated harshly and the workhouses were more like prisons where beggars were forcibly placed and given very meagre food. In his novel *Oliver Twist*, Charles Dickens depicted the appalling circumstances of the workhouses in the 19th century in a truthful and authentic manner. A child of the parish "had contrived to exist upon the smallest possible portion of the weakest possible food", and in most cases "it sickened from want and cold, or fell into the fire from neglect, or got half-smothered by accident; in any one of which cases, the miserable little being was usually summoned into another world" [9, p.3]. Here Dickens shows how children were starved, mistreated, inappropriately dressed, and neglected. His statement also claims that many times, the children died as a result of the poor environment. Perhaps, the most striking scene in the workhouse is the episode when little Oliver Twist asks for a refill [10]. In the workhouse, the boys are given a porridge-like mixture that was thinned down with milk or water and boiled. One of the boys desperate with hunger hints darkly to his companions, that unless he has another basin of gruel per diem, he is afraid he might some night eat his bedroom neighbour, who happens to be a weak youth of tender age. Suddenly Oliver asks for more. It's described like this:

'Please, sir, I want some more.'

The master was a fat, healthy man; but he turned very pale. He gazed in stupified astonishment on the small rebel for some seconds, and then clung for support to the copper. The assistants were paralysed with wonder; the boys with fear.

'What!' said the master at length, in a faint voice.

'Please, sir,' replied Oliver, 'I want some more.'

The master aimed a blow at Oliver's head with the ladle; pinioned him in his arm; and shrieked aloud for the beadle.

For nearly two centuries, readers have been moved by this heartbreaking line, bravely delivered by the starving orphan Oliver. Perhaps, it is because we feel the echo of Dickens' own struggle in Oliver's story – the misery of his childhood.

Charles Dickens was the author who depicted the sensory aspects of a feast more accurately than any other writer. Dickens was a true Victorian foodie, a man who took serious pleasure in eating and drinking [11]. His culinary interests likely stemmed from surviving meagre times during his youth. He was keen on describing all kinds of food – we know surprisingly much about how his characters ate. We have already seen that his food can be a punishment, a personification of cruelty and heartlessness. But he is equally adept at describing food that speaks of domesticity and love. And it's not necessarily lavish dishes and delicacies – on the contrary, Dickens usually describes characters sitting at a rich table as not most pleasant. And the good people in Dickens' novels eat simple food and enjoy it immensely. He has a knack for describing bread and butter as the food of the gods and does so often. For example,

David Copperfield, the hero of the largely autobiographical novel *The Life and Adventures of David Copperfield* (1849), makes toasts for his grandmother every evening [12]:

I then made her, according to certain established regulations from which no deviation, however slight, could ever be permitted, a glass of hot wine and water, and a slice of toast cut into long thin strips. With these accompaniments we were left alone to finish the evening, my aunt sitting opposite to me drinking her wine and water; soaking her strips of toast in it, one by one, before eating them.

Dickens so often describes a feast that consists of bread and butter and sometimes cheese, because he himself knew poverty and hunger as a child. His father lived from hand to mouth and ended up in a debtors' prison – it was a very difficult period in the family's life. In the novel *David Copperfield*, Dickens has a character, Mr Micawber, whose prototype was his father. This character finds himself in difficult situations all the time and in utter despair prepares to part with his life but is immediately comforted if he has a good meal. Although he experiences gloomy periods of misery and tends to talk excessively, he remains the part and parcel of any company and has the ability to improve seemingly desperate circumstances, whether it's by making friends in prison or turning a badly burnt dinner into a "devil" (i.e., spicing up the burnt roast and making it edible). Both Dickens and his character Micawber were skilled in the art of making punch [13], which was generally out of fashion in the Victorian era, but Dickens was known to be quite traditional in his drinking habits and would often put on a display of preparing punch at social gatherings. At the same party above, Micawber demonstrates that his own water supply has just been cut off:

To divert his thoughts from this melancholy subject, I informed Mr. Micawber that I relied upon him for a bowl of punch, and led him to the lemons. His recent despondency, not to say despair, was gone in a moment. I never saw a man so thoroughly enjoy himself amid the fragrance of lemon-peel and sugar, the odour of burning rum, and the steam of boiling water, as Mr. Micawber did that afternoon.

When it came to depicting food in his stories, Dickens was known for his exceptional focus on even the smallest details. In the novel *Great Expectations* (1860), when young Pip describes his sister buttering bread, Dickens manages to turn a simple snack into something far more indulgent [14]:

My sister had a trenchant way of cutting our bread-and-butter for us that never varied. First, with her left hand she jammed the loaf hard and fast against her... Then she took some butter (not too much) on a knife and spread it on the loaf, in an apothecary kind of way, as if she were making a plaster — using both sides of the knife with a slapping dexterity, and trimming and moulding the butter off round the crust. Then, she gave the knife a final smart wipe on the edge of the plaster, and then sawed a very thick round off the loaf: which she finally, before separating from the loaf, hewed into two halves, of which Joe got one, and I the other.

As a meal is a social event, the interactions of characters during mealtime easily show which characters are able to exercise power over the others. In the novel *Great Expectations*, it is illustrated on the example of the meal shared by Pip with Mr Wopsle and the Gargery family. Mr Wopsle assumes what Pip's moral worth could have been if he had been born "a four-footed squeaker", or a pig. This hypothesis is juxtapositioned against the "pork" the guests are eating, which metaphorically transforms Pip into pig, dwarfing him to the state of total powerlessness and humiliation by authoritative adults.

A very special place in Dickens' work is occupied by the theme of Christmas. The Dickens family "looked forward to it with eagerness and delight, and to my father it was a time dearer than any part of the year. He loved Christmas for its deep significance as well as for its joys..." [11, p. 76]. The Dickens household was known to celebrate Christmas in an intricate and detailed manner. Dickens, who wrote Christmas stories, created the spirit of Christmas. Dickens describes the festive season as "a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time: the only time I know of in the long calendar of the year when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely..." [15, p. 10].

In order to showcase Scrooge's key change in personality as he discovers the significance of benevolence and compassion, Dickens employs food as a tool. To make amends for his past mistakes, he offers a prized turkey to the underprivileged Cratchit family, and chooses to attend his nephew's holiday meal: "Mrs Cratchit made the gravy (ready before-hand in a little saucepan) hissing hot; Master Peter mashed the potatoes with incredible vigour; Miss Belinda sweetened up the apple-sauce..."

Discussion.

Much is not clear to the modern reader who is not familiar with the English household of the Dickens time. Perhaps, a Dickensian Christmas pudding as described in Chapter 3, *A Christmas Carol*, is something worth trying for a holiday dinner [15, p. 11]:

Hallo! A great deal of steam! The pudding was out of the copper. A smell like a washing-day! That was the cloth. A smell like an eating-house and a pastrycook's next door to each other, with a laundress's next door to that! That was the pudding! In half a minute Mrs. Cratchit entered—flushed, but smiling proudly—with the pudding, like a speckled cannon-ball, so hard and firm, blazing in half of half-a-quarter of ignited brandy, and bedight with Christmas holly stuck into the top.

One might assume that pudding is a kind of sweet pastry. But why should a sweet pastry smell like a washing day (laundry), a copper, or a cloth? During the Victorian times, if you had a higher social status, you would be more inclined to make a more decadent pudding, containing a greater amount of fruit, eggs, spices, and brandy. The pudding is either steamed or boiled. Prior to being served, the pudding is either doused in brandy and ignited or presented with a simple brandy sauce. The pudding that Mrs. Cratchit prepares is evidently formed into a solid, spherical shape resembling a spotted cannon-ball, thanks to the process of boiling in cloth. The copper basin would have been Mrs Cratchit's 'wash copper', the large water boiler used for washday, bathing and cleaning. If you're picturing a large cooking pot, the basin was commonly fixed as it was built into a brick structure in the house. Traditionally plum pudding is 'made' on the fifth Sunday before Christmas, set aside for the flavours to mature, and then re-steamed on Christmas Day. During the Victorian period, this occasion was designated as 'Stir Up Sunday' and marked the start of Advent preparation. Now, some cooks suggest making the pudding well in advance, 2-3 months beforehand, while others believe in the super tasting quality of an aged pudding that has been stored for a full year.

Charles Dickens portrays his characters as individuals who may possess material wealth and satiated stomachs, yet are often destitute in spirit, as opposed to those who may be impoverished and starving but are rich in terms of their spirit, warmth, and charity. The underlying motive for Dickens' desire to entertain and share food – his suppressed childhood memories of hunger and his conviction made clear in his stories that everyone, regardless of social standing, had the right to enjoy food and drink and that children deserved the security of adequate and nutritious meals.

The traditions related to holidays and festivities evolve with each passing era, but through literature, we are able to gain insight into the past and catch a glimpse of what life was like during earlier times. On the 175th anniversary of the publication of *A Christmas Carol*, a new exhibition at the Charles Dickens Museum – Food Glorious Food: Dinner with Dickens [16] – explores Dickens's relations with food and the extensive menu of food and drinks served by the Dickens family to their numerous guests. It shows his action-packed dinner parties – humour, comedy, people and their specific features – were basic food for his and our imagination.

Conclusions.

To sum it up, it can be said that almost always the appearance of a particular food in literature is not accidental. Its use helps the writer to achieve a certain effect, to convey hidden meanings. It is not merely a meaningless decoration and illustration, but an essential element of a work whose significance is obvious. It can either be some key to unlocking the meaning of the work, an artistic detail or symbol, or it can be a character in its own right, telling its own story. Recent literary food studies have enhanced the development of gastronomic tours, the so-called food trails, and inspired theme festivals such as the Great Dickens Christmas Fair and Victorian Holiday Party or Whitby's White Rabbit Trail as part of niche gastronomic tourism in Great Britain, welcoming to walk in the footsteps of literary greats. These events enjoy continued popularity among food tourists and country study specialists, who taste-test literary food experience. Current research, as discussed in this paper, proves that the interest in food itself has become a key motivation for travellers to read the works analyzed and explore the world of literature through a unique experience. It can also be a great way to connect with other people who are passionate about literature. Finally, literary food trails can provide an opportunity to learn about new recipes and dishes, as well as gain insight into new cultures and cuisines.

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