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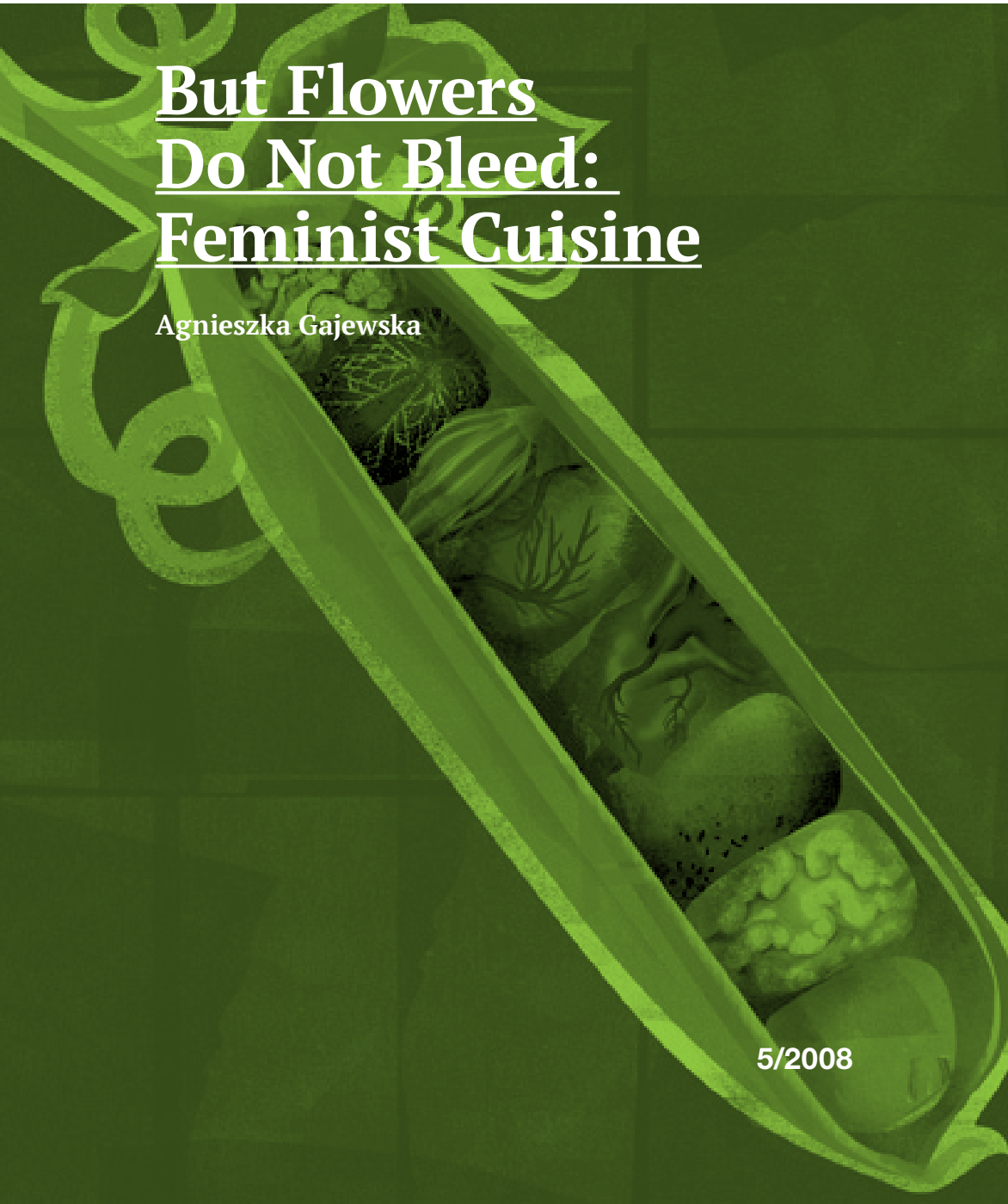

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If the most important question in the Judeo-Christian tradition was whether or not the apple tasted good when Eve ate it, we would not live in a patriarchal culture. Knowledge would have a sour, bitter, or sweet taste, depending on the description of Eve's impressions. And perhaps, throughout the ages, the taste of the fruit would have been a point of departure for inquiries made by ethnologists and researchers in religious studies. For Hélène Cixous, Genesis is the story of a women tempted not by a snake, but by an apple which "pleads to be known." Defying an abstract prohibition, Eve "chooses the joy of knowing, tastes the inside of the fruit, and finds out what is good."[1] Eve's gesture reveals her relation to her own inside, her lack of fear of penetration and of touch from the outside.[2] The above exegetic oversight has been correct-

1 K. Kłosińska, *Miniatury. Czytanie i pisanie "kobiece"*, Katowice 2006, p. 55.

2 Ibid., p. 16.

ed by Jolanta Brach-Czina in "Wiśnia i rozumienie" [The Cherry and Understanding], where the author proves that the best way to know a "particle of being" is to touch, and then eat the fruit. Consent to accept a cherry into one's inside and taste it, is related to the acceptance of the fact that cognition of the world is not objective, since it depends on the sensitivity of the mind and body of the cognizing subject: "The cherry fruit directs us to the sensual side of life, and brings this side on as a value."[3] The category of sensitivity is one of the most important ones in the humanities today, and philosophers, as well as sociologists, historians, and literary critics have repeatedly tried to redefine the "politics of placement," pointing to gender, ethnicity, religious denomination, and social class. I would like to add vegetarianism to these placement markers, negatively defined as "not eating meat." Is the refusal to accept the bodies of animals into one's body as important as one's religious denomination? Or, to ask the question in a different way, do readers who are vegetarians pay attention to other aspects of literary and philosophical works? A reading of books by Peter Singer (Animal Liberation), Maria Gdrodecka (*Zmierzch świadomości łowcy* [Twilight of Hunter-Consciousness]), or Agnieszka Dyczewska (*Światopogląd na talerzu. Wegetarianizm jako przejaw współczesnej religijności* [World-View on the Plate: Vegetarianism as an Expression of Contemporary Religiousness]) leaves no doubt that a vegetarian diet is as political a response as postcolonialism or the alterglobalist movement.

3 J. Brach-Czaina, *Szczeliny istnienia*, Warszawa 1992, p. 16.

Deep vegetarianism

Carol J. Adams claims that feminists should be vegetarians. On the cover of *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990), which is a direct reference to Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*, the image of a woman is cut with lines, delimiting various body parts with names written on them: ribs, spare rib, ham. This is a protest against representations of women's bodies that focus on breasts, thighs, belly, and buttocks. The image of an "edible woman" also subverts worn-out language patterns that allow for hiding acts of animal carnage: words such as "beef" or "humanitarian killing" remove the feeling of shared responsibility for animal deaths.[4] The analogy is obvious: in patriarchal culture, the woman's body is treated the same as the animal body. The ethical response, thus, should be vegetarianism. The refusal to eat meat is also a refusal to participate in the dominant culture, for which suffering and the objectivization of women and animals are fundamental matters.[5] The concept of the vegetarian body proposed by Adams helps to activate sensitivity among philosophers and literary critics: the author is writing her own history of feminist literature to demonstrate that in a patriarchal society, the aspect of responsibility for eating animals is marginalized. Analyzing, among others, texts by Mary Wollstinecraft and Mary Shelley, she demonstrates how vegetarianism has been associated with feminism since its beginnings, and that the parallel between the oppression of animals and women was obvious for activists

4 P. Cf. Lockie, J. Hayward, N. Salem, "Book Reviews", *Agriculture and Human Values* 19/2002, pp. 361–363.

5 C. J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-vegetarian Critical Theory*, New York–London 2000.

involved in the movement for women's emancipation. This has consequences for feminist literary studies: criticism which identifies with dead animals is related to the discovery of the morally responsible pleasure of eating vegetarian meals. By forgetting about meat, we stop talking about the "absent referent," and begin to tell the story of the animal as an individual existence. Patriarchal values are expressed by symbolic images of animal offerings, which reveal qualities within the culture: dominance, control, and unavoidable violence. The world of plants, on the contrary, provides humans with food and clothing, and is additionally associated with a different vision of the world, where the harmonious succession of seasons determines slow changes and predictable consequences. The political implications of this vision are obvious: organic relations between humans and the world, harmony instead of dominance. Symbolic representations focus on the plant world, free from violence, suffering, and bloodshed. Sensitive criticism revises patriarchal culture and focuses mainly on the attitude of the researcher. To renounce participation in the dominant culture, and to be able to evaluate it and create images of a new social order, one needs to have a vegetarian body.[6] Michael Allen Fox in *Deep Vegetarianism* adds that veganism is closer to the vision of the world that attracts Adams because it allows for a full redefinition of the relations between humans and animals.

6 Adams's concepts have been critically discussed by, e.g. Kathryn Paxton George in *Animal, Vegetable, or Woman?*, in which the author stresses that the model of universal ethics proposed by Adams is West-centric and does not include poorer regions of the world, where women have no influence over what they eat, or people who rely on meat to protect their health. Paxton's book, however, introduces new elements into the debate on vegetarianism, because, by analyzing self-help books on healthy nutrition, she points out that the books include critical comments about veganism, but disregard the health risks of eating meat. S. Cf. Lockie, J. Hayward, N. Salem, "Book Reviews", op. cit.

Woman vegetarians

"Polish no-meat cuisine," states Adrianna Ewa Stawska, "is rooted in religious fasting, and has little to do with self-denial. It is culinary bliss."[7] Days of fasting corresponded to culinary habits because until recently, some time in the last century, people in Poland did not eat meat every day. For centuries, meat was not a basic foodstuff. In Polish, however, vegetarianism is not positively defined in dictionaries: "jarstwo, or vegetarianism, (...) are weird examples of outlandish vegetarian terms, coined at the end of the 19th century by the first Polish 'vegetable maniac' (Moes-Oskragiełło, *Jarstwo i wełniarstwo*) and propagated by *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, a weekly magazine in Warsaw, between 1900 and 1914."[8] "Vegetable maniac" does not sound like a compliment, and this negative tendency is amplified by examples from Witold Doroszewski's *Dictionary of Polish Language*, such as "Should we idolize vegetarianism?" Vegetarians never enjoyed much social support in Poland, and the literary origins of the term did not win the sympathy of linguists. Polish feminist writing rarely touches upon cooking, but when it does, it is usually in the form of vegetarian recipes. They are usually not merely scripts telling the reader how to perform a sequence of actions,[9] and participate in an artistic event, but constitute an important el-

7 A. E. Stawska, "Mlecznych barów czar", *Zabytki. Heritage* 7/2008, p. 46.

8 A. Bańkowski, *Etymologiczny słownik języka polskiego, vol. 1*, Warszawa 2000.

9 In *Food for Thought: Philosophy and Food*, Elizabeth Telfer, apart from her inquiries into ethics and vegetarianism, also wonders whether it is possible to treat cooking as a work of art, and stresses that culinary art often fulfils the criteria of philosophical definitions of art. Cooking is creation, recipes often resemble descriptions of artworks, and a cook can be compared to a musician playing a piece from a score: music does not sound in its score, just as a recipe demands a performance. E. Telfer, *Food for Thought: Philosophy and Food*, London-New York 1996.

ement of the composition. In the short story "Otwórz oczy, już nie żyjesz" [Open your eyes, you are already dead] by Olga Tokarczuk, the female protagonist is reading a crime novel in which the characters are eating more or less elaborate meals, which influences the protagonist's choice of dinner meal: "C. thought that she had not fried pancakes in a long time,"[10] the narrator interjects. This interlacing of the crime-novel world and the protagonist's world has important consequences for the detection of the murderer. In Tokarczuk's story, the procedure for arousing the reader's appetite with descriptions of food blurs the boundary between literary fiction and the experience of reality.

A novel by the same author, *House of Day, House of Night*, can be read as a personally profiled cookbook, with mushroom meals as a repeating motif. The chapter on the lurid bolete in cream ends with a recipe which corresponds to the recipe on the book cover, and is repeated as a separate subchapter, for a layered cake made of fly agaric; both recipes include a dose of poison, and eating them can be harmful to one's health. "So what?", asks the narrator, remembering that the brown roll-rim has only recently been classified as poisonous, and in the past many generations knew and appreciated its taste. What counts here is oral tradition and non-specialist opinion, since it is not scientists who are experts in eating, but eaters. Instead of a microscope, there is a cooking pot, and instead of chemical solutions, there is long cooking and removal of the poisoned water. There is a discernible desire for a return to pre-modern

10 O. Tokarczuk, *Gra na wielu bębenkach: 19 opowiadań*, Wałbrzych 2001, p. 21.

times. What, however, does the ending of the fly-agaric cake mean? "Eat slowly. Wait." We clearly think here about lethal poisoning, even though fly-agaric can rarely cause death (unbeknownst to many attempting suicide). Fly agaric can also be eaten as a hallucinatory substance, which would mean that the recipe is asking the eater to wait for visions. The recipe for the sweet cake is the cornerstone of the entire novel, and mycelium here is a different mode of spatial-vegetative organization, incomprehensible for humans with their anthropocentric preconceptions, such as the common fear of death. Removing the fear of mushrooms is the first step on a long way to rejection of the burden of scientific knowledge about plants and mushrooms. The protagonist narrator classifies mushrooms according to her own system: before she picks a mushroom, she tastes a bit of it, opens herself to an open encounter with it, and checks its suitability for cooking. In *House of Day, The House of Night*, we can thus find recipes for meals made from mushrooms commonly considered inedible or poisonous. The people in her social setting are not eager to experiment on their own bodies, and she herself carefully monitors her health to make sure that her intuitions do not fail her, and that she is right not to reject the pleasure of eating mushrooms: "And I haven't died of mushroom poisoning yet. So I learned to eat Rossula aeuginea, which no one picks and which turns the whole forest yellow in August, and I learned to eat Helvella crispa, which has exotic enough shapes to provide an architect with an example of a perfect structure. And amanitas, wonderful amanitas – once I fried their caps and sprinkled them with parley. They

were far too delicious to be poisonous."[11] This passion for preparing a dessert of puffballs, lurid bolete in cream, cake of fly agaric, or coquettes of flammulina betrays a fascination with the mushroom world and is interlaced with declarations, such as "if I were not human, I would be a mushroom," and this identification leads to dilemmas: "I brought home whole basketfuls, spread them out on newspapers, and inspected my collection for as long as I could, until the moment came when I had to take a knife and cut up their soft, childish bodies, chop off their caps and spike them on blackthorn spines to dry out. The prickly branches with all the mushroom caps speared on them leaned against the walls of our house all autumn, steeping them in the odour of dried boletus."[12] The delicate skin of a mushroom resembles a child's skin, and spearing each part on a blackthorn resembles depictions of the crucifixion. However, although there is a skin, there is no blood, and the associations cannot hold; what remains is a pleasant smell that fills the entire house. A sensual mingling of mushrooms and plants in the human world is not always associated with pleasure. A grass allergy and the persistent cough associated with it, are a sign for the novel's characters that grasses recognize them, and perhaps even take revenge for the mowing of meadows. In any case, for them it is a sign of encounter and mingling, interaction, togetherness, and co-presence. The Galician cuisine of Jolanta Brach-Czaina is meant for those who are disgusted by the sight of blood. In "Błony umysłu" [Membranes of the Mind], Tokarczuk provides a recipe for

11 O. Tokarczuk, *House of Day, House of Night*, trans. Antonia Lloyd-Jones, Evanston 2003, p. 222.

12 Ibid., p. 221.

aubergine with tomatoes. The recipe is exceptionally detailed, specifying the manner of serving and suggesting the sequence for eating the vegetables and mushrooms. An important ingredient is red nasturtium flower. And here comes the most disturbing fragment: both the flower, and skinned tomato resemble "artery blood," even though Brach-Czaina recommends the meal for vegetarians. Her associations are related to torture: "inside an outspread cup you can see swollen bruises, like dry smears of blood on the walls of a prison cell, but flowers do not bleed, and tomatoes must be skinned, which is easy if you blanch them. The skin, peeled off alive from hands, will hang from the fingers like creased gloves, but first you have to make an incision at the wrist." The transience of the plant world and of human suffering is visible and not appetizing. We find here similarities to the associations of the protagonist in *House of Day, House of Night*, when she leans over mushrooms with a knife and thinks about murdering her children. In the depiction of the meditation of Jolanta, Irena's Daughter, the point is not only to show how we frequently side with the destructive forces of nature. The key component in the recipe is not the nasturtium, nor the aubergine or tomatoes, but Galicia and its history. When the meal is served it turns out that there is no dinner service left undamaged at home, and descriptions of vicious tortures run parallel to questions about memory:

> *We still think about memory, although, as we think, plants have no memory, and do not transmit any message across generation. All that is left is chance*

> *traces, which were not removed by oversight, and can be found now in unexpected place. Sometimes only in juices of plants.*[13]

It is possible to read this fragment as an ironic response to the vegetarian dream of a bloodless meal, which is undoubtedly related to Brach-Czaina's holistic concept of nature, as expressed in "Metafizyka mięsa" [The Metaphysics of Meat]. Here, however, the most important point is the tradition of family recipe books, which carry traces of past generations, their suffering and the blood they shed. Galician cuisine cannot be separated from the history of Galicia because cuisine is an integral part of history. The statement that plants have no memory has been questioned; anthropocentric modes of cognition are questionable, too, and in reading the recipe with reference to the essay "Cherry and Understanding," one can ask about the degree of sensitivity to the objects encountered: "a necessary condition for understanding messages about being is our readiness to listen to them. Concentration. Focused attention. It is we who are reading, after all, even though we are reading what is given to us to read."[14] After all, to see Galician history in traditional vegetarian meals, one cannot be limited to "common sense" or epistemological theories. Mingling of the plant and human worlds, with all their associations or cultural references, is conducted through devouring, acceptance into one's insides, the acceptance of knowing from the inside: "From a slight, skin-deep contact, to full attachment, from embracing, squeezing, strangling, through ripping,

13 Jolanta, córka Ireny [Brach-Czaina, J.], *Błony umysłu*, p. 36.
14 Ibid., p. 21.

crushing, to dissolving: all these touches are forms of my communion with the world and with myself."[15] And besides, flowers, tomatoes, and aubergines grow in the earth, where our relations are buried. The essay on the cherry ends with a recipe for *pierogi*. The setting seems the same as before: a gush of red juice is flowing out from a *pierog*, when has just been cut open, but this time the conclusion is different. Instead of the expected sourness of cherry, or associations with blood, we experience gentleness and sweetness: "And so, even though the sharp taste of cherry seemed as perfectly appropriate as the taste of existence, the same cherry can, under some circumstances, reveal other tastes."[16] It is as if someone has given us advice: do not be prejudiced, first try and then decide whether you like the taste. In eating, we risk disappointment, or even disgust, but we can also experience bliss. Botanical classifications tell us little about the plant world, and the surest form of knowing this mysterious form of existence, with which we cannot communicate, is not by means of a microscope, but through individual sensual experience: touching, watching, and eating. At this moment, the verse "Erotica" by Ewa Sonnenberg becomes perfectly understandable:

> *"You are the most beautiful fridge, into which I throw*
> *Wild strawberries, beans, and peas."*

translated by Paweł Stachura

15 Ibid., p. 67.
16 Ibid., p. 23.