

poetry *does* and where it *is*. The duck moves from animal to abstraction to essence (68), an approximation of the poetic process: material or imaginative experience, crafted and coaxed into poetic form, elevated upward and outward to a poetic essence that initiates connections and associations where they may not have existed.

Crucial to a poetics of food is the gap that remains between a material thing or experience and the language a poet uses to describe it. A poem titled “Substitutions” makes this chasm clear, between material thing and language but also between past traditions and present conditions: “Balsamic, for Zhenjiang vinegar. / Letters, for the family gathered” (5). What transformations do these substitutions engage and shift into view? What does it mean to reside in this place of transformation, whether at a kitchen table in Atlanta or in the lines of a poem?

For students of poetics, Su’s work illustrates the power of form, meter, and rhyme to create meaning and to process ideas and images into poetry. She utilizes a sestina, which conveys a sense of circularity, to frame modes of hunger and consumption as both consistent and evolving across the years in “Abundance.” She employs a blues form in “Buford Highway” to pay homage to the blues music of the South and articulate what it means when one’s home no longer feels quite like it did. When Su writes, “What conjures our home is a seven-lane highway” (83), the reader can sense both the ground itself, and the definition of home, shifting.

For food studies scholars, this versatile book belongs on a Food and Identity syllabus as much as one on Food and Literature. To take its applications in the field further, it might be placed within a constellation of emerging work about the New South and diasporic foodways. For instance, placing *Peach State* in conversation with Julian Agyeman and Sydney Giacalone’s *The Immigrant-Food Nexus: Borders, Labor and Identity in North America* could help answer Agyeman and Giacalone’s call to conduct a multiscalar food systems analysis that synthesizes “the ‘macro’ approaches, which [focus] on policy and national narratives, and the ‘micro’ approaches, which [focus] on daily lived experiences, materiality, personal identity, and cultural practices” (2020: 8). This analytical framework enables a deeper understanding of immigrant foodways, modes of resistance, and daily survival amid structural constraints. Su offers invaluable poetic insights on the way these approaches manifest and interweave through food and across generations in a diasporic context. Su’s poems often foreground the micro, the daily practices, and the family traditions, but touch on the macro as well: “On the Recommendation That American Adults Consume No More Than One-Quarter Cup of Rice, Twice a Week”

ushers the reader into a macro-level food systems frame regarding the ecological costs of intensive plantation production as it notes that “Studies reveal, where fields were cotton / (Southern states), more contamination” (12).

Su follows that up with an unsettling micro-level imperative: “If your word for food is your word for rice, / change your word for food, or rice” (12). Pathways for analysis proliferate in those consecutive rhyming couplets, where Su in effect links the systemic with the cultural, the soil with the life lived from and with that soil, the material experience of the food and the poetics of that food, the retention of cultural ideas and ideals amid implacable forces of change and time. Earlier, and relatedly, she writes, “Already the days / overflow with imperatives” (8) and invites us to ask, how might food (and how might poetry) intervene?

Su demonstrates the pivotal role poetry can play in a multilayered food systems analysis: as a vehicle for identity formation and expression, for critique, and for a creative rethinking of relations in food ranging from sites and practices of production to those of consumption. If “the raw materials of circumstance” (57) shape recipes and what becomes of food traditions across space and time, then perhaps they also shape the elements that find their way into poetic form.

—Eric Himmelfarb, *New York University*

REFERENCE

Agyeman, Julian, and Sydney Giacalone. 2020. “Introduction: The Immigrant-Food Nexus.” In *The Immigrant-Food Nexus: Borders, Labor, and Identity in North America*, edited by Agyeman and Giacalone. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 1–15.

FAT

Regina Hofer, translated by Natascha Hoffmeyer
University Park, PA: Graphic Mundi, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2021
120 pp. 118 black-and-white illustrations, \$17.50 (paper)

From its arresting cover through its final ambiguous page, Regina Hofer’s graphic novel *FAT* provokes and disorients the reader. Hofer, an Austrian artist and author, battled with anorexia and bulimia from her teen years in the context of family abuse and dysfunction. The memoir promises to resonate with anyone grappling with, or trying to understand, an eating disorder. Armed with sharp lines and indeterminate symbolism, Hofer confronts readers with the reality of distorted perception, mirroring her own experience with anorexia and bulimia: “When you have an eating disorder, you lose a sense for your own appearance—among other

things. The perception of your own body changes significantly” (7). Informed readers will recognize through lines sourced from science fiction, the animal kingdom, and even Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, but may buckle under the weight of the sense-making enterprise, as Hofer’s commitment to disorientation is complete.

Hofer’s memoir is a story of damage, drawn in black and white; there are no gray areas. Describing the daily practice and bodily effects of her eating disorder, she offers panels filled with abstractions—heavily inked circles, dots, slashes, lines—as she plays with negative space. Hofer deploys a visual vocabulary that is less transparently illustrative than it is evocative, and sometimes, meant to disorient. The book’s cover provides the only splash of color, the bright yellow shirt of the objectively *not* fat narrator, alongside the memoir’s all-caps title, *FAT*, offering an inaugural experience of dissonance. Artifacts of early twentieth-century industry populate Hofer’s panels: clocks, robots, blimps, and sinking ocean liners conjure the mechanical and nonhuman as sources of violence, and stand in jagged contrast to the more sympathetically rendered animal world, which exists at its mercy. Hofer’s abusive father is drawn as a robot, whose “R.U.R.”-emblazoned chest piece slyly nods to the artificial people—soulless replicants—in Karel Capek’s eponymous 1920 play. Hofer, although protean, sometimes appears almost orangutan-like, with her anorexic’s downy lanugo reimagined as the shaggy hair of a primate; other times, she is a slug, a fish—unhuman, but alive.

Themes of sexualized violence—toward women and animals—abound in Hofer’s work. She visually morphs her father from a human into a robot spaceman, describing him as a master hunter and recounting a degrading “tavern ritual” among hunters that ties together entitled masculinity, sexual cruelty, and disregard for the other, both feminine and animal. Her hometown in Upper Austria—“a place that’s known for its priests”—is surprisingly illustrated with a louche, stubbly, brassiere-clad angel, a naked butch horse-straddling saint, a jowly degenerate pastor, and a little-boy Hitler, juxtaposed to plaque-mounted rabbit heads, as she tenders the cryptic observation that “Not even the forest offers protection from people’s narrow-mindedness” (59). A topsy-turvy armadillo accompanies Hofer’s narrative about being hit on by a man in a bar. Hofer-as-woman and creatures at the low end of the food chain are presented interchangeably, only their suffering in common.

Perhaps the most violence-evoking measure in Hofer’s memoir is her threading-through of excerpts from Shakespeare’s *Henry V*. Hofer samples heavily from *King Henry V*’s brutal Act 3, Scene 3 speech, weaving the Bard’s savage

imagery of “naked infants spitted upon pikes” and “most reverend heads dash’d to the walls” into the story of her nervous breakdown and devolving relationship with her father. In the speech itself, Henry V shifts blame for the slaughter he threatens, warning the governor of Harfleur that he is about to bring this dark madness upon himself and his town if he fails to surrender, much as the violence of Hofer’s paterfamilias has put her in a no-win situation.

FAT is not a graphic novel about the violence and damage of eating disorders that neatly resolves its tensions. The final page is forward-looking although ambiguous, but any hopes for an epilogue of peace and self-acceptance are seemingly undone by Hofer’s admission on the first page that just two weeks ago, she was still roiling, riddled, disoriented. Hofer’s graphic memoir succeeds in that it provokes a similar dis-ease in readers, laying bare the harsh lived realities of abuse and disordered eating.

—Kathleen LeBesco, *Marymount Manhattan College*

Amber Waves: The Extraordinary Biography of Wheat, from Wild Grass to World Megacrop

Catherine Zabinski

Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2020
216 pp. \$24.00 (hardcover); \$17.00 (paper); \$23.99 (eBook)

Wheat is the world’s most widely grown crop, covering 534 million acres in 2020, and responsible for nearly one in five food calories available globally (FAO 2021a; FAO2021b). In *Amber Waves*, Catherine Zabinski explores how wheat has claimed this preeminent place in farmers’ fields and in our diets. A professor of plant and soil ecology, Zabinski’s gift as a science communicator shines throughout the book. Her story goes well beyond photosynthesis, plant physiology, and genetics, as she uses insights from archeology, anthropology, and politics to unravel the long, intertwining history of wheat and the human societies that have gathered, planted, harvested, and eaten wheat seeds for millennia. In this sense, the book really is a “biography” of wheat—Zabinski has succeeded in bringing out the crop’s wonderfully unique personality, the quirks of nature that have made it so appealing as a food crop, and the twists and turns of its spread around the world. The book is written in an engaging style, with relatively short chapters organized roughly chronologically but delving into a number of branching themes along the way.

Zabinski begins with an evolutionary history of plants, including major milestones such as the emergence of flowering plants and seeds. Our early human ancestors were drawn to wheat because its seeds are nutritionally dense and easy to store