

A Recipe for Parody: Mark Crick's "Clafoutis Grandmère à la Virginia Woolf" as a Pastiche and Parody of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*

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Abstract: This paper explores a parody of Virginia Woolf's writing style featured in *Kafka's Soup* by Mark Crick. The volume by Crick comprises a wide range of parodies, including "Clafoutis Grand-mère à la Virginia Woolf", which, this paper strives to show, represents both a general parody of Woolf's writing style and a specific parody of her novel *To the Lighthouse*. This paper also highlights the similarities between certain features of Woolf's writing style and of the chiselled style of the late-Victorian, decadent-aestheticist writer Walter Pater – particularly the use of lengthy sentences divided by semicolons, stream-like writing with frequent subject changes, and the intertwining of the external events with the characters' impressions. This connection between Woolf and Pater is underexplored in scholarly research. Crick's *Kafka's Soup* is also rarely discussed academically, save for occasional reviews. This paper explores the inspirations behind the book and demonstrates how Crick's "recipe" functions as a literary pastiche. The recipe form is what makes Crick's parody unique; hence, an overview of the inclusion of recipes in twentieth-century literature is here provided. Crick's parodic rewrite of the British Modernist's literary manner is discussed here not only with regard to the stylistic features but also with reference to the motifs typical to Woolf's writing. Thus, while analysing "Clafoutis" as a specific parody of *To the Lighthouse*, this paper indicates specific themes from the novel – including the themes of the passage of time, of genteel sentiments, and of gender differences – which, too, find their comical reflection in Crick's text.

Keywords: specific parody, pastiche, Virginia Woolf's writing style, themes of *To the Lighthouse*, Mark Crick's *Kafka's Soup*

"I hate celebrity cookbooks - they're really boring . . . But I thought of what you could do if you had a huge budget and a time machine and could use any author or artist in history", says Mark Crick for the *Telegraph* (quoted in Milner 2005). Indeed, Crick had an idea for an unorthodox cookbook, resulting in the creation of *Kafka's Soup* - a book featuring "fourteen recipes in the voices of famous writers, from Homer to Virginia Woolf to Irvine Welsh" (Crick 2006b). Each recipe consists of a list of ingredients followed by a short excerpt written in a given author's style. As such, *Kafka's Soup* is an example of literary pastiche, defined by Jean-François Marmontel as "an affected imitation of manner and style of a writer" (quoted in Hoesterey 2001). Asked about how he mastered the art of pastiche, Crick recalled his childhood and university years:

I'm a London East Ender, and when I got to university I realized people couldn't understand me, so I started adapting my voice. Also I'm a bit of a linguist, and I've developed an ear for voices. If you can get a writer's rhythm going, you're halfway there. As a child I was asthmatic and I couldn't sleep at night. I used to sit there, with a big pile of books, Proust-like, reading through the night. (2006a)

It was Crick's asthma, too, that became the reason why he became interested in food: "Because I couldn't eat much as a child, food became a source of enormous fascination . . ." (quoted in Milner 2005). As an adult writer who decided on the cookbook form for his pastiche, Crick set about finding recipes that would fit the themes of the chosen authors' texts (2006a). He would go to his friends in search of recipes, but he was not looking for general culinary recommendations (Crick 2006a). Rather, Crick was asking questions such as "'Have you got something nice I could cook and use violent, sadistic language in?' Or 'Have you got a recipe for something that's got a real class-consciousness to it?'" (2006a). Some examples of the recipes from the book include miso soup for Franz Kafka, who Crick felt would not be particularly interested in cooking; mushroom risotto as a symbol of the Great Depression for John Steinbeck; and clafoutis grandmère, representative of motherly and tender qualities, for Virginia Woolf (Milner 2005). All this care put into the selection of recipes for the respective authors makes *Kafka's Soup* a reflection of both Crick's interest in cooking and his passion for literature (Milner 2005). Incidentally, the genre

which his book represents takes its name from the name of a dish. According to the *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, the Italian ‘pasticcio’ means “baked meat dish, pie” (n.d.). In the same way that ‘pasticcio’, in a definition provided by Margaret Rose, combines “several different ingredients”, a pastiche is a mixture of the distinct elements of a given author’s style and the unique idea behind the hypertext (1993, 73).

The recipe form makes Crick’s pastiche unique. J. Michelle Coghlan argues that “artful recipes – or, recipes artfully merged into books we wouldn’t immediately describe as cookbooks – have long been regarded as a modern literary creation” and states it was the twentieth century when they were introduced (2018, 115). Coghlan goes on to differentiate between various recipe uses in literature, such as the “gastronomical essays of M. F. K. Fisher”, “experimental cookbook-cum-memoirs”, and “novels and memoirs which ingeniously embed recipes for the dishes cooked up in their pages” (2018, 115). Crick’s *Kafka’s Soup*, although not a personal memoir, has a preserving function as well. It is a homage to fourteen remarkable authors, their distinct writing styles, and their exemplary works. Crick’s understanding of the selected writers’ styles makes *Kafka’s Soup* both an accurate testament to the authors and an effective pastiche. The success of *Kafka’s Soup* as a parody lies in Crick’s ability to combine a given author’s style with a recipe form, which is not normally associated with literature. The result is a mix of the literary and the functional: the reader finds a list of traditional ingredients alongside a text written in a particular author’s hallmark style. The subject of cooking is a subversion of expectations, as it is not the first thing a reader might find in the writings of, for example, Homer or Proust. Yet, Crick manages to create literary renditions of what such texts might have looked like if they had indeed been written by the selected authors, thus making the pastiche extremely successful.

Virginia Woolf’s Style

One of the fourteen recipes in *Kafka’s Soup* is “Clafoutis Grand-mère à la Virginia Woolf”. Woolf’s style, out of all the authors in the book, was the most challenging for Crick to recreate (Milner 2005). As he admits, Woolf “was difficult because her voice is so subtle and not that old-fashioned sounding. You really want people with a voice that is recognisable even if they’re writing about car maintenance” (quoted in Milner 2005). As Michael Whitworth points out, Woolf’s style had to be distinctive and experimental in order for her to separate

her writing from the Victorian literary tradition, mainly its 'materialism' understood as the nineteenth-century emphasis on tangible reality (2000, 151). The rejection of 'materialism' allowed Woolf to be experimental in her pursuit of representing "a reality which is semi-transparent, combining the solidity of granite and the evanescence of rainbow" in her works (Whitworth 2000, 151). Vid Simoniti adds that another distinction between the two literary approaches – described in Woolf's 1924 essay *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* as Edwardian (Victorian) and Georgian (Modernist) – is the degree of descriptiveness (2016, 65). While the Edwardian style abounds in accurate representations of material reality and detailed descriptions of characters and events, the Georgian style abandons detailedness altogether and shifts its focus to impressions (Simoniti 2016, 65–66). As Simoniti points out:

What replaces the Edwardian pedantry is Woolf's emphasis on the stream of consciousness, which she would perfect not in *Mrs Brown* but in *Mrs Dalloway*. Her [Woolf's] style emphasizes colliding, unconnected impressions; it uses long sentences separated by semicolons, which sometimes change their subject matter midway; it contains unexpected mixing of action and reminiscence of her characters; there is little description of social fact or of fixed psychological characteristics. (2016, 66)

Woolf's style was not entirely free of Victorian influence, as its certain features – such as those lengthy sentences, frequent subject changes, numerous semicolons, and the intertwining of the external events with the characters' inner lives – could be a legacy of Walter Pater. Perry Meisel argues that, although Pater is not mentioned directly in any of Woolf's essays, Woolf draws from "Pater's celebration of personality and the privileged moment, his chemical vocabulary for the artist's crystalline or incandescent expressiveness" (1980, 13–14). Pater's style was regarded as unsurpassed. He was a supreme stylist, yet his meticulously crafted aesthetic-decadent style was also a subject of Max Beerbohm's light-hearted parody. In his essay "Diminuendo", Beerbohm recalled his experience reading Pater:

Not that even in those more decadent days of my childhood did I admire the man as a stylist. Even then I was angry that he should treat English as a dead language, bored by that sedulous ritual

wherewith he laid out every sentence as in a shroud-hanging, like a widower, long over its marmoreal beauty or ever he could lay it at length in his book, its sepulchre. (1896, 115)

Beerbohm claims that, through his extensive use of meandering sentences, Pater deadens the English language. Rather than lengthy, stream-like writing, the Victorians valued descriptive, matter-of-fact prose. Woolf, for that matter, commented on the Edwardian overreliance on descriptions in her essay *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*: “Begin by saying that her father kept a shop in Harrogate. Ascertain the rent. Ascertain the wages of shop assistants in the year 1878. Discover what her mother died of. Describe cancer. Describe calico. Describe –” (1924, 18). Yet, despite her writing sharing noteworthy similarities with Pater’s style – particularly the paratactic sentences and frequent use of prolepsis – Woolf does not mention Pater as her influence. Meisel argues that this is due not only to Pater being “a confirmed misogynist and university man,” but also to the fact that his status as a Victorian makes him, “however much an intellectual renegade to some among his contemporaries, . . . antipathetic to the revolutionary and loquacious matriarch of Bloomsbury” (1980, 12). Ultimately, it is the presentation of nearly simultaneous impressions as well as an extensive use of the interior-monologue, stream-of-consciousness, and fragmentation techniques, that makes Woolf’s style clearly distinguishable from those established nineteenth-century literary traditions which were deemed materialist (as those represented by Galsworthy and Bennett). Her model – although rarely acknowledged – is in Walter Pater’s decadent-aestheticist expression.¹

For his pastiche to be successful, Crick had to retain all of the elements that make Woolf’s style unique and use them to describe something as ordinary as cooking. Thus, Crick’s Woolfian heroine – while covering fruit with dough – observes her youngest son and uses the dough metaphor while reflecting on her family’s future security, or the lack of it:

1 For Pater’s influence on Woolf, see: Meisel, Perry. 1980. *The Absent Father: Virginia Woolf and Walter Pater*. Yale University Press.; and Tseng, Jui-Hua. 2004. “Walter Pater, the Stephens and Virginia Woolf’s Mysticism.” *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 30 (1): 203–26. [https://doi.org/10.6240/concentric.lit.200401_30\(1\).0008](https://doi.org/10.6240/concentric.lit.200401_30(1).0008). More recent studies conducted in the realm of autobiography, however, suggest the influence of Thomas De Quincey. See: Covelo, Roxanne. 2018. “Thomas De Quincey in the Essays of Virginia Woolf: ‘Prose Poetry’ and the Autobiographic Mode.” *Journal of Modern Literature* 41 (4): 31–47. <https://doi.org/10.2979/jmodelite.41.4.03>.

She looked up: what demon possessed him, her youngest, playing on the lawn, demons and angels? Why should it change, why could they not stay as they were, never aging? (She poured the mixture over the cherries in the dish.) The dome was now become a circle, the cherries surrounded by the yeasty mixture that would cradle and cushion them, the yeasty mixture that surrounded them all, the house, the lawn . . . (Crick 2006b, 63)

The above fragment mirrors Woolf's style through the use of brackets, rhetorical questions, repetition as a means of emphasis, and complex sentences with multiple commas. Woolf's signature is also apparent in the focus on the character's thoughts over what is taking place in the tangible reality. The mother is covering the cherries in batter, but at the same time she is pondering her son's future and the inevitability of time passing. By using brackets to indicate that the batter is being poured as the mother is lost in thought, Crick indicates that making the pie is only secondary to the character's musings. In the same way, in Woolf's works, events in the real world only serve as a background for the characters to explore their inner selves, reminisce, or envision the future. Once the cherries are topped with the mixture, the mother has yet another reflection, this time imagining the batter as if it covered not the fruit, but her household, providing a sense of safety. The use of words 'cradle' and 'cushion' is deliberate, as Crick wanted the cherries used in the recipe to be "cradled and protected in batter in the same way that the mother in Woolf's books protects her children" (quoted in Milner 2005).

While it captures the general characteristics of Woolf's style, "Clafoutis" is also a specific parody – defined by Dentith as a parody "aimed at a specific precursor text" (2000, 7). Not only a pastiche of Woolf's distinct writing style, "Clafoutis" also explicitly draws from *To the Lighthouse*². Perhaps the biggest clue for the hypotext is the dish Crick chose for Woolf – a French tart called *clafoutis*

2 It is crucial to acknowledge the differences between parody and pastiche. The main quality that distinguishes pastiche from parody is its neutral character; Margaret Rose argues that, in its assembling processes, pastiche is "neither necessarily critical of its sources, nor necessarily comic" (1993, 72). Simon Dentith, on the other hand, explains that parody, in contrast, albeit difficult to strictly categorise, is thought of as fulfilling a polemical function which varies in its degree (2000, 9). Because it is relatively neutral and recent historically, the term 'pastiche' should not be used synonymously with 'parody' (Rose 1993, 72). This article thus argues that "Clafoutis", written in Woolf's style and parodying certain themes and motifs from Woolf's specific novel, should be considered as both a pastiche and parody.

grandmère. As a justification for his choice, Crick said that he “thought of her [Woolf] making something soft, rising and feminine” (quoted in Milner 2005). Yet, apart from the thematic reasons, there is also significance in the dessert being French and not English. The mother in “Clafoutis” wonders:

Should she have made something traditionally English? (Involuntarily, piles of cake rose before her eyes.) Of course the recipe was French, from her grandmother. English cooking was an abomination: it was boiling cabbages in water until they were liquid; it was roasting meat until it was shriveled . . . (Crick 2006b, 60, 62)

Her words mimic those spoken in Woolf’s novel. Mrs Ramsay’s triumphant dish in *To the Lighthouse* is also French; she chooses to serve boeuf en daube. She expresses her pride after Mr Bankes has praised the stew:

‘It is a French recipe of my grandmother’s,’ said Mrs Ramsay, speaking with a ring of great pleasure in her voice. Of course it was French. What passes for cookery in England is an abomination (they agreed). It is putting cabbages in water. It is roasting meat till it is like leather. (Woolf 2018, 95)

Despite the change from the main course to dessert, the reasons given in “Clafoutis” for choosing a French dish over an English one are the same. The similarities between the fragments are obvious enough for the reader who is familiar with *To the Lighthouse* to recognise that “Clafoutis” is not only a general pastiche on style, but that this specific novel is being parodied as well.

The Woolfian Themes

“Clafoutis” also reflects specific themes present in *To the Lighthouse*, which explores a plethora of themes, including, but not limited to, the subjectivity of memory, the unexpectedness and fleeting nature of life, societal differences between men and women, and maintaining harmony in one’s relationships. Memories shape the characters in the novel – their subjective impressions of the past greatly influence the characters’ present feelings and actions. James’s childhood memories of how Mr Ramsay repeatedly denied him the trip to the Lighthouse result

in James harbouring deep resentment for his father years later. James is able to differentiate between what his recollections suggest and reality – he recognises that “it was not him [Mr Ramsay], that old man reading, whom he wanted to kill, but it was the thing that descended on him – without his knowing it perhaps: that fierce sudden black-winged harpy ...” (Woolf 2018, 177) – but the powerful impression of Mr Ramsay’s tyranny is too ingrained in James’s memory for him not to take a cautious approach when interacting with his father. The Ramsays’ trip to the lighthouse is also indicative of the unpredictability of life. There is a certain bittersweetness in a childhood dream being fulfilled several years later, with many tragedies in the family along the way. The same goes for Lily Briscoe only finishing her painting after Mrs Ramsay’s death. Gender differences reinforced by society are yet another important theme as they pervade not only the relationships in the novel but also the characters’ understanding of themselves. Male characters possess the freedom to set lofty goals for themselves, which is shown through Mr Ramsay’s obsession with leaving a legacy through scientific achievements and Charles Tansley’s writing his dissertation. Moreover, the men in the novel are allowed to express their emotions openly and their lack of etiquette is excused. During the dinner party, for that matter, Mr Ramsay shows clear signs of discontent when Augustus Carmichael asks for a second serving of soup, and Charles Tansley makes snarky remarks towards Lily Briscoe. Female characters, on the other hand, are expected to conform to societal expectations and show courtesy. For example, at one point during the dinner, Mrs Ramsay instructs Lily Briscoe to be polite when responding to Charles Tansley, which causes the latter to “re-nounce the experiment – what happens if one is not nice to that young man over there – and be nice” (Woolf 2018, 87). Although she cannot escape the expectations set for women entirely, Lily Briscoe shows defiance by being an unmarried woman and an artist; thus, she is the exact opposite of Mrs Ramsay, who plays the role of the perfect housewife. Mrs Ramsay feels inclined to care for other people, who, indeed, “came to her naturally, since she was a woman, all day long with this and that; the children were growing up; she often felt she was nothing but a sponge sopped full of human emotions” (Woolf 2018, 30). Her need to maintain unity is integral to the dinner party scene, which is also the pivotal scene of the novel.

The theme of the fleetingness of life is reflected in “Clafoutis” through the fact that neither the mother in “Clafoutis” nor Mrs Ramsay wants their children to grow up, and that both women feel pity over their inability to stop time. Their sentiments are expressed, respectively, in the above-mentioned fragment

of “Clafoutis”, where the mother is covering cherries in batter while pondering the future awaiting her family, and in the reflection that Mrs Ramsay has about her children: “She did not like that Jasper should shoot birds; but it was only a stage; they all went through stages. Why, she asked, pressing her chin on James’s head, should they grow up so fast? . . . They were happier now than they would ever be again” (Woolf 2018, 55). It is worth noting that Jasper Ramsay and Nicholas, the son in “Clafoutis”, are similar as well. Jasper is keen on shooting birds, a habit Mrs Ramsay hopes is temporary, and Nicholas from “Clafoutis” is described as “that devil running past the window”, which suggests that he is also quite an unruly child (Crick 2006b, 63). The theme of ‘assembling’ oneself, one’s surroundings, and relationships is also parodied in “Clafoutis”. In *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs Ramsay reflects on the opinion some people have of her:

Wishing to dominate, wishing to interfere, making people do what she wished—that was the charge against her, and she thought it most unjust . . . Nor was she domineering, nor was she tyrannical. It was more true about hospitals and drains and the dairy. About things like that she did feel passionately . . . No hospital on the whole island. It was a disgrace. (Woolf 2018, 54–55)

Mrs Ramsay opposes being thought of as an authoritarian parent, a tyrant, and so does the mother in “Clafoutis”:

She was so commanding (not tyrannical, not domineering; she should not have minded what people said), she was like an arrow set on target. She would have liked to build a hospital, but how? For now, this clafoutis for Mrs Sorley and her children (she added the yeast, prepared in warm water). (Crick 2006b, 63)

Both women accept that they can be imposing at times, but not in the way other people think them to be. Mrs Ramsay and the mother in “Clafoutis” believe they fight for the right causes, such as reforming their surroundings. Thus, the hospital mention in “Clafoutis” serves as yet another hint about the parody’s hypotext. The juxtaposition of the two creations – building a hospital and baking a pie – is a source of humour in this fragment, and perhaps it is also a mild mockery of performative gestures of the upper-middle and upper classes. The act of making

a dessert is treated by Crick's heroine as a worthy substitute for any grander form of help. As in – if she lacks the power to build a hospital, baking a pie will have to do for now. The mother in "Clafoutis" believes that it is her responsibility to offer her assistance to "Mrs Sorley, that poor woman with no husband and so many mouths to feed," and decides that baking is the right way to do it (Crick 2006b, 60). She is oblivious to the fact that a single pie might not be enough to improve the Sorleys' situation in any meaningful way, which makes the fragment a mockery on the futility of sentimental genteel gestures. Indeed, both the mother in "Clafoutis" and Mrs Ramsay believe that it is their duty to bring harmony to their relationships through gestures related to cooking. Mrs Ramsay feels the need to unite people around her and throws a dinner party as a means to achieve that. She is particularly pleased that Mr Bankes – that "poor man! who had no wife, and no children and dined alone in lodgings except for tonight" – accepted her invitation (Woolf 2018, 79). Thus, when Mr Bankes tastes the boeuf en daube and declares that it "is a triumph", Mrs Ramsay feels that she has fulfilled her role as the hostess and successfully brought her guests together (Woolf 2018, 95).

The societal differences between men and women are also parodied in "Clafoutis." In *To the Lighthouse*, James, the youngest in the Ramsay family, uses the metaphor of "the arid scimitar of the male, which smote mercilessly, again and again, demanding sympathy" when he thinks about his father (Woolf 2018, 36). Mr Ramsay constantly requires approval from others, especially from Mrs Ramsay, and is as ruthless as a blade in his pursuit of sympathy. Just as James perceives his father as the 'scimitar,' the son likens his mother to a "fruit tree" (Woolf 2018, 36). Mr Ramsay plunges into that very tree in search of validation, which he feels Mrs Ramsay is obliged to give him (Woolf 2018, 36). In "Clafouti", a similar metaphor appears. The mother wonders about the next stages of preparing the pie and has the following reflection in the process: "The yeast would cause the mixture to rise up into the air like a column of energy, nurtured by the heat of the oven, until the arid kitchen knife of the male, cutting mercilessly, plunged itself into the dome, leaving it flat and exhausted" (Crick 2006b, 63). This time, the knife is not an outright metaphor for destructive behaviour which affects the whole family, but seems to refer, quite literally, to the act of cutting the cake. Yet, through describing the knife as specifically "of the male", the fragment becomes a subtle commentary on social differences between the two genders (Crick 2006b, 63). Just like the pie in "Clafoutis" is left "flat and exhausted" as a result of being cut,

so is Mrs Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* after having to reassure her husband endlessly (Crick 2006b, 63).

Thanks to the inclusion of elements and themes specific to *To the Lighthouse*, “Clafoutis” works both as a general pastiche on style and a specific parody. Not only can “Clafoutis” be enjoyed by readers who are familiar enough with Woolf’s writing to recognise her style, but it is also a nod to those who have read *To the Lighthouse* and can pinpoint exact thematic correspondences – the Woolfian themes and their parodic invocations. “Clafoutis” is at once humorous and slightly mischievous; it is a parody as fun – capitalising on its playfulness – but also, in social terms, a mild parody of, rather ineffective, genteel sentiments, and gender relationships. Still, despite its critical aspects, “Clafoutis” also pays homage to Woolf and her writing manner. The pastiche was not created with the intent to diminish Woolf’s work; rather, it was written out of appreciation for her extraordinary modernist style. Even if certain Woolfian themes are subject to light parody and subtle satire, it is the admiration for the way Woolf construed her narratives that is at the heart of Crick’s rewrite. Woolf’s legacy is kept alive in “Clafoutis” through revisiting what made her writing truly unique and through the use of those elements to create an unconventional, playful retelling, one that recontextualises the classic Woolfian motifs and, at the same time, prompts a reflection. It can only be hoped that with the creation of works such as “Clafoutis,” pastiche will shake off its long outdated-reputation as a mere ‘fake’ and receive full recognition for its ability to honour and enrich the literary tradition.

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