

EAT IT

Food, sex and the language
that binds them.

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY Ella O’Keeffe

*When treated well, she will open for you.
Share her heart with a lover.*

Taste is everything. The intellectual, the sensory, the subliminal. To flavour, savour, sample, discern. Different to the individual, equal for us all. We are the same in that we are not.

Bound by the urgent drives that keep us alive, food and sex are the eternal; language serving as the celebrant for their millennium-long marriage. The right language, redolent with sensuality, rhythm, scent, and technique, functions as the crucial yoke between the two. A moment to say it all, or an opportunity to let our bodies do the talking. Both deeds laden with pleasure, their words as the foreplay. Pick them apart, put them back together. Food and sex will always be one.

Food and sex as literal

Her skin was like milk, her cheeks like ripening peaches; her lips, bitten cherries; her sex, a fig, ready for consumption. She was moist, firm, supple, tender. All of the makings of a perfectly ready piece of fruit, fragrant and dripping with potential. Biblically, it was forbidden fruit that ushered sin into the world, a moment of knee-buckling pleasure, avoidable by suppression – of appetite and of desire, gluttony and lust, the gates of evil awaiting those who surrender.

She was “just a girl who wanted more than meat and potatoes.” She wanted to be vanilla no more. She wanted heat and spice and stickiness, and she wanted to taste it all. Sex to describe food, food to describe sex. Sustain us, move us, connect us, the language that binds them together. The popping of the cherry. The buttering of the muffin. The fruit that made man wise.

Food as the aphrodisiac

The clearest cultural link between food and sex is, of course, the aphrodisiac. Named for Aphrodite, it started with the vulvic oyster – for reasons obvious to most. “First, several millennia ago, men cracked the shells and sucked out the tender grey bodies and attendant juices,” writes M.F.K. Fisher in *Consider The Oyster*, her tribute to the mollusc and all its sensual attributes. The “tender grey body”; the salty, cool liqueur they marinate in; their fleeting interactions with the mouth, bypassing the lips, meeting the tongue for a moment before travelling down a welcoming throat – the oyster’s affluent life, cut short in mere seconds for the sake of our pleasure.

Then it was chocolate and caviar for their rarity, asparagus and artichokes for their anatomical likeness. Food to set you in the mood. When a lover’s touch isn’t enough, slippery silver shellfish is sure to do the trick.

Is it the way it’s eaten, or the molecular makeup that was believed to work so well? Tongues out, head back, mouth wide open to welcome the oyster to its little death; bottom teeth scraping the flesh of the artichoke off its leaves, rich, yolky sauce gathering in the corners of the mouth; lips wrapped around a buttery asparagus stem; tongues popping caviar against the roof of our mouths. Eating for pleasure. Eating with the senses.

Food and sex as connection

It surpasses notions of language and the senses. It lives in the grooves of giving oneself over. Breaching the barriers of self for the sake of connection, bound up in passion, service, care and love.

It begins with the preparation and

Moments of touch, skin soft as butter. Spread it thick and sink your teeth in.



*The tender grey body. Mollusc for the mood.
Lip smacking lemon and the taste of metal, all that is left.*

consumption of a meal, charged with erotic possibilities, laden with heaped spoons of fulfilment and submission. The dinner date has always been a prelude to the sexual act, just as eating off of each other's plates suggests physical intimacy is already present. I cook for her to tend to my own desires of care and connection as much as I do to nourish her. She, the recipient, submits to my offer of fulfilment.

If cooking is considered a love language, preparation is foreplay. "It was as if a strange alchemical process had dissolved her entire being in the rose petal sauce, in the tender flesh of the quails, in the wine, in every one of the meal's aromas," Laura Esquivel writes of the process of cooking in *Like Water For Chocolate*, the meal itself, plump with innuendo. "That was the way she entered Pedro's body, hot, voluptuous, perfumed, totally sensuous - Pedro didn't offer any resistance. He let Tita penetrate to the farthest corners of his being and all the while they couldn't take their eyes off each other."

Slurping, sucking, dripping, licking. Pulling something apart or plunging a fork into its supple flesh. There is chewing our food, and then there is using our mouths to eat. Pulling tender meat off bones with our teeth, catching drips down our chins with tongues, holding a cold, salty oyster in our mouths before it slides down hot, raw throats. A reminder to eat with abandon and love with abandon – the recipe to a passionate life.

Food as phallus

When language won't do, there is always imagery that spills over to the visceral. Boiled asparagus smothered in glossy butter; a courgette ripe from the vine. Saucisson strung up in the butcher; a peach, split down the middle with forceful thumbs. A cluster of grapes – the fruit of our loins.

It was the liver meant for dinner that the young protagonist in *Portnoy's Complaint* pleasures himself with, and Elio's poor mother's peach, ripened by the Northern Italian sun only to end up where food and sex cross into the same realm.¹

Once sensuality overrides intellect, shapes, curves, and texture are what's left behind. Sometimes, so is the eggplant emoji. Food used for sex; sex used as sustenance. Where is one to draw the line when they allude such visual likeness? Some may say it's too far, others, not far enough. When all is said and done, it's all food for thought.

Food and sex as acts of survival

Beyond hedonism lies survival. Animal acts connecting us to our primal nature, a push and pull between pleasure and life – but isn't pleasure life, and life pleasure? Without gluttony and lust, life is not only hopeless on a literal level, but on an experiential one, too. Sensual moments

intertwined with instinct. Submitting to the mess, to the carnal nature of it all. Our language as connective tissue, tendons softened with salty whispsers.

The senses not only guide us towards indulgence, but existence in its most boiled down, stripped-bare form. Eating and procreating. From the moment our lives begin as screaming, gasping, slippery bastards we need two things, the warmth of skin and the nourishment of milk. A prelude to the rest of our days on earth, the preservation of humankind hanging in the balance.

Food and sex as life force

The life force is both. Survival and hedonism as one. A need and a want, and oh, is it a want. Moments of touch, skin as soft as butter, gulping the juice – of plums and pears and otherwise. Food and sex as the drive we run on. That damn forbidden apple a blessing in disguise – if it ever really was a disguise. For without Eve and without the apple, we would never truly know the pleasures of the proverbial sin. How great, how necessary it is to be untethered to suppression, to feel it all and enjoy it all, bellies and spirit full as a brimming glass of Bordeaux. 🍷

¹ Page 148, *Call Me By Your Name*, Andre Aciman