

Cooking the Books: Metafictional Myth and Ecocritical Magic in “cozy” Mysteries from Agatha Christie to Contemporary Cooking Sleuths

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Introduction

There is an innate doubleness in mystery fiction. In the immediate sense this occurs in two terms to describe the fictional sleuth tradition used in this chapter. These terms are “detective fiction” and “mysteries,” and I will employ both to draw on different emphases in this surprisingly multifaceted form. “Mysteries,” taken simply to refer to the unknown complications of the crime to be solved, arguably indicates a deeper questioning of modernity’s trust in certain kinds of knowing. “Detective fiction” on the other hand, focuses on the sleuth who inherits a complex history of the hero, and also the myths structuring him or her. Both terms are useful with regard to the subgenre of gentle stories emphasizing cooking as a core activity in the solving of murders.

Doubleness continues its haunting quality in the dual origin of the modern mystery. The detective as solver of unacceptable crimes has an origin in the mid nineteenth century stories of Edgar Allen Poe’s Parisian M. Dupin (1841). This fearsomely intelligent inquirer is joined later by the arrival of the iconic Sherlock Holmes via Arthur Conan Doyle (1887). Yet crime stories implying extraordinary heroes have older mythical relatives in figures such as Oedipus and Clytemnestra.

Additionally the popular genre split into two broad emphases in the early twentieth century that are still visible today: the hardboiled and the “cozy.” Both of these are apparent in the founding fictions of Poe and Doyle. The cozy begins in a liking for domestic settings, re-thinking of familial dynamics in Holmes and Watson and conclusions that re-establish a satisfactory world. These contrast in later fictions with the hardboiled’s masculinity, its penchant for destructive violence and a detective whose detachment in Dupin and Holmes later becomes an inability to “solve” a corrupt society.

Another way of considering the hardboiled and the cozy is in the cultural, gender and historical context of their emergence. “Hardboiled” mysteries were defined by the work of major male writers such as Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett who display pessimism about America’s post-prohibition cities dominated by organized crime and politics seduced by big money. Their contemporaries in stature in 1930s England were notable women authors addressing a society still deeply traumatized by the loss of a generation of “heroes” in the horrific World War One battlefields.

As mystery scholar Gill Plain has argued so cogently, the relatively peaceful and *intact* bodies discovered by sleuths produced by Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers could be at some level *compensating* for the millions lost to the mud of France (Plain 2001). So these women authors

became associated with a type of mystery variously known as “golden age,” “clue-puzzle” or in their descendants in the United States today, as the “cozy,” indicating a paradoxically comforting quality to stories about catching murderers. Cozies feel “cozy” because they end in a restoration of a relatively tranquil social group whose values are strengthened by *one of their own* solving the murder.

Above all, the doubleness of mystery and detective fiction inheres in its metafictional quality. If metafiction is fiction about fiction, its resonance in mysteries begins very early in Holmes as the subject of Watson’s ostensible newspaper columns. Such metafictional exploration of the power of media and celebrity becomes concentrated in the golden age-cozy tradition by referencing detective fiction itself. From Agatha Christie who began publishing in 1920 onwards, the form obsessively refers to previous and contemporary fictional sleuths. Christie’s characters most frequently cite Sherlock Holmes, but are also readers of her own peers. By the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the fictional detective in the cozy can rely upon a sophisticated range of mystery references to share with readers.

The effects of metafiction in mysteries are profound. At one level, overt and covert references to the key detectives and narrative tropes of the genre are acts of sophisticated collaboration with readers. Integral to the “cozy” is giving the readers vital clues before the detective announces the solution. Where the hardboiled hero is often a loner battling to survive a dangerous urban environment, the cozy detective is less physically imperiled. She or he embodies a potential for active participation without requiring unusual strength or endurance. The metafictional cozy is open to all with a brain and heart; brawn optional. No wonder this subgenre particularly appeals to older readers.

At a deeper level, cozy metafiction partakes of a mythical and metaphysical level of religious mysteries. For cozy metafiction in particular enables the form to structure the promise of solving the greatest mystery of all; that of death. While on the one hand the majority of mysteries are secular and remain set in modernity’s turn away from the supernatural, traces of its Gothic origins remain in the cozy’s ability to turn death into something *solvable* by readers as well as fictional detectives. Metafiction ensures that the drama is simultaneously accepted *as fiction*. Death is “solved” and “re-solved” by the solution that banishes its ability to poison an essentially recuperable world. The contemporary cooking sleuth is a particularly potent example of divine re-membering of the body through nourishment to body and soul, as I will show.

Ultimately, the cozy cooking mystery has roots in one particular pre-Christian goddess in ways that charge this literary form with the ability to overcome such deep cultural divisions as that between human and non-human nature. For the cooking sleuth proves to be an image that awakens our archaic roots in rituals and mysteries of life and death.

Myth and the Detective’s Grail Quest

Detective fiction developed from the Gothic mode, which in turn began in the eighteenth century as a reaction to what had been left out of rational modernity: the supernatural, the unconscious, dreams. Gothic was fundamentally a challenge to boundaries structuring rationality; those between reason and madness, life and death (Botting 1990). Arguably the detective figure emerges as part of Gothic's internal drive to contain such disruptions of psyche. In tackling the troubling of divisions that order psyche and world, the detective inherits far older narrative forms of medieval Romance's questing knight and the hero of myth who defeats the greatest threat facing his community.

My argument here builds on the notion of myth explored by C.G. Jung as a recurrent narrative emerging from the interaction of the psyche with collective culture (Jung 1961). Jung is properly a Romantic in his development of Romanticism's key trope of the inherent creativity of the imagination. He renames "imagination" the unconscious, which has a non-personal dimension in its tendency to produce repeating narratives and images. These Jung called myth. Myth here is not a thing of the past but rather an ever-present structuring process.

The psyche inherits innate potentials for certain sorts of images and meaning. These are then realized – made real – by the productive and embodied encounter with culture and history. Hence similar stories and motifs recur over time, even though the context is radically subject to change as societies move from agrarian to cyberspace. Such an argument suggests that there is no "original" hero myth. Rather there is a limitless possibility for hero energies to be manifest as a knight questing for justice, a dragonslayer or an inner city cop.

Above all the hero myth of the cozy is redolent of the story of the quest for the Holy Grail. In the version familiar from medieval Romances, knights quest for the magical cup used by Christ the night before his death and the successful hero *has to learn to ask the right question*. Achievement of the grail is so important because it serves to heal the Wasteland, embodied in the figure of its ailing king, the Fisher King. The Grail myth is suggestive of ancient fertility religions in which the potency of the ruler is magically connected to the fertility of the land. The cozy mystery is distinguished by the identification of the murderer restoring, literally re-storying, the health of a community so making the wasteland fertile again. Solving the crime simultaneously solves the relationships that make up a "circle" of family and social bonds.

The grail here is the loving connections that have been brutally severed by murder. The cozy sleuth, unlike the police, discovers she has the ability to ask the right questions. Crucially, the cozy detective is not a loner. She (and it is most often she), comes to embody a divine feminine, enabling the grail, as feminine cup symbol, to be re-storied among the characters where she is an energizing and fertile presence. Even Miss Marple, an unlikely divine mother, sponsors the repair of families and communities by providing solutions that heal the wasteland engendered by unnatural death. Indeed it is Miss Marple who arguably creates the cooking detective in her 1957 adventure, *4.50 from Paddington*.

The 4.50 from Paddington and the Goddess

Named for a fictional train taking commuters to country homes, *4.50 from Paddington* begins with an overlooked social group, elderly middle class women. It also introduces the cozy cooking sleuth in Lucy Eylesbarrow, college educated but deciding her independence and entrepreneurial skills are best served by offering herself as a very expensive housekeeping and catering service. She is hired by a frail yet devastatingly shrewd Miss Marple to work in the suspect household of the Crackenthorpes. In their overgrown, rambling garden a body has disappeared after being thrown from a moving train.

Miss Marple is on the case because the murder was seen by an old friend who is subsequently ignored by the police when no corpse was found. Motivated by fear of the psychological impact upon the unexpected witness, and by a desire for justice, Miss Marple determines to investigate via Lucy as her fitter and younger proxy. Lucy is hired and her hard work and culinary skills quickly gain her the confidence of the household. After Lucy discovers the dead body of a woman concealed in a sarcophagus in an old barn, various clues implicate the family as connected to this unfortunate victim.

Together the dedicated sleuthing of Miss Marple and Lucy unearth the killer, although not before an attempted poisoning of the household and another murder. Lucy, rightly recognized as a possible “solution” to the family’s dysfunction, receives several proposals of marriage and is considered likely to accept one of them in Miss Marple’s final words. So more than just a killer is discovered. A whole family is torn apart and remade by the combination of murder for money and a young woman’s ability to make a home. In this sense, Miss Marple and Lucy together act out as versions of the mythical triple goddess, with Miss Marple as the crone bringing justice and Lucy fitting the dual role of maiden and matron as she mothers the grandson and his school friend.

However a more precise embodiment of a goddess for Lucy may be that of Hestia, Greek goddess of the hearth. As Ginette Paris shows in *Pagan Meditations* (1986), Hestia is first of all the sacred hearth fire; that which makes home and a place of peace in a time of conflict.

[Hestia] was this hearth... This was the heart of the home, the place of intimacy for the group or family, a shelter from tumult, for Hestia protects, receives and reassures. Paris 167-8.

Hestia is not a goddess of singleness or aloneness. She “is found wherever the family finds its center,” so is concerned with the group, dedicated to “we” (Paris 170). Hestia makes family and households; she brings people together in a particular place and time (ibid.: 171). In this sense, although Hestia is not simply the goddess of food – that would be Demeter of the harvest – she is

today often found *through* the serving of food that constitutes a family hearth. Indeed, finding Hestia through the family meal began as early as Roman times.

With the Romans, where the cult of Vesta was even more developed, she presided over the preparation of meals, and the first draught of mouthful of food was consecrated to her. Ibid. 171

Here we have Lucy Eylesbarrow. As sleuth, her undercover role in the Crackenthorpe ménage ends early with the need to account for herself to the police after discovering the body. But she does not plan to leave the family in disarray.

“Well as far as Miss Marple is concerned I’ve *done* my job, I’ve found the body she wanted found. But I’m still engaged by Miss Crackenthorpe, and there are two hungry boys in the house and probably some more of the family will soon be coming down after all this upset. She needs domestic help. If you go and tell her that I only took this post in order to hunt for dead bodies she’ll probably throw me out. Otherwise I can get on with my job and be useful.” 4.50 from *Paddington* 54.

Through the making of appetizing food, Lucy restores the Crackenthorpe family and becomes its Hestia. Of course, she only gets the opportunity to perform this divine function because of the deep wound to the social group that is the murder, which in this story gets closer and closer to the stricken household. It is as if modern society needs the jolt or the sacrifice of death for Hestia to be found again in this mystery genre. What is evident is that Lucy as Hestia embodiment is a prototype for modern female amateur detectives who find themselves inserted into a troubled household as professional caterers.

There is a further dimension to Hestia is that as goddess of hearth fire she is also the fire that the Greeks knew lived in the center of the planet. Hestia is the Earth herself as home and humanity as one household. This is not the same sense of sacred as Gaia, the Titan Mother and primordial soil (Paris 174). Nor is she abundant Demeter of fertility and harvest. Rather, Hestia in her centering capacities a return to the hearth as home is also the sense of planet as the place of our center and being.

The cult of Hestia is therefore linked to the geocentrism of the Greeks. If the archetype of a house signifying a return to the center is one of the important archetypes of our psychological life, it is understandable that the idea of our planet as the center of the universe is just as important in elaborating the collective values associated with “our” planet. Paris 175.

Here Paris is making a fundamental point about orientation. To a society believing that stars and sun circle the Earth, the planet is indeed “center” and therefore central to what humanity *is*. The Earth is home and destination and part of human soul. “Archetype” here stands for repeated motifs or themes that continue to structure consciousness even as they are modified as culture

changes. Earth is here the “house” of the human psyche that changed significantly in depth or resonance when the planet began to be conceived as a spinning rock. Perhaps today, with the cooking sleuth re-inventing Hestia in troubled homes, there is a further ecological aspect to these culinary cozies? Such a possibility will be explored later in this chapter after Lucy Eylesbarrow’s descendants are revealed as flourishing in twenty-first century America.

The Cooking Sleuth, Her Policemen and Feminine Roles

In the United States, notable cooking sleuths are authored by Diane Mott Davidson, Joanne Fluke, Isis Crawford and Katherine Hall Page. These detecting cooks range from divorced and later remarried Goldy Schulz for Mott Davidson, Faith Fairchild married to a clergyman for Hall Page, Isis Crawford’s single sisters, Bernie and Libby, and single Hannah Swenson for Joanne Fluke, (though with two fairly persistent suitors).

Goldy Schultz is a fascinating example of a woman for whom physical abuse has marked her life and continues to propel her into detecting. After divorcing her violent husband, John Richard Korman (otherwise known as the “Jerk” by Goldy and her best friend, Marla, Korman’s other ex-wife) Goldy begins a catering business in rural Aspen Meadow in order to support herself and her young son, Arch. Stumbling into a couple of murders, she encounters homicide cop, Tom Schultz, who eventually persuades her to trust love again. Tom is also devoted to Arch, especially after the Jerk dies violently. However, beneath the warmth of these new familial bonds, the real physical attacks that continue in some of the earlier novels continue to affect Goldy’s life.

And then there was the sherry, aged and golden, brought by Tom... [T]he glasses were what remained of my breakables, as I’d come to think of them, after John Richard had smashed every dish of our Minton bone china, in one of his numerous fits of rage. Thinking about the Jerk didn’t do much for my mood. *Dark Tort* (2006) 106.

Goldy gets drawn into detecting because people she cares about the people who find themselves part of a murder investigation. Often it is her job that seems to put her within range of killing within families or workplaces in the small town setting. For example, catering in a law firm, Goldy discovers the body of an employee who is also a neighbor. In an earlier work, she herself comes under suspicion when her cooking is considered responsible for poisoning her ex father in law, so she is forced to close until she can clear her name. Then there is the time she is booked to do the reception of the bride from hell. Here the wedding reception venue proves deadly as a consequence of cocaine spiked smoothies making the spa inordinately popular. What unites Goldy’s role in all the stories is that she acts because she considers herself already involved. Either she or someone she loves or feels responsible for, is under threat and the police do not have the skills of intimacy to tease out the actual *relational* dynamics of the crime.

I said quietly, “At the moment Tom, she’s *sad*. Plus, I have to say that in *all* the time I’ve known Yolanda, she has never been anything but honest and upright.”

“I know she’s your friend, but I have to treat her just the way I would treat anyone else in a murder case. I can’t just take her word for everything. But I understand if you do, with that big heart of yours.” *Crunch Time* (2011) 133.

For the cozy detective, friendship and love, Eros, are a way of knowing. The cozy detective trusts instincts and intuition about people s/he knows; trusts those loved and loves those trusted. In this sense the cozy sleuth is profoundly amateur because detecting is motivated by ethics made dynamic by love. The cooking sleuth is a variety of cozy detective whose professional culinary arts may place her at the scene of a crime, but taking action to solve it is devoid of financial reward. Goldy gets involved because she feels she has to if unofficial son, Julian, is tortured by the killing of his girlfriend in *Killer Pancake* (1995) or if best friend, Marla, is arrested for the murder of her volatile boyfriend in *The Main Corpse* (1996).

Food is more than simply a vehicle of financial independence for these women detectives. To Goldy, making food is ideally a creative act of embodying family love, as it becomes for her and Tom, who also has kitchen talents. She takes pride in her paid work as an attempt to export such sense of belonging to her catered events. Home cooked food is, of course, taken to those suffering from untimely death. Hestia inhabits the cooking sleuth via the sharing of her food in an attempt to remake the sacred in relational bonds.

Without realizing it, we’d all created concoctions that demanded the precise cutting of vegetables and fruit, as if organizing food could somehow order experience and make life neat. Like most folks, we believed that performing that small ritual of comfort, bringing nourishing gifts, could make life after a sudden death more bearable. *Dark Tort* 61.

That “like most folks” is a key motif of both cozy and cooking sleuth. The cozy sleuth is detective *within and among* the suspect and traumatized group of suspects and relatives. He or she does not investigate from the position of a detached observer. Hestia, here as culinary detective and her work, is *active within* a social network and a place. This goddess is a dynamic inhabitant of human homes; she constantly finds ways in the cooking sleuth to re-light the sacred hearth.

Perhaps Goldy’s boldest move as goddess Hestia is her most extreme when she uses her cooking to break Marla out of jail. This act of desperation is designed to save her best friend from being wrongly convicted (*The Main Corpse* 267). Such rash law breaking is made possible and also, surprisingly, healing by Goldy being able to call upon General Farquhar, an ex-military expert with a dubious obsession with explosives. While normally one man private armies are not readily to hand, even in the non-realistic fictions of cozies, the General, Goldy and Marla have a complex history from earlier mysteries. Moreover, the General is clinically depressed after a stint in prison over his arms cache and the death of his wife. Being called upon to rescue Marla

makes sense to him as he was fired from the military because they were less farsighted than he. This call to arms from the unlikely kidnapper, Goldy, instantly heals his depression.

So poisoning and an armed heist of a prison van, masterminded by Goldy, are, in fact, acts of loving healing and the reconstituting of a family! Hestia goes on the run. Fortunately this unlikely set of criminals finds a hearth in an empty cabin.

The general built a fire in the main fireplace, and soon the cabin was lit with a cozy glow. Ibid. 294.

Soon the chicken, garlic and onion were sizzling and a mouthwatering scent filled the cabin... At least I was making something for Marla that was low fat, I thought grimly. Ibid. 296.

There is an endemic humor in the cozy because the form, paradoxically perhaps, is about *survival*. It is about finding the truth as grail, that dish of fertility or sacred cup that allows life to be renewed within or as the group. Humor at extreme situations is an attitude that enables body, connection, group and survival. In the cooking cozy, more than just the sleuth and her food, the whole form of the story is about surviving as Hestia, renewing the sacred hearth as home.

The police, even in the form of gentle loving Tom Schultz, are unable to take on the role of Hestia. Tom is typical of the police in cooking mysteries in both trying to distance Goldy from crimes but reluctantly drawn into acknowledging her indispensable help. In this he is similar to cop, Mike Kington, one of two erstwhile boyfriends of Hannah Swenson in Joanne Fluke's novels, and the ex – cop father of Bernie and Libby for Isis Crawford. Katherine Hall Page's Faith Fairchild makes do with an uneasy alliance with the local cops as well. None of these largely positive presentations of the police prove adequate to unraveling these crimes, which are committed out of the acute complications of personal relationships. Therefore leaving sleuthing to the authorities would not restore the grail as hearth.

Put another way, the cozy cooking mystery begins in a polarized world of masculine and feminine values that are ultimately mythical. In insisting upon hard material evidence, looking at a crime from outside, and remaining objective, the police represent not only the law but also attitudes to knowledge that have evolved out of Christian theology (Manes 1996). In a religion in which God creates nature as separate from himself, the making of knowledge becomes dominated by notions of separation of mind from matter to be known (observer from observed), objectivity, and material clues as evidence as separate bits of truth in themselves. This is a masculine way of knowing because based upon the masculinity enacted by the separate Christian god in dividing off divine from nature, thereby designating it feminine.

In Mott Davidson's *The Main Corpse*, the blood on missing person Tony in Marla's apartment is taken as evidence by the police that she may have killed him. Marla is looked at "objectively" as a woman who admits a quarrel and shows evidence of being beaten; deducing a murder of a

lover appears rational. By contrast, Goldy's knowing of Marla includes their bonding over their mutual and violent ex-husband. After years of sisterly solidarity, Goldy *knows* that Marla would not kill. So she knows through their familial relations and her embodied painful healing from physical injuries that Marla is being framed. This form of knowing is feminine because it includes aspects of psyche marginalized *as feminine* by the dominance of separation and rationality in modernity. Hestia is one of the modes of this feminine knowing.

While most of the police in the cooking cozies are men, the masculinity they uphold is structural and cultural more than that of the innate qualities of particular sexed bodies. Indeed, in the exploration of loving heterosexuality through the desirable forms of Tom and Mike, the cooking mystery goes a long way in forgiving individual police *men* for their institutional blindness. Put another way, the cozy sleuth is at one level a conservative supporter of the police as honest, even heroic, upholders of law and order. At a deeper level, Hestia in mysteries is trying to relight the fires within the home of justice. She demonstrates that the masculine values embodied by the police "doing their duty" do not nourish, and can destroy, essential and sacred values of the hearth. Such ambivalence in the role of the (usually) honest cops brings in further questions of gender roles and political drives as the cooking mystery returns Hestia to us.

Sister Sleuths and Independent Women

Two authors mentioned in this chapter offer cooking sleuths as single women. Significantly in both series, sisters are important to the act of detecting. Again, Hestia as a collective presence is emphasized; she nurtures hearth as home meaning group. Bernie and Libby for Isis Crawford are actual sisters and equal protagonists; Hannah Swensen for Joanne Fluke may be the single self-identified detective in her mysteries but she rarely detects without the participation of her married sister, the elegant Andrea. All three unmarried cooks are heterosexual and have potential husbands in the persons of boyfriends who can be persuaded to help in solving mysteries.

In terms of social criticism, cozies often incarnate conservatism in the way they appear to stress traditional gender roles in not very diverse communities. On the other hand cozies are not uniform and individual authors can vary the extent they re-invent tradition or resist stereotyping. Hannah in Fluke's Lake Eden in rural Minnesota appears to resist sex outside marriage while exhibiting a long standing resistance to what she sees as compromising her independence. Nevertheless Lake Eden usually lives up to its name by the end of mysteries as an unusually caring small community.

By contrast, the seriously disabled ex-cop father of Libby and Bernie suffers a well-founded sense of injustice at his treatment by his colleagues. Like Goldy, Libby and Bernie also frequently encounter snobbery and bullying from the rich people they work for. In New York and Colorado, these cooking mysteries come up against endemic privileges of wealth. However

Goldy Schulz is far more likely to befriend a poor or ignored minority person and make supporting them part of her recuperative Hestia role.

She was right. I had seen it again and again. A low-income person without power is blamed for a crime and goes to jail on scanty evidence. A wealthy person, who's guilty as hell impugns the job the police are doing, impugns the victim, impugns whoever's around, and gets away with rape... or murder. *Dark Tort* 72

Faith Fairchild, the other married cooking sleuth from Katherine Hall Page, combines both the evocation of the virtuous rural community with frequent visits to the city world she grew up in. Aleford is a historic New England small town where Faith does not quite perfectly fit into the role of clergy wife and mother. Moreover she shares with all these cooking sleuths the insistence on maintaining her own business as necessary to her sense of self that cannot be compromised by only adopting a traditional feminine role of homemaker.

Indeed, on one level Hestia here idealizes capitalism because these businesses are presented as positive attempts to export the hearth to other, needy settings. Put another way, some of the soul energy that America bestows on money making, shown in its darker senses in the sense of privilege in the rich, is tempered into hearth fire as it becomes a means of nourishment for home and family.

Faith has two children and misses the more sophisticated life of a New York single woman, while not regretting her marriage. Her sleuthing does bring her into conflict with the expectations of husband and parishioners, unlike Hannah in Lake Eden whose neighbors gleefully expect her to start detecting whenever a body is found.

Faith only lied to her minister husband, when it was absolutely necessary and even then crossed her fingers behind her back. Patsy's plan would make both unnecessary. *The Body in the Gallery* (2008) 5.

Patsy's plan is for Faith to snoop around a Gallery where a saboteur is suspected. Faith's husband's dislike of Faith on the case differs significantly from Hannah's own family and associates who see her detecting as a dynamic part of the fabric of their home; restoring the Eden in Lake Eden. Hence a typical exchange between Hannah and mother Delores over Hannah's delicious cookies.

“Will you let me know when you find out?”

“What makes you think I am going to find out?”

Delores looked shocked. “Well you're going to investigate aren't you? You simply have to, Hannah!”

“Why do I have to, Mother?”

“Because we all have to work to catch Ronni’s killer before my launch party!”

I should have known it had something to do with you, Hannah thought, but she remained silent. Verbalizing that sentiment would only hurt her mother’s feelings. *Cream Puff Murder* (2009) 134.

In Lake Eden, solving murders are a kind of collective spectator sport of watching Hannah as she galvanizes friends and family while dodging the fond yet officially disapproving eye of cop boyfriend, Mike. Endemic human flaws such as a mother’s self-centeredness are accommodated by being integrated into the detecting. Lake Eden society works on a ritual scapegoating by which destructive energy is purged by murder and pursuit of a singly guilty person. Society is not to blame in Lake Eden for then Eden could not then be restored without a revolution. Such activity in the original Eden lead to banishment.

In this most conservative of these cooking cozies, Hestia is re-formed by sleuthing re-creating the grail as the bonds that stretch seamlessly into the community. A town where the poor are honest and supported rather than disrespected, malice comes as a snake able to be removed in a revision of Genesis. For here eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is done by Grail Knight, Hannah and her action restores by restorying Eden as the place of nurture and the hearth. Despite Hannah’s churchgoing, she is bringer of Hestia’s hearth fires in ways also supporting the pre-Christian idea of the grail as feminine fertility symbol.

Faith too re-stories her small community yet with still a sense of doubleness in her identity in her knowledge of the big city where justice is not absolute. Libby and Bernie channel their conversion of mysteries into Hestia hearth fires also into the complications of their relationship with a disabled father. Sean Simmons thereby takes on a role of Fisher King who continues to suffer, in part for injustices done to him and not restored. As with Goldy, Hestia’s triumph feels frailer and a lot more partial in the New York shop they run called, metonymically, *A Little Taste of Heaven*.

All these cooking sleuths embody and reinvent Hestia. It’s the extent they triumph over endemic social injustice that varies. Now it is worth considering how far this works with their ecological roots.

The Ecological Hearth

It goes without saying that cozy mysteries tend to be located in places pleasing to the eye with an emphasis on rural as opposed to urban landscapes. Famously residing in the English village of St. Mary Mead, Agatha Christie’s Miss Marple triumphs in her first full length mystery iconically named *Murder at the Vicarage* (1930). Both book title and feminine village name suggest a religious dialogue in the sacred origins of the detecting myth. Miss Marple’s

investigation reconstitutes the grail that is the integrated community in ways honoring the pre-Christian goddess. Finding the truth by asking the right questions restores the home that is St. Mary Mead as well as the home that is the Vicarage.

Moreover, the grail as fertility motif is reinforced by the unexpected and wholly welcome pregnancy of the vicar's young wife, Griselda, revealed after the solution to the murders. For the vicar spent much of the narrative in fear he was to be a permanently wounded Fisher King through his wife betraying him. Now the couple fully embody the healed wasteland of St. Mary Mead in ways embracing biological fertility.

The four contemporary American authors of cozy mysteries set their works in rural communities, or in the case of Isis Crawford, where New York touches on a wilder landscape. Indeed in *A Catered Thanksgiving* (2010), Libby and Bernie drive out to the country through a snow storm, so entering that traditional setting of the isolated country house where the inhabitants cannot leave and the police cannot arrive.

In the spring Bernie was sure it would be a beautiful drive, with green fields on either side and a vista of the valley down below. Unfortunately that was not the case now. The wind had piled the snow up across the road, making it hard to negotiate. Ibid. 35

In fact there is a high proportion of bad weather in these cooking cozies. Inconvenient snow frequently disrupts both Goldy in Colorado and Hannah in Minnesota as they attempt to drive delicious food to ungrateful clients. Extreme heat is also a problem for both of them while Faith Fairchild in New England shares the biting winters. While of course, this reflects the realistic aspect of the genre and the American climate, it also recalls both the wasteland aspect of the grail myth and Hestia as goddess of our ecological hearth.

In the grail myth, the sacred vessel is a cup of nourishment as the land is restored to fertility. Hestia is the hearth fires within the planet. What makes these cooking cozies particularly enact Hestia is the way the narrative itself makes a safe nourishing hearth out in a setting of wild nature that does not offer a safe home for anyone. In summer heat, Goldy nearly gets incinerated in wildfires while in winter she stumbles across bodies in blizzard conditions. One such as the snow covered corpse in *The Cereal Murders* (1993) at her son's school, Elk Park Prep. Yet it is the "bridezilla" Billie, in *Fatally Flaky* (2009) who gives a clue to the unusual rate of tempests in cooking mysteries.

Still, three weeks of unremitting, incessant downpour was uncharacteristic. The New Age people would have said that Billie Attenborough's nutty behavior had brought on the bad weather. When I told Tom that interpretation, he pulled me in for a hug and whispered, "At least we know who to blame." Ibid.: 11.

Mysteries are about finding out who to blame. While in a realistic sense, bad people do not cause bad weather, in a mythical sense they do. Hestia as ecological hearth is about finding the center,

restoring the balance that makes a home of the planet. Metonymically expressed in the cooking, Hestia divine energy restores nature by working with it to make it support community and family. Hestia is not of the wilderness as Artemis is. She takes the unpredictable and uncontrollable fire of nature and brings it to the hearth. Hence, the unpredictable and hearth inimical qualities of human beings that lead to murder are manifest in nature and weather in these cooking mysteries.

The genre here preserves its tangential relationship with realism in that solving crimes does not tame weather. However, Hestia herself signifies a different sense of nature, that human arts, such as homemaking are part of it and not separate. Hestia is the biosphere as nurturing community. So in this sense, violent and dangerous weather expresses the hearth-destroying malice that culminates in killing. To the Greeks the hearth was the sacred refuge of strangers. To murder someone who has been at your hearth was to violate a sacred place. Storms, snow and wildfires all enact both murder and the consequent wrath of Hestia as the hearth is desecrated.

Similarly harmony in nature comes when the hearth is restored by the re-storying of the community through the actions of the cooking detective. One moment like this occurs at the end of *The Main Corpse* when the ashes of a loved and troubled man are taken to the wilderness.

Arch shook his head, then squinted at the trees.

“Mom,” he said softly. “Everybody. Look.”

We turned. Moving through the sunlit trees was a solitary wisp of vapor. It seemed to have a military bearing. Ibid.: 350.

Cooking cozies are about the murder of someone at the hearth and its re-making through forms of loving as knowing made substantial in preparing food. If Hestia is a goddess who breaches that divide in modernity between human and nature, does that make the domestic detective into something *connecting us* to the cosmos?

Hestia, her Detectives and the Portal Symbol

C.G. Jung has a particular definition of a symbol. It is the image that points to the not yet known or fully knowable (Jung CW15 para. 105). The symbol joins conscious psyche to the unconscious of dreams and also to the body. So symbols in art are bodily because they gain energy from inherited potentials for images and meaning called archetypes (Rowland 2010). These archetypes have a bodily instinctual pole as well as a fluidity that means they are influenced by history and culture. Symbols are dynamic; when expressed narratively they are the myths that shape relations with the Other, whether that other be the unconscious, nature, gender or other cultures. Art is in this way mythical and symbolic as well as culturally construed in the way I have been suggesting of cooking mysteries.

Jung's psychology is one contemporary theory by which body and psyche are re-joined. Another is "complexity" or "emergence" science that has developed out of new ideas of evolution (Bernstein 2005). Here newness evolves or "emerges" out of the interaction of incredibly complex environments or systems in ways that seem to suggest an innate creativity in nature. By extension humans are no longer regarded as separate from nature but as part of a complex adaptive system that includes our bodies and psyches as part of an ongoing emergence of creativity that no longer is merely "ours."

Put simply, these theories suggest a new way of looking at the imagination and the arts that stem from it (Rowland 2012). Suppose that the Hestia incarnated in cooking mysteries is not a metaphor but rather a metonym, *figuring* our actual connection to non-human nature? Suppose that the culinary cozy is myth and symbol by which our psyches and bodies are reweaving our innate being in the biosphere. In this sense, Hestia is participant in the emerging of a new consciousness of home as green planet. *She is embodying us at home in this Earth*, not "on" it as separate from nature.

Moreover the cooking sleuth and her mystery is thereby a symbol as portal to non-human nature, meaning a vehicle for *reciprocal* communication. In complexity science there is mutual creativity in nature, human nature and culture: Hestia is a true goddess is being of the mysterious Other, the unknown creativity of the cosmos.

Finally we might return to the theme of metafiction that haunts the mystery genre as a whole. Might metafiction indicate those complex adaptive systems of our emergence we call art? Referencing of fictionality and previous iconic texts may just be putting flesh on the mystery as symbol by emphasizing that it is part of the mystery of death and renewal that pertains to the whole planet. Goldy, traumatized by finding a body meets Tom in his garden.

"Seeing a real dead body is nothing like the movies." His large, capable fingers reached for a handful of bulbs and carefully pressed them at intervals into the newly spaded trough. Gently he refilled the area with potting soil from a bag. The gesture reminded me of putting a blanket around a sleeping child. *The Cereal Murders* 101.

The metafictional reference to death both reinforces and blurs the lines between life and death here. We are reminded that this death is real for Goldy, not so for the reader of this mystery. From this complex adaptive system of the fictional detective genre emerges Hestia, whose hearth fires burn in acts of making home.

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