**Paper Mache for 2-14-25 by David Read**

During the holidays, we hosted a family meal featuring capon as the main dish. Capon is a castrated rooster fattened for the dinner table typically weighing 8-10 pounds. Once considered a luxury for the rich, capon still costs more than hens because they are not mass-produced so they’re not sold at most supermarkets. We found ours at Nugget in Roseville. I first heard the word “capon” while studying Shakespeare in high school. In the “All the World’s A Stage” speech in *As You Like It*, the fifth section begins “And then the Justice, In fair round belly with good capon lin’d, With eyes severe and beard of formal cut, Full of wise saws and modern instances,” The capon symbolizes the excesses of privilege and fleeting nature of worldly pleasures. When my son and daughter were in a school production of the play, I served capon at the cast party. All of this got me thinking about other food references in great literature. Food plays a vital role in storytelling, serving as more than sustenance for characters. Many great works of literature include memorable food references that illustrate the social, political, or personal realities of their time.

The Mad Hatter’s tea party in Lewis Carroll's *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* is a whimsical and chaotic scene where tea and treats abound, yet rules and logic are absent. The perpetually interrupted tea symbolizes the nonsensical, absurd world Alice has entered, where time stands still, and conventional behavior is upended. Charles Dickens masterfully employs food symbolism in *Great Expectations* with the eerie depiction of Miss Havisham’s wedding feast. Decaying and covered in cobwebs, the untouched wedding cake and banquet mirror Miss Havisham’s emotional ruin, arrested development and psychological decay. Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* uses food to convey profound social and economic messages. Early in the novel, grapes represent hope and the promise of prosperity in California. However, as the migrant worker Joad family confronts exploitation and injustice, the image of grapes turns bitter, signifying suffering and inequality. Another famous food reference in literature is Marcel Proust’s description of madeleines in *In Search of Lost Time*. The narrator dips a madeleine into tea, triggering a flood of childhood memories. This scene encapsulates Proust’s exploration of the power of sensory experiences to unlock the past and the interplay between taste, memory, and identity.

Although Hemingway was not known as a chef, he wrote often about the cuisines he experienced in his life. One of my favorite recipe books is the *Hemingway Cookbook* which celebrates his insatiable appetite for life and good food and drink. The book includes recipes inspired by Hemingway’s writings featuring unique dishes like Dorado Fillet in Damn Good Sauce, Woodcock Flambé in Armagnac, and Fillet of Lion washed down with Campari and Gordon’s Gin or a cool Cuba Libre. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* contains food and meal references that symbolize camaraderie, culture, and the passage of time. From lembas bread that sustains travelers to the simple joy of mushrooms and ale, food reflects each character’s heritage. The Hobbits famously enjoy seven meals a day: breakfast, second breakfast, elevenses, luncheon, afternoon tea, dinner, and supper. Each meal is more than just a necessity; it’s a cherished ritual emphasizing their simple, comforting routines. Food in literature is a dynamic element that enriches storytelling. Whether it’s the capon in *As You Like It*, symbolizing indulgence and privilege, or Proust’s madeleine, unlocking a world of memories, food references offer readers a deeper understanding of characters, themes, and cultural contexts. These moments remind us that food reflects humanity's complexities, desires, and stories. By savoring these literary meals, readers gain insight into the broader human experience. Bon Appetit!Top of Form

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