

**White Girls, Eating Disorders and Tumblr:
Laurie Halse Anderson's *Wintergirls* Meets
Audre Lorde and Edwidge Danticat**

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Abstract

*A site of increasing inspection, criticism, and attention, young adult literature has the power to shape eras of adolescent life. This paper centres Laurie Halse Anderson's novel *Wintergirls* (2009) as a case study for representations of disordered eating in literature aimed at young cis-women from the white, Western world. Specifically, I deconstruct the poetics of food and eating as consumed by the young readers of *Wintergirls*, alongside analyses of images from the oft-forgotten era of "pro-ana" Tumblr communities. By putting Anderson's poetics in conversation with, for example, the haptic, sensory language of consumption in Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, and Valerie Loichot's analysis of Caribbean writer and poet Edwidge Danticat, I aim to explore not only the deep relationship between language and eating, but also the connections between eating and pleasure, and between food and diaspora. To examine the phenomenon of American YA literature's preoccupation with adolescent disordered eating and the suffering body, I employ Sabrina Strings' study, *Fearing the Black Body: A History of Fatphobia*. The Western literary canon neither centres on the role of pleasure in eating nor acknowledges the role that food can play in repairing the harms of diaspora. In an effort to provide a transversal analysis of the adolescent disordered eater from the Western world, the pan-Africanist Black American author, and both visual and historical research on American attitudes toward the body, I argue that Loichot's analysis of Danticat's oeuvre holds true regarding food as a language, social binder, and symbolic tool for community-building – an ethic greatly lacking in contemporary American society.*

Keywords: culinary; literature; diaspora; young adult; fatphobia

Food serves as both a medium and a mediator in most human social relations. At the same time, it is a source of political and personal conflict, often crossing cultural and gender lines. As Sabrina Strings argues in *Fearing the Black Body* (2019), the prevalence of anorexia and bulimia among young American women is closely linked to fatphobia – defined here as a persistent cultural aversion to larger body sizes – and white supremacy. Disordered eating and body objectification are frequent themes in young adult literature. Laurie Halse Anderson's 2009 novel *Wintergirls*, for example, explores disordered eating. The book's poetics, marked by alterations in formatting, spacing, and typography, do not celebrate food or highlight its role in social life. Instead,

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they expose how, in contemporary American society, food is reduced to numbers, stripped of its cultural and social significance, and manipulated to control physical appearance. To write *Wintergirls*, Halse Anderson collaborated with a psychologist specializing in adolescent eating disorders and drew inspiration from the testimonies of young women who had suffered from such conditions. Anderson, who has written over ten young adult novels, frequently addresses traumatic and bodily experiences. In *Speak* (1999), a high schooler is raped but disbelieved by her peers. In her trilogy *The Seeds of America*, Anderson traces the life of a girl enslaved on the East Coast. Her literary style is deeply tied to the mental health discourse surrounding adolescence in the United States.

Wintergirls follows a character named Lia, a 16-year-old with anorexia. She has recently lost her ex-best friend, Cassie, to bulimia: a mental health condition which triggered an overdose on prescription medication. Lia is traumatized by the loss of her friend, as well as the divorce of her parents. Torn between the influence that her ill friend had on her own development of disordered eating, and the intimate connection that they once shared, Lia did not answer the final call that Cassie made to her on the last night of her life. Rememoring [1], reiterating and relistening to the final voicemails that the estranged best friend left on Lia's phone on the night of her suicide, Lia is tortured by guilt and Cassie's haunting presence, which manifests itself in the compulsion of disordered eating. Compulsions abound in this text, just as they do for individuals with eating disorders: Lia calculates the caloric value of everything she eats and sees, an automatism that Halse Anderson represents with a (#) after each food item. Lia cuts lines into her skin with a razor blade when she is suffering unspeakably from the depression linked to her disorder, counting the lines she makes. Lia often repeats the number of times Cassie called, the number of voicemails she left, and the sentiments that she attempted to transmit. Lia is also obsessed with the number on the scale, believing it will free her, making her light enough to escape the problems that anchor her to the shared reality on earth.

There are few passages in *Wintergirls* that, rich in sensorial language, incite the reader to feel and imagine pleasure in food and eating. Instead, perceptions of "delicious" food are always fragmented and twisted by the vice of Lia's mind, which takes great pains to see nourishment as repulsive. In a link between the broken family dynamic catalyzed by the divorce of her parents, Lia only evoked positive food memories with her extended family and reunions with her grandparents from the time before her parents' separation. In a particularly evocative and singular passage, Lia remembers:

When I was a real girl, Thanksgiving was at Nana Marrigan's house in Maine, or Grandma Overbrook's in Boston. At Nana's we ate oyster stuffing. At Grandma's, it was chestnut and sausage. Nanna liked her pumpkin pie on a

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cinnamon-pecan crust. Grandma's pies had to be mincemeat because that's what her grandmother did. The tables were crowded with tall people reaching for bowls of food and talking too loud [...] The smell of gravy and onions made my parents forget to fight, the taste of cranberries reminded them how to laugh. (29-30)

At first, Halse Anderson sets the scene, sketching with words a Norman Rockwell-esque vision of Thanksgiving in the matriarch's home on the eastern seaboard of the United States. Then come the details. Illustrating the nuances of the dishes and highlighting their importance, chestnut signifies one grandmother, while oyster comes to signify the other. Mincemeat signifies two generations of matriarchal heritage, while cinnamon-pecan references a grandmother again. Finally, more sensory details, "the smell of gravy and onions", for example, represent the togetherness of the parents that Lia idealizes. This passage presents food as a potential binding agent for family, using food details as a means of fostering matrilineal connection. It stands out in the context of the book, where food is otherwise portrayed with a calculated and detached tone.

Compare this prose, however illustrative and symbolic, to a later chapter in Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*. Lorde, a prolific author, teacher, poet, and pan-Africanist, wrote extensively about lived experiences, including her battle with cancer, her perspective as a Black academic, and her self-renaming and discovery of her sexuality – key themes in *Zami*. The text is also rich in culinary details. In this particular chapter, *Zami* offers a glimpse into Black lesbian nightlife in 1980s New York City, where parties hosted by bars and friends are vividly described through the food served. These gatherings are not only about what was eaten but are also pivotal moments in the author's journey toward embracing her sexual identity.

... at Laurel's on Sunday afternoons there was free brunch with any drink, and that meant all you could eat. Many of the gay bards used this to get Sunday afternoon business at a traditionally slow time, but Laurel's had the best food. There was a Chinese cook of no mean talent, who cooked back and kept it coming. [...] When the doors opened there was a discrete but direct stampede, first to the bar and then to the food table, set up in the rear of the lounge. We tried to keep our cool, pretending that we couldn't care less for barbecued spare ribs with peach and apricot sweet sauce, or succulent pink shrimp swimming in thick golden lobster sauce, dotted with bits of green scallion and bright yellow egg drops, tiny pieces of pork and onion afloat on top. There were stacked piles of crispy brown egg rolls filled with shredded ham and chicken and celery, rolled together and fried with a touch of sesame paste. There were fried chicken bits, and every once in a great while, a special delicacy such as lobster or fresh crab. [...] We were healthy young female animals mercifully more alive than most of our peers, robust and active women [...] for

that year, Laurel's served as an important place for those of us who met and made some brief space for ourselves there. It had a feeling of family. (220–222)

In this passage, Lorde dedicates more space to descriptions of dishes in their intricacies: "peach and apricot sweet sauce", using descriptors which render the dishes alive, hot and ready for consumption before the eyes of the reader. While the egg rolls are crispy and brown, the lobster sauce as vived as an abstract painting "dotted" with "bright yellow egg drops", the bar which could otherwise be a rather anonymous and nondescript place is teeming with life. As Lorde herself puts it, it had a sense of family. While most bars may not necessarily offer a sense of family, when food and community are tied to the survival of an independent, queer, Black writer, food becomes an essential element of togetherness.

Outside of the bar, an otherwise commercial space where Zami pays to enter queerness, the parties hosted by other New York City lesbians defined community, identity, and food culture. Zami explains: "Those parties given by Black women were always full of food and and drink and dancing and and reefer laughter and highjinks. [...] Joan and Nicky's parties were different. [...] And there was never enough food." (217) Regarding models of partnership, food figures prominently. The ability to celebrate and enjoy life is complicated if good food, and enough of it, is absent.

In order to capture another essential memory, of a time spent with a partner named Muriel, Lorde tells us how proud Muriel was to recreate black-eyed peas, a traditionally Black American dish served at New Year's, to be shared with friends. Because of the precarity of her life's conditions – Lorde left her parent's house at 16, supported herself financially with no generational wealth, and navigated the world as a Black woman of colour – , her notes around food are notes on survival. Its abundance and its connotation with Black community are causes for celebration. Furthermore, at the cornerstone of this text and at the intersection of survival, diaspora, gender and sexuality, a chapter on food and cooking is a long-operating metaphor for "becoming woman" and, more specifically, for reconnection with matrilineal Jamaican heritage. In playwright and poet Ntozake Shange's outstanding cookbook *If I Can Cook/You Know God Can* (1996), an early chapter follows the young mother from grocery store to grocery store of Manhattan's upper west side in the interest of recreating a traditional Black Southern family meal, for her young daughter. From cleaning pig's ears to sauteeing collard greens, all is in the interest of complementing the black-eyed peas, which are meant to bring good luck for the new year.

Mortar and pestle, aromatics, souse. These are the elements of Lorde's recollection of her first menstrual cycle in a narrative that is at once erotic, historical and practical. It could be read as a recipe, as its directions for recreating the Jamaican dish of souse, an inherently creole preparation with

origins in northern Europe, adapted to more tropical ingredients, are enumerated directly. However, making the souse in the mortar and pestle passed down through generations of women becomes a fertile metaphor, as Lorde narrativizes crushing the spices with the pestle as rhythmically as sexual penetration. By linking the conception of souse with femininity, symbolized by the menstrual cycle, the author “becomes a woman” and establishes a new relationship with her mother, whom she will later be forced to leave when she departs from home at a young age. Lorde (1983) writes:

So in my fifteenth summer, on examining table after examining table, I kept my legs open and my mouth shut, and when I saw blood on my pants one hot July afternoon, I rinsed them out secretly in the bathroom. [...] When I came back into the kitchen, my mother had left. I moved toward the kitchen cabinet to fetch down the mortar and pestle. My body felt new and special and unfamiliar and suspect all at the same time. I could feel bands of tension sweeping across my body back and forth. [...] I took the mortar down, and smashed the cloves of garlic with the edge of the underside, to loosen the skins in a hurry [...] As I continued to pound the spice, a vital connection seemed to establish itself between the muscles of my fingers curved tightly around the smooth pestle in its insistent downward motion. [...] I hummed tunelessly to myself as I worked in the warm kitchen. (73–80)

Here, making a culinary product is at once arousing in and of itself, a metaphor for the creative potential of sexuality, and an embodied practice for the recollection of history. As Lorde fetishizes the mortar and pestle inherited from her grandmother meant for making the souse, she goes further by following her recipe, elaborated by the directions of her mother. The specificity of souse, an iconically Jamaican dish, cannot be ignored. It makes of this passage a uniquely identity-reifying moment which, contained in an autobiography, informs the reader about the author.

Furthermore, Lorde did not choose the name “Zami” at random. A historically founded phenomenon in the Caribbean islands, Zami or Zanmi women married to men in maritime professions lived interdependently. In the Epilogue, Lorde offers us her own definition: “Zami. A Carriacou name for women who work together as friends and lovers.” It represents a historical phenomenon that Lorde and other academics like Andrew Apter in his article “M.G. Smith on the Isle of Lesbos: Kinship and Sexuality in Carriacou” (2013), have explored. In a book about becoming, Lorde chooses to include touchstones of national and cultural identity and sexuality that hinge on cuisine.

More often than not in Halse Anderson’s text, food is associated with its caloric value (#food=____), which takes what could be a signifier for the boundless possibilities of intergenerational connection, and reduces it to a

number. Halse Anderson (2009), capturing a cafeteria scene, writes from the first-person perspective of Lia:

I buy a small, bruised apple (70), and a low-fat, artificially-sweetened yogurt (60). The girl in front of me, Sashi, buys breaded cheese fingers deep-fried in lard served with tomato sauce. And a brownie. And a bottle of water. The guy in front of her (he runs the lightboard and the sound) buys spaghetti and pays extra for a second serving of garlic bread. Another guy buys pizza. The girl behind me gets a small bowl of lettuce and celery and a small bowl of ketchup. The rest of the girls buy taco salads. (105)

Straddling the line between a list and a mathematical equation, the above extract characterizes both Lia's internal monologue and the broader poetics of the text. It is important to note that this passage is intentionally dull. Unless the reader is interested in studying normative cafeteria offerings in the early 2000s United States, the citation holds little intellectual value. However, its emptiness mirrors Lia's internal state. Consumed by the regimented control of her body, which runs counter to natural biological processes, she can focus on little more than the numeric value of food. Her existence becomes an equation, fixated on reaching the number on the scale that she desires – yet one that, as the text repeatedly reveals, shrinks ever smaller as she nears it.

This obsessive behavior aligns with textbook symptoms of disordered eating as a mental illness: mind-wandering, an inability to engage in food-centered social bonding, and the fatigue and low endorphin levels associated with depression. The poetic emptiness in many of Halse Anderson's passages reflects Lia's mental state. Her need to reduce her body size, seen in repeated references to floating, becoming a ghost or angel, and the pursuit of lightness, reveals her deeper wish to disappear entirely. By stripping the signifier of food in the text of its symbolic or imagistic meaning, the novel also suggests that Lia's relationships are utterly fragmented. Her refusal to consume food, and thus her rejection of the deeply social act of eating, serves as a rejection of intimacy itself. Without meaningful interpersonal relationships, Lia is left profoundly self-absorbed and self-loathing. In *Wintergirls*, food – otherwise a rich source of imagery and social connection – remains hollow and empty.

Valérie Loichot, in an essay entitled "Edwidge Danticat's Kitchen History" (2004) on the Haitian-American poet Edwidge Danticat and her culinary language, highlights the intergenerational power of food. Loichot uses Danticat's most recognizable publication, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994), to trace the disordered eating of its main character, Sophie, as an outlier in representing mentally ill Black women from the Global South. In this text, Sophie rejoins her biological mother in the United States, leaving her aunt and grandmother, who largely raised her, in Haiti. The first three chapters are marked by scenes of the kitchen and the table. To show love upon her departure, Sophie's grandmother

is “going to cook only the things you like” (Danticat 1994: 17). Because she is so reticent and depressed to leave, Sophie cannot eat on the morning of her flight: “I left Tante Atie’s kitchen, my breakfast uneaten and the dishes undone.” (20) Although she doesn’t eat, food is not insignificant. The evening before: “We ate supper on the back porch. My grandmother cooked rice and congo beans with sundried mushrooms.” (17) Here, food connotes togetherness. Furthermore, it punctuates the shared rhythm of the day. According to Loichot, Sophie’s eating disorder comes with her sense of *dépaysement* [2] in the United States. She is thrust into an environs that valorizes white beauty standards (namely, thinness), but in which her childhood food traditions and the aunt and grandmother who made them manifest are absent. Loichot (2004) writes:

The relationship she experiences there with her environment and her kin is one of disconnection illustrated by an abundance of random food samples leading to amnesia. Sophie’s body, like the serialized food products she consumes, becomes detached from any coherent system of reference. The body turned thing does not fit the predetermined Western mold. As a consequence, Sophie rejects the food her body ingests and develops bulimia. (93)

Much like the thesis of this paper argues, food serves as the language of self-retrieval – if the receiving body can accept and value it. For Halse Anderson’s characters, and much of the cultural production surrounding Western adolescence, the focus is placed on the body’s appearance from an external perspective. In this dynamic, the body is experienced as an object to be seen, not felt haptically or sensorially. This self-objectification severs the subject from the pleasurable experience of food and its relationship to the body. Sabrina Strings’ examination of American fatphobia shows that race, and its construction as a pseudo-scientific category, is central to this issue. Pleasure in eating is notably absent. While voluptuous figures were once praised as symbols of white, upper-class women, by the turn of the 19th century, critics, doctors, and scientists began condemning fatness as harmful to the physical and moral health of white society. Strings traces this fatphobia to religious, particularly Protestant, values that shunned the carnal and corporal, and later to medical discourse. In Edwidge Danticat’s work, Sophie, a Black woman who immigrates to the U. S. from Haiti, seems to struggle with the psychological effects of the racialized fatphobia that Strings explores.

Using the historical figure of Sara, a woman from the African continent kidnapped to Northern Europe, whose body was exoticized and eventually scientifically preserved and studied in apparent reaction to its proportions, Strings makes evident the connection between blackness and an otherized body from the White point of view. Sarah’s exposition and objectification nearly allude to the mediatized platforms with which we live in the

contemporary era. While in the age of imperialism, colonialists exoticized and orientalized Black bodies, in the early 2000s on Tumblr, we fetishized thinness as/and whiteness.

In his study on representations of anorexia on Tumblr, researcher Mudmun de Choudhury (2015) highlights the role of images in promoting disordered eating. While texts like those by Halse Anderson suggest that the root causes of eating disorders are more deeply tied to intra-community and interpersonal traumas, as well as discriminatory attitudes toward fatness and femininity, comparative studies of new media reveal that hyper-visual stimulation is closely linked to the self-objectification found in disordered eating practices. Young women with eating disorders often believe that pursuing bodily ideals will end once they achieve this ideal. According to de Choudhury, the visual function of image-rich platforms like Tumblr is described as follows: “the pro-anorexia community uses this microblogging platform Tumblr to share image-rich graphic and ‘triggering’ content around internalization of thin body ideals, as well as for the maintenance of anorexic lifestyles” (44) and “proana content that is shared is often replete with triggering and graphic images, aside from text” (48).

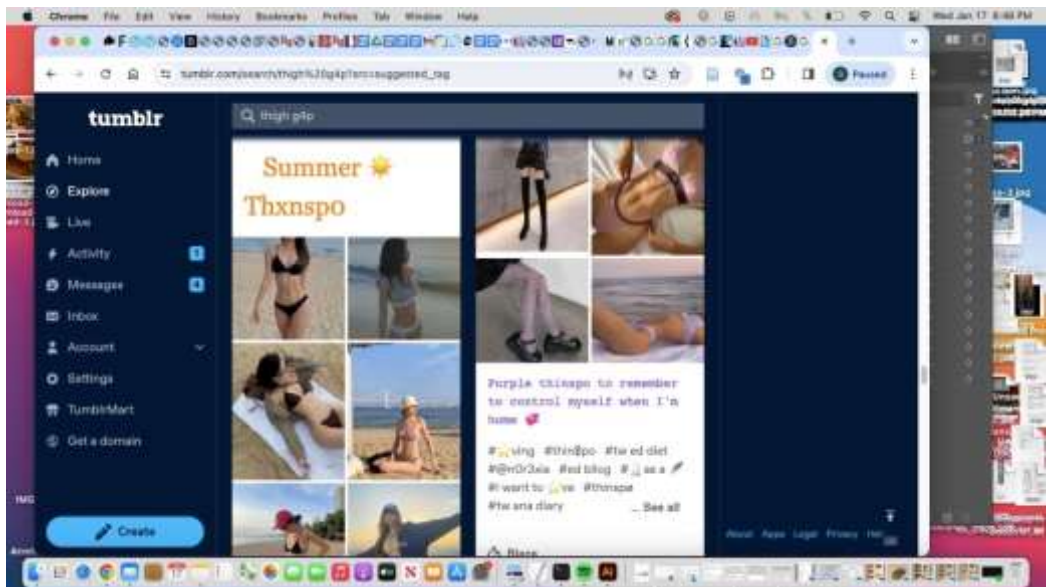


Figure A. [Search result “thigh gap” accessed 17/01/2024]

Shockingly, but unsurprisingly, keywords that suggest what is known in internet language as *thinspo* [3] bring up stark white visual results. The aestheticisation of thin feminine bodies, as Sabrina Strings suggests from a historical perspective in her book *Fearing the Black Body: The Origins of Fat Phobia*, is racialised. This screen grab takes the perspective, one which can feel

alarmingly voyeuristic, of a seeker of *thinspo* via a platform which has since censured its existence: Tumblr.

Most significantly to the text and the context of *Wintergirls* are incorporations of the mediatized world from Lia's perspective. Through numerous in-text examples, the reader learns that Lia's relationship to disordered eating comes not just from the influence of her ex-best friend, but from the virtual forums through which other young women with eating disorders enable each other's behavior. In Halse Anderson's *Wintergirls*, recreations of virtual eating disorder communities are represented by changes in font, indentation and spacing. True to reality, the recreated "dialogue" between participants is anonymous, but indented, and thematically and syntactically fragmented in such a way that it becomes clear to the reader that it represents numerous participants: "'Yeah I feel gross right now. Only ate a bowl of cereal which is good.' 'If I eat that I'll have to run to get rid of it, but I'm too tired to run. Anyone ever felt like this?'" (175)

The blogs and chat rooms, to which Halse Anderson makes references, are lodged within the internet era of the early 2000s. Since this period, sites like Tumblr have sensitised their community moderation teams to the harmful potential of what are called "pro-ana" or pro-anorexia communities. The intra-dependence and homosocial bonding between young Western women that took (and takes in contemporary society) around body and food complexes was in this era best represented by the at once abusive and encouraging language in pro-ana groups on Tumblr. In this text, the nature of this dynamic is represented textually, if it is visually stylised. In reality, pro-ana content was hyper-visual with some incorporations of text, and some forums exclusive to conversation, sharing tips for weight loss, buddy-systems of encouragement for days of fasting and over-exercising, and inspiration and motivation transmission. The text of Halse Anderson (2009) seems to gesture toward the optical quality of eating disorders on line with this passage directly following the representation of a chatroom virtual dialogue: "The internet beams through me like I'm a paper bag, waves a magic wand and *flash* the pictures of two girls flash waving from a tree house, lips stained grape popsicle *flash* wearing identical bathing suits." (76)



Figure B. Images like this, with their propagandistic use of text, posed photography, and editing, circulated like currency among girls with eating disorders. This particular image uses the “thigh gap” to represent the ideal of “what you want to be”. Discussions in the comments and other forums guided newer anorexics and bulimics on how to achieve it.

In her use of the word *flash*, as both onomatopoeia and a signifier of the camera’s shutter and thus ability to capture a moment rendered static in time, the reader is alerted to the link between food compulsivity and self-objectification, or food and body. With the crack of the *flash*, the reader sees the “thinspo” messaging communicated explicitly in text and image in the early 2000s, and, in contemporary internet culture, simply masked. According to a Bustle article, “thinspo is used to describe photos, blog posts, quotes, and diet tips that are meant to “inspire” someone to become dangerously thin. Thinspo can be found on Pinterest, Instagram, Tumblr, and personal blogs.” Tumblr did well to crack down on content tagged as “thinspo,” given that “While no studies have been conducted on the effects of thinspo, an eating disorder treatment centre in Chicago says that “30–50% of its teen patients used social media as a means of supporting their eating disorders.”





Figure C. [Images from <https://the-perfectsize.tumblr.com/post/64654424757/proana1234-askingbilly-thinspo-thin-ana> accessed on 05/05/2024, and <https://ar.europeanwriterstour.com/images-2023/hip-bones-thinspo-tumblr> accessed 05/05/2024]

Semiotically, these images are highly authoritative. Perhaps more importantly, they reflect an impressive level of self-objectification and a concept of the body that is entirely disembodied. Although each phrase begins with “I”, the viewer does not have the sense that the speaker inhabits the body. Instead, these images fragment, classify and capture it from an external point of view, renaming each part with a task. The valorisation of certain signifiers of thinness (collar bones, thigh gap, hip bones) reveals a hierarchization of parts of the functioning body, as if there was anything more supreme than inhabiting one. The abbreviations and signifiers employed are uniquely adapted to our contemporary media, as they are easily translatable into hashtags – #ana (anorexic), #mia (a nickname for an eating disorder), #thynspiration (an alternative spelling of thinspiration) – , which could be used as shortcuts to more easily access this content, and also to shield it from a larger public untouched by this particular mental illness.

Audre Lorde’s *Zami* and Edwidge Danticat’s *Breath, Eyes, Memory* use food writing as a means of reconnecting with the body. The sensory and tactile descriptions of food in these diasporic works highlight this connection. Just as Lorde vividly recalls making souse with her grandmother’s mortar and pestle during her initiation into womanhood, Loichot (2004) explains:

Sophie painfully overcomes the yoke of food by engaging with it through cooking. In *Breath*, cooking intervenes in quite a literal manner. Through a meal she cooks, Sophie links the four generations of women of her family. Danticat complicates the action of cooking further in "Women Like Us", where she links cooking and writing in a reciprocal metaphorical relation. Women's cooking gestures are poetic acts, just as writing becomes a "survival soup". (106)

These texts do not poetically foreground self-objectification, although we know that body dysmorphia and its links to eating always run silently in the background. Namely, these texts have a rapport with Halse Anderson's *Wintergirls* because they are a counterpoint to the disembodied culture of food and eating that plagues Halse Anderson's Lia. Lia sees food either as an equation or as a nostalgic signifier of an idealised and lost family. Lorde, by contrast, sees food as an active and functioning means of articulating togetherness, self, and heritage. Drawing on previous research, Loichot argues that Danticat does the same as part and parcel of a food/mind/body/community epistemology that is decidedly non-Western. Citing Elisa J. Sobo's concept of the "body-in-relation", Loichot synthesises her approach to understand why food figures prominently in Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* through an analysis of Jamaican social relations. Loichot (2004) warns that Sobo's concepts may feel unfamiliar to Western readers, who typically see the body as independent and self-sufficient. Since food links the body to the earth and to those who share a meal, nourishing it is vital for maintaining communal ties and preserving cultural memory. (97)

The concept of the "body-in-relation", which Loichot takes from Sobo, is useful in linking the story of Sarah shared by Sabrina Strings with the experience of Lia in *Wintergirls*, alongside Danticat and Lorde. There is no body more outside of relation than that of Sarah, kidnapped and subservient, who was preserved unbeknownst to her in death. She was never perceived as part of the body politic, nor as part of the Northern European community to which she was taken but was forcibly remembered as other. Her fatness played a role in this othering. The refusal of food out of fear of fatness, a fear which is linked to a history of racial othering, leaves Lia isolated from the community. The text written by Halse Anderson reveals this isolation in its barrenness: food is an emptied signifier. Dry food citations in *Wintergirls* often refer to the eating habits of characters whose relationships to food are rather neutral (and it's worth noting that this is true for men or children). Sitting at a diner with a hotel employee who saw her best friend on the night that she died, Lia observes him eat: "She sets the plate of toasted brown bread and a small crock of red jam in front of him and walks away without another word. He dumps the jam on his spread, spreading it thick with the knife." (93) The server's casual gestures give

way to the hotel worker's even more nonchalant approach to jam, which he "dumps" on his toast and spreads "thick", suggesting his lack of concern for its caloric value. To a reader sensitive to the inner workings of the eating-disordered mind, thoughtlessness around calories is itself unthinkable. Although this passage is unremarkable in terms of the poetics of the sensory in food, it is notable because it illustrates a second relationship that can be communicated through food writing: one of survival and practicality.

Seeing food as an engine, inscribed in the semiotic world of the everyday, Laurie Halse Anderson traffics in food language that has lost cultural and familial significance, while Lorde and Danticat see food, and its inscription into the written form, not only as survival, but as a means to survival in the richness of diasporic identity. Using Valerie Loichot's article, "Edwidge Danticat's Kitchen History," another rapport between food, the body, and society becomes evident. As Sabrina Strings suggests in *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia*, auto-control of body size evolved out of the imperialist projects of the European West, as well as religious and moral movements in an anti-Black early America. It is useful to consider the cultural movement surrounding a culture's complexes around food and body, given that food is the cornerstone of social exchange. It is thus only more essential to highlight the shadowy figure of the internet in books like *Wintergirls*. If Lia is an anorexic and Cassie a bulimic, the internet is the reflection of an anemic society looking back, marked by its fatphobia and anti-blackness. The image-rich platforms on the internet may dominate our social relations more so than food traditions in actuality. Giving way to violent, rapid changes in beauty standards, there is a pertinent beauty in writing the material world of food into printed literature in the era of the internet.

Notes

- [1] The concept of *rememoring*, given this article's focus on Black women writers, would be incomplete without referencing Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). In her magnum opus, Morrison employs this concept to depict the devastating impact that the slave trade and plantation economy had on Black motherhood.
- [2] *Dépaysement* is a French term (from the root "pays" = country), which refers to the feeling of disorientation or culture shock when removed from familiar surroundings or cultural contexts. It can describe discomfort in unfamiliar environments or, more positively, a refreshing change that offers new perspectives. The term is often used in discussions about travel, exile, and displacement.
- [3] *Thinspo* is an abbreviation for "thinspiration", a term that has circulated widely on the internet and is used throughout the text to designate content diffused online that, in a homosocial context, encourages behaviours that reduce body size.

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