

The Different Worlds of Robert May and Hannah Glasse

Robert May's *The Accomplisht Cook* (1) and Hannah Glasse's *The Art of Cookery Made Plain & Easy* (2) are separated by less than 100 years, but expose drastic changes in the attitudes of the country. May and Glasse write for different worlds: May's book is intended for trained cooks in the houses of upper-class nobility, while Glasse's book appealed to the rising numbers of practical, economical housewives. The differences in their introductions, backgrounds, and recipe language and tone all help to shed light on the disparity between their respective audiences.

Right from their respective introductions, May and Glasse direct their book towards audiences in different social and economical spheres. May addresses the "master cooks" and "young Practitioners of the Art of Cookery" while Glasse intends to instruct "the lower sort." In his introduction, May refers to his readers as "most worthy Artists" and "diligent perusers," and praises their "experienced Society." He claims that cooking is an art filled with mystery, and that he will elucidate some aspects of cooking that the reader would not have learned from simply being an apprentice to a master. He is targeting professional cooks or those who are in formal training to become professional cooks, who would have been primarily men. On the other hand, Glasse refers to her readers as "servants" aspiring to be just "tolerably good cooks" and "those who have the least notion of cookery." She is writing this book for younger girls who are moving away from their families and into cities, and haven't had any experience or training in cooking. The list of subscribers at the beginning of her book suggests that the lady or woman of the household would buy the book, but use it, as Sarah

Colquhoun notes in *Taste* (3), “to slough off the burden of teaching their staff how to cook.” In fact, the price of the book quickly decreased to become slightly more affordable for a hired female cook to buy herself as an investment.

Appealing to their respective audiences, May and Glasse include different amounts of information about themselves. May legitimizes himself by referencing his experience and proficiency many times. There is an entire section in his introduction describing his life, his training, and the various masters for whom he cooked. It states that his expertise comes only from “long experience, practise, and converse with the most able men.” There are also two poems written by other men praising May and his recipes. For an audience of professional cooks or those cooking for noble or upper-class families, this legitimacy validates the use of May’s cookbook. Reading about the honorable families whom May served could assure another high-status family and their cook that the recipes included were of a suitably high caliber. Glasse, on the other hand, includes hardly any information about herself. In fact, the early editions of her book were published anonymously, only stating that it was authored “by a lady.” She does not consider her identity and experience a vital part of the book as May does. Their background difference may also be why May’s recipes were mostly original, while Glasse’s were mostly adapted from other cookbooks (3,4). Glasse’s introductory material is more focused on her audience and their needs rather than trying to legitimize herself. Her writing is more suited to the maids of middle-class houses to whom an impressive listing of noblemen and training in May’s style is irrelevant, and who just want to get decent food on the table with their available supplies and budget.

The class difference in their audiences is further made clear by specific references to budget in their introductions. May thanks the generosity of his patrons and masters, noting that he would not have been able to learn and create all these recipes had he been “confined and limited to the narrowness of a Purse.” May does claim to include a variety of recipes so that people of lesser backgrounds can afford to make them, although his tone in doing so (“I have descended to their meaner expences”) makes it clear that he himself and the nobility he serves are not those unfortunate types with limited purses. Glasse, on the other hand, specifically boasts about the inexpensiveness of her recipes, giving a sauce recipe that she claims would only cost about three shillings. She is disdainful of the costliness in existing recipe books, calling them “so extravagant.” She further denounces French cooking, claiming that it is expensive and wasteful. May, however, considers his experience in France an asset, saying that he is well-read in French cookbooks and has inserted the good French recipes he knows. While May’s recipes are ultimately meant to be cooked for upper-class nobility, such as his own masters, who would have money to spend on more indulgent recipes, Glasse’s recipes are geared towards household maids in normal working-class houses who would be concerned about making presentable meals on a limited budget.

Their different audiences likely motivate the contrast in the way their recipes are written. Glasse’s tone is no-nonsense, and her introduction assures the reader that her intent is just to educate household cooks in practical recipes rather than display her status or confuse readers with complicated terms. She says that she is not writing in the

“high polite style,” and is using simple language that anyone would know, such as “little pieces of bacon” instead of “lardoons.” Her word choice is tailored towards an audience who is not trained in cooking. As Jennifer Stead explains (4), this is likely because herself and her audience are primarily women who historically would not have had the benefit of an apprenticeship where they would have learned formal cooking terms. Rather, she wants her book to be useful a wide range of people, including those starting from scratch with cooking. May’s tone throughout his book is more lofty and noble, and he clearly holds his audience and profession in high regard.

Glasse’s simpler language can be noted when comparing her recipe for “calf’s head pie” with May’s (appendix 1a, 1b). While May says to boil the head until it is “almost boil’d,” Glasse says to boil it until it is “tender,” which is a more descriptive and understandable term. Similarly, May says to “close it up with some butter,” but a cook who had not made a pie before might not know what he meant by this. Of this step, Glasse says to “lay a thin top-crust on.” When May wants to add clarified butter or gravy to the pie, he says to “liquor it,” while Glasse more simply says to “pour” the sauce on it.

Glasse’s effort to simplify cooking for her audience is also shown through her explicit notation of quantities and cooking times, details that May lacks entirely. For example, in Glasse’s recipes for calf’s head pie, she specifies exact quantities for all ingredients, while the only descriptor May usually uses is to add “some” of an ingredient. She also gives cooking times. For example, she says to “bake it an hour in a quick oven” when May says “being baked.” While a trained cook might know how

much time a calf's head pie should generally be in the oven, or how to tell when it is done, a young maid moving to the city to work for the first time likely would not.

Glasse's detail with quantities therefore makes her recipes well-suited to an audience more ignorant of cooking than May's.

May's recipe is more confusing in the way the sentences are ordered as well. He says first to stuff the head with some ingredients, then to season it, "work it together," and then to "stuff the cheeks." It is unclear whether the reader should be stuffing the cheeks with the same mixture as in the first reference to stuffing the head, and if so, whether the first step to "stuff it" excludes stuffing the cheeks. A few sentences later he again says to "season the head," but it is unclear whether one should be seasoning the head with the same spices again. Towards the end of the recipe, he says to bake the pie, and "being baked, liquor it with clarified butter, and fill it up," but does not specify what exactly to fill it up with. Glasse orders her steps in a way that is more intuitive to an untrained cook. All the steps are in chronological order and she also adds additional clarifying details ("in the mean time"). When listing the ingredients involved in a step, she tends to list them all at once. This is unlike May, who in his last sentence, for example, says to "liquor it with gravy and butter beat up thick together; with the juyce of two oranges." Glasse likely would have listed the orange juice with the gravy and butter, or should the juice should be added afterwards rather than beaten in, still described how to mix up the ingredients and then said to add the mixture to the pie. As Stead notes, "Hannah Glasse rearranges badly worded recipes so that each stage in the method follows logically." (4)

In the calf's head pie recipe, Glasse's recipe is more detailed and longer. She also simplifies other recipes by cutting out versions or indulgences she deems unnecessary. This can be seen in the recipe for "puff-paste" or puff pastry (appendix 2a, 2b). May has five different recipes for different types of puff pastry while Glasse has exactly one. May does not explicitly distinguish his recipes from one another by describing if they are meant to be used for different purposes, rather for each he says to "use it as you will" or "how you please." While a more experienced chef might have a better idea of which recipe to use and what to use it for, a newer chef making puff pastry for the first time might just be confused by the choices. Glasse gives one short recipe and at the end says "this crust is mostly used for all sorts of pies." This is information that a seasoned chef would not need, but for a younger girl in new surroundings Glasse's voice comes across as a comforting helping hand. This motherly image is supported by Stead's observation that Glasse's inclusion of precise measurements that were not present in earlier versions of the recipes that she adapted from reveals that she must have made most of the recipes herself (4). This grants her helpful tidbits the voice of someone more experienced but wanting to help, such as a mother figure.

The fact that there is a calf's head recipe at all in Glasse's book suggests that it is somewhat aspirational; Colquhoun observes that this recipe was "most impressive of all, and reserved for company." (3) Perhaps Glasse's book was also meant as a way for the cooks reading it to imagine themselves in a different, more privileged life. In that way, May's book, which in its introduction states that it will leave the more costly recipes in the book so that the all readers can know what is "extraordinary," is similar.

Hannah Glasse and Robert May both wrote very comprehensive, popular cookbooks, but are very different in the way they view cooking, present themselves in their books, and write their recipes. Their differences are ultimately motivated by a split in the audiences they write for: Glasse writes in a practical, thorough, and cost-efficient way for unschooled cooks of middle-class houses while May writes in a lofty and impressive way for the trained professional cooks of noble households.

Sources:

1. May, Robert. *The Accomplisht Cook, Or, The Mystery of Cookery. Wherein the whole Art is revealed in a more easie and perfect method, then hath been publisht in any Language.*
2. Glasse, Hannah. *The Art of Cookery, Made Plain and Easy: Which Far Exceeds Any Thing of the Kind Yet Published...* W. Strahan, J. and F. Rivington, J. Hinton, 1774.
3. Colquhoun, Kate. *Taste: The Story of Britain through its Cooking.* New York, NY, USA: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008.
4. Stead, Jennifer. "Quizzing Glasse: Or Hannah Scrutinized." *Petits Propos Culinaires.* London, UK: Prospect Books, 1983.

Appendix 1a.

To make a calf's head pie.

CLEANSE your head very well, and boil it till it is tender; then carefully take off the flesh as whole as you can, take out the eyes and slice the tongue; make a good puff-paste crust, cover the dish, lay on your meat throw over it the tongue, lay the eyes cut in two, at each corner. Season it with a very little pepper and salt, pour in half a pint of the liquor it was boiled in, lay a thin top-crust on, and bake it an hour in a quick oven. In the mean time boil the bones of the head in two quarts of liquor, with two or three blades of mace, half a quarter of an ounce of whole pepper, a large onion, and a bundle of sweet-herbs. Let it boil till there is about a pint, then strain it off, and add two spoonfuls of catchup, three of red wine, a piece of butter as big as a walnut rolled in flour, half an ounce of truffles and morels. Season with salt to your palate, Boil it, and have half the brains boiled with some sage; beat them, and twelve leaves of sage chopped fine; stir all together, and give it a boil; take the other part of the brains, and beat them with some of the sage chopped fine, a little lemon-peel minced fine, and half a small nutmeg grated. Beat it up with an egg, and fry it in little cakes of a fine light brown; boil six eggs hard, take only the yolks; when your pie comes out of the oven take off the lid, lay the eggs and cakes over it, and pour the sauce all over. Send it to table hot without the lid. This is a fine dish; you may put in it as many fine things as you please, but it wants no more addition.

Appendix 1b.

To bake a Calves Head in Pye or Pasty to eat hot or cold.

Take a calves head and cleave it, then cleanse it & boil it, and being almost boil'd, take it up, & take it from the bones as whole as you can, when it is cold stuff it with sweet herbs, yolks of raw eggs, both finely minced with some lard or beef-suet, and raw veal; season it with nutmeg, pepper, and salt, brake two or three raw eggs into it; and work it together, and stuff the checks: the Pie being made, season the head with the spices abovesaid, and first lay in the bottom of the Pie some thin slices of veal, then lay on the head, and put on it some more seasoning, and coat it well with the spices, close it up with some butter, and bake it, being baked liquor it with clarified butter, and fill it up.

If you bake the aforesaid Pie to eat hot, give it but half the seasoning, and put some butter to it, with grapes, or gooseberries or barberries; then close it up and bake it, being baked liquor it with gravy and butter beat up thick together; with the juyce of two oranges.

Glasse, Hannah. *The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy: The Revolutionary 1805 Classic*. © Dover Publications, 2015. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>

Appendix 2a.

To make Puff-Paste divers ways.

The First Way.

Take a pottle of flour, mix it with cold water, half a pound of butter, and the whites of five eggs; mix them together very well and stiff, then roul it out very thin, and put flour under it and over it, then take near a pound of butter, and lay it in bits all over, double it in five or six doubles, this being done roul it out the second time, and serve it as at the first, then roul it out and cut it into what form, or for what use you please; you need not fear the curle, for it will divide it as often as you double it, which ten or twelve times is enough for any use.

The second way.

Take a quart of flour, and a pound and a half of butter, work the half pound of butter dry into the flour, then put three or four eggs to it, and as much cold water as will make it leith paste, work it in a piece of a foot long, then strew a little flour on the table, take it by the end, and beat it till it stretch to be long, then put the ends together, and beat it again, and so do five or six times, then work it up round, and roul it up broad; then beat your pound of butter with a rouling pin that it may be little, take little bits thereof, and stick it all over the paste, fold up your paste close, and coast it down with your rouling pin, roul it out again, and so do five or six times, then use it as you will.

The third way.

Break two eggs into three pints of flour, make it with cold water and roul it out pretty thick and square, then take so much butter as paste, lay it in ranks, and divide your butter in five pieces, that you may lay it on at five several times, roul your paste very broad, and stick one part of the butter in little pieces all over your paste, then throw a handful of flour slightly on, fold up your paste and beat it with a rowling-pin, so roul it out again, thus do five times, and make it up.

The fourth way.

Take to a quart of flour four whites and but two yolks of eggs, and make it up with as much cream as will make it up pretty stiff paste, then roul it out, and beat three quarters of a pound of butter of equal hardness of the paste, lay it on the paste in little bits at ten several times; drive out your paste always one way; and being made, use it as you will.

The fifth way.

Work up a quart of flour with half a pound of butter, three whites of eggs, and some fair spring water, make it a pretty stiff paste, and drive it out, then beat half a pound of more butter of equal hardness of the paste, and lay it on the paste in little bits at three several times, roul it out, and use it for what use you please.

Drive the paste out every time very thin.

Appendix 2b.

Puff-paste.

TAKE a quarter of a peck of flour, rub fine half a pound of butter, a little salt, make it up into a light paste with cold water, just stiff enough to work it well up; then roll it out, and stick pieces of butter all over, and strew a little flour; roll it up and roll it out again; and so do nine or ten times, till you have rolled in a pound and a half of butter. This crust is mostly used for all sorts of pies.

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