

**From glutton to gourmet:  
Is gourmandise still a deadly sin?**

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## **Declaration of authorship**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed: Gilles Petit

Date: 21 July 2019

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## **Abstract**

If the word 'gourmandise' appears in written documents at the end of the Middle Ages, its history is much older since it dates back to the early days of Christianity, to the first monastic communities of the third and fourth centuries. In addition, while the term still exists today, its significance has had many variations over the centuries.

In Western society, gourmandise refers to three denotations roughly corresponding to three historical periods. The earliest meaning refers to the big eaters, the heavy drinkers, and all the excesses of the table. Strongly negative, the word gourmandise qualifies a horrible vice, one of the seven deadly sins codified by the Christian Church.

Gradually, gourmandise was enriched by a second, positive sense which would triumph in France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and introduce the word 'gourmet' into European languages. While still reprobated by the Christian Church and moralists, gourmandise became respectable, characterising the amateurs of good food, good wines and good company.

The invention of 'gastronomy' in 1801 very probably contributed to the process of depreciation of gourmandise by substituting to its meaning a less ambiguous connotation, now devoid of religious references.

Drawing from historical literary works and contemporary French literature, this dissertation explores the evolution of the meanings of gourmandise as a concept, from its early characteristics of a cardinal sin to a contemporary notion merging with visual textualisation.

Furthermore, this research argues that the twentieth century paved the way for a transformation of the meaning of gourmandise, putting the emphasis on a visual refinement characteristic, while still retaining the element of excess as part of its appeal, thus making gourmandise symbolic, accessible and acceptable to the general public.

## Glossary of French terminology

The definitions of the French terms used within this dissertation have been sourced from the online Dictionnaire de l'Académie française (2019) and translated in English by the author.

### **Académie française (French Academy)**

Founded in 1634 by Cardinal Richelieu, the Académie française is an institution whose primary function is to standardise and perfect the French language. Forty members, elected for life ('The Immortals'), preside over the writing and publishing of the Dictionnaire de la langue française (*Dictionary of the French Language*), currently in its ninth edition. It is comprised of personalities who have exemplified the French language: poets, novelists, playwrights, literary critics, philosophers, historians, scientists, and, by tradition, high-ranking military men, public officials and religious dignitaries. Some of its most famous past members were Alexandre Dumas, Victor Hugo and Louis Pasteur.

### **Gourmand, gourmande**

First edition (1694):

Glutton, one who eats with avidity and excess.

Current edition (2000):

1. One who takes pleasure in eating and eats with avidity, with excess.
2. One who appreciates good food, who seeks pleasure in eating delicate dishes.

### **Gourmandise**

First edition (1694):

1. Gluttony, vice of one who is a gourmand.
2. One of the seven deadly sins.

Current edition (2000):

1. Excessive taste for the pleasure of the table.
2. One of the seven deadly sins.
3. Aptitude to appreciate the quality and delicacy of dishes.
4. Gourmandises: small delicacies, most often sweet.

### **Gourmet**

First edition (1694):

One who knows and tastes wine.



Current edition (2000):

1. (Old) Wine taster, a person in charge of appreciating the qualities of wine and recognising their provenance.
2. One who brings to the pleasures of the table a search for delicacy and refinement.

### **Glouton, gloutonne**

Fifth edition (1798):

Gourmand, one who eats with avidity and excess.

Current edition (2000):

1. One who eats greedily and excessively, voraciously.
2. Eager.

### **Gloutonnerie**

Fourth edition (1762) and eighth edition (1932):

Vice of the glouton.

The English translation of the French terminology has been sourced from the online *Oxford English Dictionary* (2019).

### **Glutton**

1. One who eats to excess or who takes pleasure in immoderate eating.
2. An excessively greedy eater.
3. A person who is excessively fond of something.

### **Gluttony**

Habitual greed or excess in eating.

### **Gourmand**

1. A person who enjoys eating and often eats too much.
2. One who is fond of delicate fare, a judge of good eating.
3. A connoisseur of good food; a gourmet.

### **Gourmet**

A connoisseur of good food; a person with a discerning palate.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

This introductory chapter presents the background for this study, outlining in particular its aim and scope. It explains the significance of this study and describes the methodological approach it is based on. The chapter concludes with an overview of the dissertation.

### 1.1 Introduction

This study explores the history of the French concept of gourmandise by investigating and analysing the influences that shaped the changes of meaning of gourmandise over time. Using the form of a historical narrative, this study focuses on the nature of the transition and evolution of meanings from the early days of Christianity into the twenty-first century. It argues that the advent of the internet and social media platforms have paved the way for the transformation of the meaning of gourmandise into a digital visual concept in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

### 1.2 Background to the research

The French concept of gourmandise has a very long history. While contemporary lexicographers define it as “the aptitude to appreciate the quality and delicacy of dishes” and the “excessive taste for the pleasure of the table” (Dictionnaire de l'Académie française, 2018), its meaning has had many variations over the centuries (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011). It has been the object of a philosophical, spiritual and social debate, whether it is depicted as excess or moderation. A quintessential deadly sin of early Christianity (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Billard, 2003), gourmandise was rejected without hesitation by the Christian Church and moralists of the Middle Ages (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Billard, 2003; Fischler, 2008; Meyzie, 2008). The eighteenth century brought about a redefinition of the notion of gourmandise, all the more so as the influence of the Christian Church declined considerably (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Billard, 2003; Fischler, 2008; Meyzie, 2008). The works of Grimod de la Reynière and, a few years later, Brillat-Savarin saw a semantic change in the meaning of gourmandise, which Meyzie (2008) and N'Diaye (1993) both attributed to the transition of an economy of scarcity to one of abundance. The twentieth and twenty-first centuries brought a new era for gourmandise (Telfer, 1990). Social habits changed and dining out became a very important aspect of modern life (Greene, 2015). With the advent of digital communication, people began to

talk about their experiences more rapidly and to a wider audience. Eating out has become a social event, one which must be shared instantly (Greene, 2015). Gourmandise has become digital and focuses both on quality and quantity, retaining some of its original meaning but adding a new dimension at a visual level.

There are a number of researchers, such as Bantreil-Voisin (2011), Bonnet (2015) and Jeanneret (1993) who have focused on the religious aspects of gourmandise. Quellier (2013) and Pitte (2002) both looked at gourmandise within a specific time period. And despite the considerable number of journal articles published on the topic of gourmandise, no study has been done that incorporates all aspects of gourmandise, from historical and spiritual to social and contemporary meaning. The aim of this study is to fill this gap and present the evolution of this term, including a combination of different perspectives as well as an analysis of its contemporary meaning.

### **1.3 Aim and scope**

The aim of this study is to present a narrative history of the meaning of the French concept of gourmandise, focusing on the theories behind the transition of meaning.

Three key objectives are addressed:

- A presentation and examination of the history of the concept of gourmandise, from early Christianity to the present day.
- An analysis of the different influences that shaped the changing meanings of gourmandise.
- An explanation of the emerging modern expression of gourmandise through the twenty-first century social media platforms.

While there appears to be an inexhaustible source of information in the field of gastronomy, very little research has been done looking at gourmandise, the French concept of appreciation of the quality and delicacy of dishes, bordering on excessiveness. Furthermore, the existing literature on the subject of gourmandise has mainly focused on the perspectives of and correlation between a 'glutton' – one who eats to excess, or who takes pleasure in immoderate eating (Oxford English Dictionary, Glutton, 2019) – and a 'gourmand' – one who is fond of delicate fare, a judge of good eating (Oxford English Dictionary, Gourmand, 2019). While Bantreil-Voisin (2011) wrote an interesting account of the history of gourmandise, her work was based mostly on the spiritual aspect of its meaning. Bonnet (2015), in his book *La Gourmandise et la Faim*, looked at the aspect of gourmandise only through the theme of food in French literary works of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Reggiani's (2017) account of

gourmandise is mainly based on the semantic and linguistic difficulties of translating gourmandise into other languages while trying to retain its French cultural connotations.

This study looks at all the aspects of gourmandise, incorporating the interrelation between linguistic, historical, spiritual, social and psychological aspects. It further attempts to clarify the terminology relating to the phenomenon of gourmandise in order to facilitate the general discussion.

By incorporating all points of view (including linguistic, historical, spiritual, social and psychological perspectives), this study provides a clearer, more up-to-date contribution to the discussion on the transition of gourmandise from the notion of excessive consumption to the concept of digitally and visually consuming the food.

#### **1.4 Methodological approach to the research**

In developing a narrative history to better understand the theories behind the changes and evolution of meaning of gourmandise, this study used an interpretive paradigm within a relativist ontology. This approach was considered the best suited as it is based on the assumption that the social world has no direct interaction with ourselves (Gray, 2013; Ponterotto, 2005) and it facilitates the intention of understanding human experiences (Gray, 2013; Ponterotto, 2005).

Since historical and contemporary literature was used exclusively to conduct this research, a hermeneutic methodology was selected. As hermeneutics combines both a descriptive and narrative analysis of the data collected, this seemed the most suitable approach. Furthermore, it allows for the researcher's lived experiences (Kinsella, 2006) and personal assumptions and pre-conceptions to be integrated into the study.

#### **1.5 Overview of the dissertation**

This dissertation comprises six chapters and is structured as follows:

Chapter 1 introduces the study, reviewing the background of the research, its aim and scope as well as the methodological approach.

Chapter 2 introduces the concept of gourmandise through a review of existing literature.

Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework of the study. It provides an explanation and justification for using a hermeneutic approach.

Chapter 4 presents the narrative history of the concept of gourmandise, from early Christianity to the twenty-first century. It explores the evolution of the meaning of

gourmandise from a cardinal sin to a contemporary notion of excessive digital consumption.

Chapter 5 presents the findings and discussion based on the thematic analysis of the data collected.

Chapter 6 provides a conclusion to the study by summarising the findings. It also sets out the limitations to the study and introduces suggestions for further research.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **METHODOLOGY AND METHOD**

This chapter introduces the philosophical and theoretical assumptions underpinning the research. To truly understand the methodology chosen, key terms are clearly identified followed by the rationale for selecting an interpretivist research paradigm. Furthermore, the chapter introduces and explains the ontological and epistemological stance, congruent with the hermeneutical methodology selected to conduct this research.

This research is based on a relativist ontological perspective. It aimed at exploring the concept of gourmandise, examining its historical representation in relation to a deadly sin. Through this relativist approach, the research examines and compares the different meanings of gourmandise and investigates their permutations within a contemporary social, cultural and historical world. As solely literature-based piece of research, using qualitative data collection, the study considers how social reality is constructed by multiple perspectives (Bryman, 2008).

#### **2.1 Purpose of the research**

While there appears to be an inexhaustible source of information in the field of gastronomy, very little research has been done looking at gourmandise, the French concept of appreciation of the quality and delicacy of dishes, bordering on excessiveness. Furthermore, most of the existing literature on the subject of gourmandise has mainly focused on the perspectives of and correlation between a glutton – one who eats to excess, or who takes pleasure in immoderate eating (Oxford English Dictionary, Glutton, 2019) – and a gourmand – one who is fond of delicate fare, a judge of good eating (Oxford English Dictionary, Gourmand, 2019). Therefore, from the outset, specific themes and key words were selected for this research, in both French and English. This was followed by a judicious selection of books, mostly French literature. This material was selected to provide a reliable theoretical foundation for developing and understanding the concept of gourmandise, thus making it possible to address three key objectives:

- Present and examine the history of the concept of gourmandise, from early Christianity to the present day.
- Analyse the influences that shaped the changing meanings of gourmandise.
- Explain the emerging modern expression of gourmandise through the twenty-first century social media platforms.

While a variety of definitions of the term gourmandise have been found, this dissertation will use the definition suggested by the prestigious Académie française (French Academy), which defines gourmandise as “The aptitude to appreciate the quality and delicacy of dishes; one of the seven deadly sins; excessive taste for the pleasure of the table (Dictionnaire de l'Académie française, Gourmandise, 2018)” .

## **2.2 Research paradigms**

Research paradigms are sometimes referred to as theoretical framework perspectives and may influence the way knowledge is studied and interpreted. Whilst loosely defined as a collection of beliefs, philosophical assumptions or concepts, they guide the researcher in deciding on the research topic and how the research is conducted and interpreted (Denscombes, 2009; Gray, 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

A number of theoretical paradigms are available to the researcher but the four most common ones are: positivism, postpositivism, interpretivism and critical theory (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Ponterotto, 2005).

Positivism aims at testing a theory or describing an experience through observation and measurement to predict a specific outcome. The inquiry should be empirical (scientific observation) therefore it should be dealing only with facts, within a very rigid set of rules (Gray, 2013).

The assumptions of postpositivism are that the research is influenced by many different existing theories, including the one which is being tested. Postpositivists see the social world as mysterious, variable and possessing a multitude of realities. Therefore, what they consider to be the truth for one person might not be the same truth for another (Gray, 2013; Ponterotto, 2005).

The interpretivist approach is based on the assumption that the social world (object) has no direct interaction with ourselves (subject). The intention is to understand human experiences, recognising that multiple realities are socially constructed in the mind of the individual (Gray, 2013; Ponterotto, 2005). Meaning is brought forward through deep reflection and a hermeneutical approach, and interactions between the researcher and the participant (Ponterotto, 2005).

An interpretive paradigm was deemed the best suited approach for this research, as it focused on the historical meanings of gourmandise. This approach enabled the intention of understanding the ‘lived experience’ and the validity of multiple realities (Ponterotto,

2005, p. 129). While my role as researcher may also be as participant (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), I used my own interpretation of cultural and historical textual data and imagery to enable a reconstruction of the perceptions and concepts of gourmandise and the evolution and transition of its original meaning and connotations.

Critical theory presents a very different perspective, going against the positivist and interpretivist stances. Critical inquiry invites a collaboration between the researcher and the participants to develop new theories and interpret them based on the beliefs and values of the researchers; those values will form an integral part of the final findings (Denscombes, 2009, Gray, 2013).

Within any particular paradigm, a symbiotic relationship between ontology, epistemology and methodology must prevail to show a logical and congruent approach to the research. It is therefore crucial to understand the differences between ontology, epistemology and methodology.

Ontology and epistemology, both synergistic in nature, can simply be described as reflections of how people know and understand the world around them (Gray, 2013). Ontology is concerned with the state of the nature of existence (Gray, 2013; Ponterotto, 2005) and focuses on our world views of reality. Ontology addresses questions such as “What is known of reality?” and “What are our views of the human world and what can be known from it?” (Crotty, 1998; Ponterotto, 2005). Furthermore, Bryman (2008) and Crotty (1998) both identified ontology as being related to the ‘nature of existence’ – or, more simply put, it is related to the question ‘What is real?’. It is important to mention that our ontological positions on what is reality can differ considerably.

Two principal positions of ontology are *realism* and *relativism* (Crotty, 1998; Denscombes, 2009). Realists view the world as a single ‘reality’, unchanging and motionless, where physical attributes will stay the same. Their views will be objective, based on facts without any human interaction (Ponterotto, 2005). Relativists are concerned with multiple perspectives on reality. They believe that there is no objective truth or meaning to be uncovered but that truth and meaning must be constructed by the way we perceive and act in the social world (Crotty, 1998). Therefore, different people will construct different meanings as they interact with reality, their choices being influenced by their own experiences and social interactions (Gray, 2013).

Embedded within ontology is epistemology – the study of what we know and how we know what we know. Laverty (2003) proposed that epistemology relates to the nature of the relationship between the ‘knower’ and what can be known. Similarly, epistemology is described as a philosophical backdrop for determining what kind of knowledge is feasible and how it can be both adequate and legitimate (Crotty, 1998; Gray, 2013;



Ponterotto, 2005). Epistemology is paramount as it helps a researcher gather evidence and gain validity through using proper design tools and developing a suitable structure for the research (Crotty, 1998; Gray, 2013).

Three epistemological positions have eventuated over the years: subjectivism, constructivism and objectivism. Within subjective epistemology, the concerns of researchers are focused on the meaning we give to the object and how we give those meanings. A researcher will give a meaning to an object through experiences, dreams, cultural or religious values, without any correlation between object and subject (Crotty, 1998).

Constructivist epistemology suggests that the meaning is created through interactions in the social environment (Crotty, 1998) instead of being discovered and developed. Truth and meaning are constructed and imposed by the researchers, which in turn may link to multiple and conflicting perspectives – even when associated with the same phenomenon (Gray, 2013).

Objective epistemology implies that the phenomenon studied is separate and independent from social interaction. Therefore, knowledge is free from social or researcher influence; the aim is to find the absolute facts or truth (Crotty, 1998; Gray, 2013).

Based on a relativist ontological perspective, this research aimed at investigating how the meanings of gourmandise eventually evolved into a symbol of culinary sophistication in the nineteenth century and through to the present day. A constructivist epistemological position was selected as it best reflected on the social and historical perceptions of gourmandise (Crotty, 1998; Gray, 2013). Using this constructivist epistemology, the research aimed at investigating and analysing the influences that shaped the changing meanings of gourmandise and at pointing out how they evolved into a description of culinary sophistication in the nineteenth century to the present day. As Crotty (1998) suggested, this theoretical background was based on the assumption that meaning is created out of “our engagement with the realities in our world” (p. 8). This research explored and compared theories, using questions such as “What is gourmandise?” and “How is gourmandise defined in the twenty-first century?”

### **2.3 Overview of methodology – Hermeneutic approach**

In view of the research objectives, a hermeneutic approach was used to conduct this research. ‘Hermeneutic’, in its most traditional sense, means the art of interpreting text correctly. It focuses primarily on texts as research data sources and seeks to understand

rather than offer an explanation (Kinsella, 2006). The term hermeneutic comes from the Greek verb 'hermeneuein', which translates as 'to interpret'. Hermeneutics was therefore understood as the 'art of interpretation', its purpose being to suggest rules allowing the correct interpretation of texts in order to avoid misunderstandings (Kinsella, 2006; Lavery, 2003).

Two embedded assumptions of hermeneutics are that humans experience the world through language and that this language imparts both understanding and knowledge (Byrne, 2001).

As Jardine (1992) states:

Hermeneutic inquiry has as its goal to induce understanding, to bring forth the presuppositions in which we already live. Its task, therefore, is not to methodically achieve a relationship to some matter and to secure understanding in such a method. Rather, its task is to recollect the contours and textures of the life we are already living, a life that is not secured by the methods we can wield to render such a life our object. (p. 116)

Originally, hermeneutics was linked with the examination and translation of biblical texts in order to explain how to live a Christian life. Through a method called 'reconstruction' (forming a new perspective), monks sought to find the original intended meaning. Hermeneutics evolved from this analysis of biblical texts to a method aimed at gaining understanding of human nature (Spiegelberg, 1982).

In his 1960 work on hermeneutics, *Truth and Method*, German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) stated that "Part of real understanding is that we regain the concepts of a historical past in such a way that they also include our own comprehension of them" (Gadamer, 1996, p. 307). What interested Gadamer was not the text as such, but the experience of comprehension in which the text and its interpretation come into a fusion. He asserted that there is no text without interpretation, which is to say without the unfolding of its meaning by an interpreter: "Part of real understanding is that we regain the concepts of a historical past in such a way that they also include our own comprehension of them" (Gadamer, 1996, p. 374).

In relation to this research, the hermeneutic approach had the benefit of being able to combine both the narrative and descriptive interpretation of the data collected, as the purpose of hermeneutical research is to understand and reflect on (rather than explain) human experience while we are living it (Kinsella, 2006). Furthermore, through this approach, this researcher's biases, assumptions and pre-conceptions formed an integral part of the interpretive process and his personal experience is included as part of the data collected (Lavery, 2003). Lastly, while conducting this hermeneutic research, the concepts of historical phenomena (lived experiences) (Lavery, 2003) were retained but

the focus was on the meaning that emerged from the researcher's self-reflective interpretive examination.

### **3.4 Data collection and analysis**

This research on gourmandise was built on a qualitative constructivist methodology. Based on this approach, two data collection methods were identified: the primary method and the secondary method (Miller & Deutsch, 2009). Primary data collection encompassed historical narratives, historical food diaries and works of art, while secondary data collection included books, reviews of food history, journal articles and food bibliographies (Evaluation Research Team, 2009; Miller & Deutsch, 2009). Systematic and thematic historical analysis was also useful as it allowed for a classification of themes as well as determining a cause-and-effect process in the evolution of meaning of the concept of gourmandise.

Historical and contemporary literature established the background of this research and improved the inductive process of the research. It also provided a structure for the data analysis, identifying key themes and classifying them into groups of identical meanings (Lester, 1999; Miller & Deutsch, 2009). Using works of art (paintings) by means of a semiotic approach (Chandler, 2017) helped describe and understand the connotations of gourmandise. The use of contemporary written and digital documentation (books, journal articles and web sites) helped focusing on the nature of the transition of meaning of the term gourmandise.

Lastly, the focus was placed on a thematic analysis of the collected data. Historical documents and portraiture were evaluated beyond their factual accounts to provide a dialectical interpretation of events (Kinsella, 2006; Lester, 1999; Miller & Deutsch, 2009). Contemporary literature contributed to the narrative by providing an argument in regards to the transitional meaning of gourmandise, leading to an emerging theory.

## CHAPTER 3

### INTRODUCING GOURMANDISE: LITERATURE CONTEXT

This chapter provides an overview of the published literature considering the French concept of gourmandise. It aims to present an outline of the changes of meanings of gourmandise

The history of gourmandise dates back to the early days of Christianity, to the first monastic communities of the third and fourth century (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011). And while the term still exists today, its significance has had many variations over the centuries (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011).

The prestigious Académie française (French Academy), whose main mission is to “work with all possible care ... to make French language pure and eloquent” (Dictionnaire de l'Académie française, Gourmandise, 2018), defines ‘gourmandise’ as “the ability to appreciate the quality and delicacy of dishes” (Dictionnaire de l'Académie française, Gourmandise, 2018). An exact English translation of gourmandise is not entirely possible. While it seems to have become synonymous with ‘gluttony’ or ‘greed’ (eating in excess), some lexicographers use the words ‘voracity’ or ‘epicurism’ (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011).

The earliest meaning of gourmandise refers to the big eaters and the heavy drinkers and all the excesses of the table (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Jeanneret, 1993). Strongly negative, the word gourmandise qualifies a horrible vice. It is referred to as one of the seven deadly sins, codified by the Christian Church in the sixth century. While the Bible ratifies them, it is interesting to note that nowhere are they recorded as ‘The Seven Deadly Sins’. The closest reference to gluttony appears in Proverbs 23: 20-21: “Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags”.

In the Middle Ages, gourmandise is often described as a sin of the rich and powerful, closely related to pride and greed, especially for those seen eating and drinking with extravagance, excess and/or avarice (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011). Gluttons and misers hold the Christian faith up to ridicule by associating the clergy with other cardinal sins like sloth, greed and envy (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Pitte, 2002). Gourmandise’s portrayal in various forms of self-indulgence and with negative undertones is clearly evident in French literature of the sixteenth century by François Rabelais (1494-1553) and his

series of crude and satirical novels featuring his main character Gargantua, a giant whose first words are “some drinks, some drinks” (GradeSaver, 1999).<sup>1</sup>

In the middle of the eighteenth century, French authors Denis Diderot (1713-1784) and Jean-Baptiste le Rond d’Alembert (1717-1783) re-evaluated the perception of gourmandise. In their *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers*,<sup>2</sup> gourmandise is defined as “a refined and inordinate love of good food” (Chevalier de Jaucourt, 2006, p. 754).

It was not until the nineteenth century that gourmandise was gradually liberated from its negative undertones (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Bonnet, 2015; Brillat-Savarin, 1994; Pitte, 2005). Gradually, gourmandise was enriched by a more positive meaning which imposed the French word ‘gourmet’ (a person with a discerning palate, a connoisseur of good food) on European languages – the English preferred to wait until 1820 when the French gastronomic discourse emerged to add it to their vocabulary (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Jeanneret, 1993; N’Diaye, 1993). Gourmandise characterised the amateurs of good food, good wines and good company. But, still reprobed by the Christian Church and moralists, gourmandise incurred a social sanction by assimilation to the ‘dirty’ glutton, a hungry and hideous person without education. In its plural form, gourmandises became synonymous with friandises (sweet treats) and referred to the nibbling of food between meals (Hache-Bissette & Saillard, 2007; Kronl, 2011;). Once linked to salted delicacies, gourmandises were strongly tied to the reign of sweetmeats in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, when sweet treats were reserved for women and children, while good food and good wines were the prerogative of men (Kronl, 2011).

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the invention of ‘gastronomie’ (in English, ‘gastronomy’), then of ‘gastronome’ – and, above all, the great success of these words in European languages – very probably contributed to the process of depreciation of gourmandise by substituting to the meaning of gourmandise a less ambiguous meaning (Berchoux, 1805; Simon, 2018). In 1801, French lawyer Joseph Berchoux (1760-1839) published *Gastronomie où L’homme des Champs à Table (Gastronomy or the Peasant at the Table)*, a long poem in four parts dedicated to the love of food. It marks the first appearance of the word gastronomie in the French language, defining it as a codification

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<sup>1</sup> Gargantua himself and his love of food and gourmandise later gave rise to the adjective ‘gargantuan’ – which is often used nowadays in relation to large things, especially when associated with food – for example a gargantuan appetite, a gargantuan meal (Merriam-Webster, Gargantua, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> *Encyclopaedia or Reasoned Dictionary of Science, Arts and Craft*, published between 1751 and 1772. The encyclopaedia is a major editorial work of the eighteenth century and the very first of its kind. It represents the classification of the knowledge of the time, collected and organised by “a society of literati” (Agora, 2012).

of the art of eating and the pleasures of the table (Berchoux, 1805). Created from the Greek 'gastros' (stomach) and 'nomos' (rule), gastronomy evoked the notion of mastery of the ways of the table, according to Berchoux; in other words, it was an acceptable passion, and the respect of good manners (Berchoux, 1805; Simon, 2018).

Three years after the publication of Berchoux's poem, Alexandre Balthazar Grimod de la Reynière (1758-1837), with his *Almanach des Gourmands*, published between 1803 and 1812, led a semantic revolution by making a capital sin the mark of a positive distinction, even a value on which to rebuild a sociability shaken by the French Revolution of 1789 (Garval, 2016). Gourmandise does not disappear from the cultural landscape of the nineteenth century, even if the disapproval of the voracity and excess that it stigmatises tends to become secularised.

The statement drawn up by Brillat-Savarin (1755-1826) in his 1825 *Physiologie du Goût*<sup>3</sup> is emblematic of the re-evaluation of gourmandise during the nineteenth century. Considered as the exclusive prerogative of the (civilised) man, gourmandise was therefore, for connoisseurs, what connected him to his fellow citizen and allowed a form of community beyond the mere sharing of food (Brillat-Savarin, 1994).

Brillat-Savarin characterised gourmandise by the co-existence and interdependency between gastronomes, restaurant owners, cooks as well as "all who in their turn employ other works of every kind for their needs, thus giving rise at all times to a circulation of funds incalculable in respect to mobility and magnitude by even the most expert brains" (Brillat-Savarin, 1994, p. 133).

He also presented gourmandise in close relation to the prominence and superiority of French cooking, which influenced the numbers of foreigners coming to Paris to eat, thus linking gourmandise to what is now recognised as gastronomic tourism (Brillat-Savarin, 1994, pp. 135-136).

A review of recent literature on gourmandise suggests that the evolution of meaning of the word gourmandise may be linked to the changes of eating habits of the twentieth century (Bonnet, 2015; Quellier, 2013). Furthermore, with the advent of the internet and social media platforms of all kinds, gourmandise now occurs in many different forms within many different areas of professional and everyday life (Bonnet, 2015; Greene, 2015). Gourmandise has taken a significant place in our hyper-consumption society

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<sup>3</sup> The full title is *Physiologie du Goût, où Méditations de Gastronomie Transcendante; Ouvrage Théorique, Historique et à L'ordre du Jour, Dédié aux Gastronomes Parisiens, par un Professeur, Membre de Plusieurs Sociétés Littéraires et Savantes (The Physiology of Taste, or, Meditations of Transcendent Gastronomy; A Theoretical, Historical and Topical Work, Dedicated to the Gastronomes of Paris by a Professor, Member of Several Literary and Scholarly Societies)* (translated by A. Drayton in Brillat-Savarin, 1994).

(Greene, 2015). While Bonnet (2015) presented these changes as a reflection of sentiments prevalent throughout French society, others have provided a more complicated discussion about the cultural and political impulses behind them (Pitte, 2005).

The recent affirmation of its patrimonial dimension (Reggiani, 2017) as well as the attempt to create a hybrid that includes a 'gourmand bon vivant' and the elitist gastronome (foodie) are the paths currently used to give gourmandise a social legitimacy.

## CHAPTER 4

### GOURMANDISE: A NARRATIVE HISTORY

This chapter provides a historical and chronological narrative of the changes of meaning of the French concept of gourmandise.

#### 4.1 Gourmandise: An unimportant sin with dire consequences

Deriving from the Latin word 'gula' meaning 'throat', gourmandise refers to the sin of greed for the Christian Church (Shannon, 2016). It appears in the history of Christianity in a particular geographical and human context, that of the 'Fathers of the Desert', the hermits who founded the first communities of monks established in the Egyptian desert (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Shannon, 2016). In order not to hinder the elevation of their souls towards God, these monks inflicted a rigorous self-abnegation upon their bodies. They adopted the perspective of a spiritual combat, of the victory of the Spirit over the flesh that every man must win. For these Fathers, gourmandise affected the spiritual life and it was the vice that had to be attacked first – and conquered – if one was to claim to have acquired other virtues (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Shannon, 2016). Around 365AD, the monk Évagre the Pontic created a list of eight vices or evil thoughts used by the Devil to tempt the monks (Fischler, 2008; Meyzie, 2008). Gourmandise (gluttony), lust, avarice, sadness, anger, acedia (laziness), vanity, pride: the order indicated a hierarchy from carnal vices to spiritual vices. The gravity of the vices increased towards pride, and this hierarchy also indicated a path: gourmandise incited other vices (Bibleinfo, 2012). Hence, the monastic rules appeared to carefully restrain gourmandise by restricting food intake to vital bodily needs. These rules also defined precisely the quantity and quality of the daily rations of food and drink, fixing the specific times for the meals and establishing a system of fasting (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Meyzie, 2008; Shannon, 2016).

One of the most influential works about the deadly sins is *The Institutes*, first published around 429AD (Eberstadt, 2008; Hill, 2007). *The Institutes* is divided into a series of books in which its author, John Cassian (360AD-435AD),<sup>4</sup> discussed the organisation of monastic communities, addressing in particular a systematic list of eight vices (which would later evolve into the seven deadly sins). Cassian's approach to gourmandise is three-fold. Firstly, gourmandise is "that which urges the anticipation of the canonical hour of eating" (Hill, 2007, p. 62). Within monastic communities, the act of eating outside the

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<sup>4</sup> John Cassian, Christian monk and theologian, is mostly known for the influence of his writing in early medieval Western society (Eberstadt, 2008; Hill, 2007; The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019).



set times is considered going against the communal edicts, therefore breaking “the most ancient tradition of the fathers” (Hill, 2007, p. 62).

Secondly, gourmandise is “that which rejoices only in filling the belly to repletion with any food whatsoever” (Hill, 2007, p. 62). This type of gourmandise is the closest to today’s notion of overeating. In Cassian’s words, eating too much will make the individual unable to think clearly, therefore unfit for established monastic life (Hill, 2007).

Cassian’s third and last type of gourmandise is “that which is delighted with more refined and delicate foods” (Hill, 2007, p. 62). As food prepared in monasteries must be cheap to purchase and quick to prepare, its only function is to provide one’s bodily needs.

Therefore, for Cassian, gourmandise is about the proper place of food in one’s monastic life (and in the monastic community), and is a communal burden, challenging one’s spiritual disciple (Eberstadt, 2008; Hill, 2007; The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019).

At the end of the sixth century, the order of the eight vices is redesigned, inverted and re-codified into seven capital sins by Pope Gregory the Great in his *Moral Commentary on the Book of Job* (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011). Choosing a descending order of gravity, Gregory gives first place to pride (vanity), seen as an exacerbated love of self, while gourmandise finds itself in penultimate position just before lust, in the full sequence: vanity, envy, anger, sadness, avarice, gourmandise (gluttony) and lust. Fundamental to medieval morals and culture, the epitome of Gregory the Great was in being the origin of the seven deadly sins taught to all the faithful from the thirteenth century onwards, in particular by the recently created Dominican and Franciscan Orders (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Bibleinfo, 2012; Meyzie, 2008; Shannon, 2016).

#### *What does the Church mean by the sin of gourmandise?*

For Gregory the Great, it can take many forms: eating out of meal times or anticipating meal times; eating and drinking too much in relation to one’s physiological needs; eating greedily; or looking for sumptuous feasts, richer foods or refined dishes (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011). If the monastic influences remain visible, especially in the condemnation of eating before the hour, by passing from the monastic world to that of the laity, the meaning of gourmandise has changed (Meyzie, 2008). In being opposed to the idea of moderation, and no longer to that of privation and mortification of the body, the sin of gourmandise knew its first relaxation.

Medieval theologians insisted much less on the sin of gourmandise, which in itself was a venial sin, but more on its dangerous consequences (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011). Brainless joy, obscenity, loss of purity, excessive loquacity and weakening of the senses were the

five penalties of gourmandise for Gregory the Great. The effects of drunkenness on the speech and body were particularly stigmatised. Obscene gestures and songs, buffoonery, blasphemous remarks, excessive speech, stupidity, asinine joy... part of the sin of language was related to gourmandise, while other aspects were related to anger, envy and lust (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Meyzie, 2008; Shannon, 2016).

Promoted to the rank of capital<sup>5</sup> sin, gourmandise had become responsible for sins that were much more serious, sometimes fatal, such as the heating of the senses that conspired to lust (Shannon, 2016). A serious form of the sin of gourmandise, drunkenness, could lead to arguments, violent acts – even resulting in homicide – extramarital sex or having other objectives in sex than procreation (Shannon, 2016). Potentially, gourmandise was at the origin of disorder and social unrest. By leading one to eat and drink too much in relation to one's physiological needs or too sumptuously in regard to one's rank in society, gourmandise destabilised a social body perceived as naturally immutable and established by God (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; N'Diaye, 1993).

## 4.2 Gourmandise: The original sin?

*On which biblical episodes is the sin of gourmandise established?*

The list of the seven deadly sins does not appear as such in the Bible, the Ten Commandments ignore gourmandise and the Gospel According to Matthew says that “What defiles a person is not what goes into the mouth; it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles a person” (Matthew 15:11). Nevertheless, the Old Testament contains many stories that were interpreted from the earliest days of Christianity as references to the sin of gourmandise (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Bibleinfo, 2012).

Writers often described Adam and Eve as responsible for the first sin. While biting into the forbidden apple is enough to portray the first humans as guilty of gourmandise, it challenged the contemporary notion of gourmandise as overeating. According to John Cassian (360AD-435AD), Adam would not have been tempted by gourmandise “had he not had something to eat and immediately and lawlessly misused it” (Hill, 2007, p. 63). Therefore, for Cassian, gourmandise is defined as a “misuse of food that resulted in human ruin and death” (Hill, 2007, p. 61).

In his work entitled *Summa Theologica* (written 1265-1274), Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) addressed the concept of gourmandise as a serious sin. According to him, one

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<sup>5</sup> The adjective 'capital' does not mean *first by importance* but *first on top of the list*, that is, engendering other sins. Gourmandise is considered a *capital* sin because it leads to other sins (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011).

can tell the severity of a sin by its punishment. Since gourmandise resulted in Adam and Eve being evicted from the Garden of Eden, Aquinas asserted that gourmandise is undeniably a serious sin. He stated that the act of eating the forbidden fruit was “less about the apple itself and more about the abuse of divine things that becomes the occasion of other sins” (Hill, 2007, p. 65). Furthermore, Aquinas conceded that gourmandise is an unreasonable desire and exists “only when a man knowingly exceeds the measure in eating” (Brind'Amour, 2007).

### **4.3 Medieval images of gourmandise – A sin of the rich and powerful**

Miniatures adorning manuscripts, frescoes and the carved decoration of medieval churches offer a figurative representation of gourmandise. The ventripotent glutton seated in front of a large meal and a pitcher of wine is the most common way to symbolise the sin of gourmandise because it is the most easily decipherable, (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Bonnet, 2015; Meyzie, 2008). In a parade of vices carrying the seven deadly sins into a furious race, iconographic motifs adorning many manuscripts of the fifteenth century (and also painted in frescoes on the walls of religious buildings), an obese man with a well-rounded belly, holding in one hand a pitcher and in the other a piece of meat, rides a wolf or a sow, two animals symbolising gourmandise (gluttony) in the whimsical medieval bestiary (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Quellier, 2013; Shannon, 2016). If one of the most famous representations of gourmandise in England (dating from the fifteenth century, and to be found in Norwich Cathedral: see Figure 1, below) makes a glutton ride a sow, the latter is carrying not a pitcher of wine but two mugs of beer, thus revealing a fine example of local adaptation of the depiction of gourmandise (Quellier, 2013).

The medieval representations provided a valuable contemporary definition of gourmandise (see, for example, Figure 2, below). Its portrayal does not stigmatise gender – both men and women can be affected. On the other hand, it regularly pinpoints to specific social groups – often a chubby monk (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Quellier, 2013).

Image deleted due to copyright

Figure 1. Gluttony riding a sow, from the misericords of Norwich Cathedral. (n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://www.pinterest.nz/pin/430867889328342291/>

Depicted as a sin of the rich and powerful, gourmandise is dangerously close to two much more serious deadly sins: pride and greed. The abundance of food and drink on the tables, the obesity of the sinners – all these define gourmandise as an excess of wine<sup>6</sup> and food, as voracity and intemperance (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011). Nevertheless, the presence on these tables of the most prestigious and most sought-after meats (poultry and other roast meats), together with wine jugs, emphasises how much gourmandise reinforced the search for pleasure and good food, judging by the quality of the dishes depicted (Flandrin & Montanari, 1996).

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Figure 2. Bruegel the Elder, P. (1559). Gluttonous Carnival from *The Fight Between Carnival and Lent*. Retrieved from <https://www.pinterest.nz/pin/347340189987410652/>

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<sup>6</sup> Wine was considered a 'noble' drink, and was consumed by the rich and powerful (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011).

Numerous medieval literary texts deal with the gourmandise of clerics, often associating it with other deadly sins such as sloth, lust or envy. These vices are at the heart of satirical poetry to the point that the representation of the plump, overweight monk became a true literary stereotype (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Bonnet, 2015).

Not only does the reputation for good food continue to be associated (not without reason) with Catholic clerics, but many religious communities participated in the vast production of quality food and other gourmet specialties. Consequently, these communities have gained an excellent reputation in the production of fruit and vegetables, and of sweet and savoury treats, cheeses<sup>7</sup>, beers, wines and liqueurs<sup>8</sup> (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Bonnet, 2015; N'Diaye, 1993).

#### **4.4 Gourmandise, moralists and health**

The Middle Ages brought a modification to the notion of sinful gourmandise to the world of the laity. The Church recognised that social status was represented and/or achieved by the quality of food one consumes, that the pleasure of eating is natural and that society needs conviviality (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011). Therefore, along with moralists and pedagogues, it sought to banish the (all too often) disgusting eating manners of the dinner table and make the pleasure of eating acceptable (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011).

This moral offensive, launched in the twelfth century, focused less on the quantity and quality of the food consumed than on the requisite behaviour and table manners expected of the guests (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; N'Diaye, 1993; Quellier, 2013). Swallowing large pieces of food was a sign of (sinful) gourmandise, eating the bread before the start of the meal marked impatience, and grabbing the best morsels revealed bad education (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; N'Diaye, 1993; Quellier, 2013). As early as the thirteenth century, most table seating treatises were written in an informal and popular style. Created by clerics but also notaries, judges, educators and doctors, these rules of etiquette were thriving in France and the central regions of the Italian peninsula (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; N'Diaye, 1993; Quellier, 2013).

The danger of an unreasonable love of food (gourmandise) did not only concern the order of society and the salvation of the sinner, it also affected the physical health of the

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<sup>7</sup> Cantal is said to be the oldest cheese in France. Pliny the Elder, Roman author, evokes the Cantal from the first century AD. He speaks of a highly esteemed monastic cheese coming from the county of Gabalès and Gévaudan (France). It got its official name of Cantal in 1298 and would be the oldest French cheese still produced today ("Quel est le plus vieux fromage," 2019; World News Inc., 2019).

<sup>8</sup> Bénédictine, an herbal French liqueur, was created by a religious order as a medicinal remedy in the 1500s in the town of Fécamp, Normandy, France (French Waterways, 2003).

gourmand (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011). From the thirteenth century, the ecclesiastical authorities put forward treatises on the serious physiological risks gourmandise represented to one's health. Fever, numbness, stupefaction, drowsiness, daze, nausea, vomiting and other digestive disorders, but also epilepsy, paralysis or even sterility for women who were too fat, threatened the public – all leading to premature death (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; N'Diaye, 1993; Quellier, 2013). What if the most horrendous vice of gourmandise was the crime against one's own body?

Furthermore, many medieval texts included, under gourmandise, most of the sins of the mouth: blasphemy, perjury, lying, and bragging (Miller, 1997). There was also mention that, through the sin of blasphemy, witchcraft and heresy were dealt with under the heading of gourmandise (Miller, 1997).

Conflicting with the views of the clergy, some medieval medical discourses were far from unfavourable to the pleasures of good food. On the contrary, the pleasures of taste helped patients, pregnant women and melancholy temperaments to consume food and facilitate digestion (Shannon, 2016). Even sweets benefited from a highly favourable medical disquisition. Sold by apothecaries, cane sugar belonged to the sphere of therapy until the seventeenth century (Kronl, 2011). Intended to facilitate the digestion of food, sugar entered the sauces of meats, fish and vegetables and gave the aristocratic cuisine of the late Middle Ages sweet and sour flavours. It was also customary for the élite to serve sweet treats at the end of the meal. As for jams, they had the property of closing the stomach after a meal, therefore allowing for good digestion (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Fischler, 2008; Jeanneret, 1987).

#### **4.5 Gourmandise, a natural weakness for children**

Sitting on the ground, without worrying about the wedding meal taking place around him, a little boy licks his finger with which he has just wiped his bowl (see *The Peasant Wedding*, Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1568), Figure 3, below).

From the Middle Ages to the present day, gourmandise was perceived as a natural weakness – imperfection – of children. If the Church presented children as weak beings, it did not systematically associate them with innocence (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011). Among many failings attributed to childhood by Saint Augustine (354-430) in his *Confessions*, eagerness or greed towards food figures prominently (Munday, 2013). Influenced by Antiquity and the Church's fathers, Western religious and medical discourses considered children to be imperfect, unfinished beings, which brought them closer to the animal world and made it possible to explain the primacy of their natural appetites (N'Diaye, 1993).

Image deleted due to copyright

Figure 3. Bruegel the Elder, P. (1568). *The Peasant Wedding*. Retrieved from <https://bruegelnow.com/tag/jerome-montcouquiol/>

The Church strongly condemned the gourmandise of children. An English preacher of the fifteenth century presented it as a physiological and social pathology linked to laziness. Within the traditional theological and moral writings of the Middle Ages, sixteenth century, Spanish moralists held similar remarks: abundant food can only keep children in flabbiness and predispose them to luxury (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Bonnet, 2015). Thus, some did not hesitate to recommend never letting the children eat to satiety. However, the childish word *bon-bon*, marked by the splitting of a syllable, meant a drug coated with sugar intended for children (Jeanneret, 1993).

Through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a new literature was created specifically for children, highly moralising short stories whose heroes are children of the same age as the readers/listeners (Meyzie, 2008; Quellier, 2013). These short stories often follow the same narrative pattern. Despite the benevolent parental warning against the sin of gourmandise, children disobey, steal and lie. The offence is soon discovered, and the culprits are punished by a severe and painful case of indigestion, eventually supplemented by the confiscation of toys, a ban on going out and playing with their friends, or by sending them to austere boarding schools. In this guilt-provoking literature, the shameful child understands her or his misdeed and repents (Meyzie, 2008; Quellier, 2013).<sup>9</sup>

Despite moralists' displeasure about it, not only was children's gourmandise perceived as normal by the population, but also as reassuring. A chubby child was the pride of

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<sup>9</sup> One of France's most famous authors is La Comtesse de Ségur. Sophie Rostopchine, born Sofiya Feodorovna Rostopchina (1799-1874), was a French writer of Russian birth, who wrote twenty novels for children. Best known today for her novels *Les Petites Filles Modèles* (*The Good Little Girls*) and *Les Malheurs de Sophie* (*Sophie's Misfortunes*), both published in 1858 and written for her granddaughters (Malarte-Feldman, 1995).

mothers and nannies and, in the form of a putto,<sup>10</sup> invaded western paintings from the Renaissance onwards to signify abundance, fertility and prosperity (see *Figure 4*, below).

Image deleted due to copyright

Figure 4. Lagrenée, L. [called le Jeune]. (n.d.). *Putti Harvesting Grapes (Allegory of Autumn)*. Retrieved from <https://www.lempertz.com/en/catalogues/lot/1083-1/47-louis-lagrenée-called-le-jeune.html>

The young child, plump and pink, blond and curly haired, remains the bodily ideal of healthy childhood (Meyzie, 2008; Quellier, 2013). The seemly rolls of flesh must be visible in order to show that the child wants for nothing, and, in the twenty-first century, the classic photograph of a naked newborn lying on a blanket still meets this goal. This reassuring expression of vitality is to be placed in a society marked, until the nineteenth century, by a frightful rate of infant mortality and the shadow of food shortages. Corpulence is primarily perceived as a sign of life, of health, the proof that the child lacks nothing – proudly shown to everyone (Meyzie, 2008; Quellier, 2013).

#### **4.6 The absolution of the pleasures of gourmandise**

Through the twelfth century through to the sixteenth century, moralists stated that the pleasure felt by men was God's gift to lead them to feed themselves, to restore their strength and thus to keep themselves alive (Flandrin & Montanari, 1996). The providential *taste of food* and the no-less providential *pleasure of taste* acknowledged a physiological necessity and the divine command 'grow and multiply'. The Catholic exoneration of the pleasures of the table was based on the ambiguities of defining gourmandise (Flandrin & Montanari, 1996; Onfray, 1995). By choosing only one meaning, textbooks written about confession managed to ostracise the gluttons and

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<sup>10</sup> A representation of a naked child, especially a cherub or a cupid in Renaissance art (Meyzie, 2008).



drunkards without condemning their sincerity. Clerics recognised the possibility of feeling genuine pleasure in eating and drinking (N'Diaye, 1993). Nevertheless, gourmandise could remain a sin if the search for good food was the sole purpose of the meal and if moderation and necessity were exceeded. Particularly fuzzy, the notion of necessity served the conciliatory position of many ecclesiastics towards good food. This was especially so since the Catholic Church recognised that the quality and quantity of food and drink had to reflect the birth, state and social rank of the guests (Fischler, 2008; N'Diaye, 1993; Pitte, 2002). If the tables of clerics should not have accommodated excessive meals, if gourmandise became a sin when one ate or drank with too much extravagance or with too much pleasure, it came down to the ability of the confessor to freely interpret 'too much' according to the penitent's age, sex and social status (Fischler, 2008; N'Diaye, 1993; Pitte, 2002).

By its prescriptions and prohibitions, the Catholic Church inculcated in the faithful the existence of standards in food matters. As indispensable pedagogical power and moral authority, the Church left its mark on the numerous contemporary treatises on civility (N'Diaye, 1993). From scenes of Christ's meals to the communal meals of religious orders, the Church made eating at a table a major moment in the social life of people. If nibbling between meals, stealing food and gourmandise were condemned, sharing, conviviality and good manners were valued. In other words, *gourmet pleasure* was legitimate as part of a shared meal (Pitte, 2005; Quellier, 2013). In a true sense, the teaching of the Church led to a gourmet gastronomy: the pleasure of good food being accepted only when it followed the rules, foremost among which were good behaviour at the table. By praising moderation and decency at table, the Catholic Church led the élite in a process of civilising gourmandise.

In 1526, the Dutch humanist and scholar Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) published *The Puerile Civilities*,<sup>11</sup> a series of small books (intended for children and teenagers) which defined rules in all areas of life, and naturally including a set of prescriptions on good behaviour during meals: monitor yourself, moderate your appetite, control your actions (do not play with your knife), stand up straight (Rummel, 2017). The gestures are particularly codified: how to use, cut and carry the food to the mouth, chewing and not swallowing whole pieces of food. It is the same with speech: do not speak with your mouth full, do not make incongruous noises, do not say vulgarities (Rummel, 2017). The dining table was empowered by educators as an essential place to learn fair gourmandise. The regulated meal became the epitome of legitimate gourmet pleasure, the prerequisite condition of an *honest* gourmandise, contrary to the consumption in

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<sup>11</sup> *De Civilitate Morum Puerilium Libellous* – A handbook on good manners for children (Rummel, 2017).

secret and nibbling outside meal times which remained reprehensible (Rummel, 2017). As for the Catholic Church, it reinforced the social importance of the communal meal and good table manners. The codification of food intake associated with the type of meal (breakfast, lunch, dinner) and its specific dishes played a part in the teaching of gourmandise (Rummel, 2017). Furthermore, by preventing consumers from immediately throwing themselves on the food as soon as they sat down at the table, the blessing of the food offered a way of restraining gourmandise (Rummel, 2017).

Through learning, gourmandise could claim a place in the world of legitimacy and separate itself from glotonnerie (gluttony), the action of a person without education.

To know how to eat also meant to choose food worthy of one's social status. To be honourable, gourmandise had to focus on foods that were compatible with the sex, age and social status of the consumer (Shannon, 2016). The notion of choice was even more central to the definition of honest gourmandise as food insecurity remained the daily plight of many people. In a society that was inherently elitist, each social body had its own gourmet pleasures: to the élite of fortune and birth the choice of dishes, to the poor the dream of satiety (Shannon, 2016). The diversity of dishes served at the élite tables allowed guests to indicate their social position by having the possibility of making a choice – something unheard of for the majority of the population more accustomed to one single dish and the tug of hunger (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; N'Diaye, 1993; Shannon, 2016).

If, from the seventeenth century, an honest gourmandise was imposed as a French cultural model, it was not until the middle of the eighteenth century that gourmandise is defined as “a refined love of good food”. And as soon as it entered the world of legitimacy, gourmandise became a sign of social distinction, the mark of education (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Fischler, 2008; N'Diaye, 1993; Pitte, 2002).

#### **4.7 The eighteenth century: Everything changes**

In the eighteenth century, new words emerged to define aspects of the culinary art: ‘gastronomy’ first, then ‘gastronomic’ and ‘gourmet’ (Bonnet, 2015). Gastronomic literature was born. French cuisine entered the realms of national heritage (Bonnet, 2015). In addition, the status of gourmandise changed. Until the appearance of the word gastronomy, gourmandise was the object of constant reprobation. The Church still condemned it, as did educators and doctors, being concerned about the future happiness of humankind. In the famed *Encyclopédie*, Louis, Chevalier de Jaucourt (1704-1779), one of its principal editors, defined gourmandise as the “refined and inordinate love of

good food” (Agora, 2012). Inseparable from corruption and moral depravity, it was a sign of decadence (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011).

The major historical event that was the French Revolution of 1789 saw the political triumph of a new social class, the bourgeoisie. These parvenus<sup>12</sup> were generally devoid of education and ignored the customs of the Ancien Régime<sup>13</sup> (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Boundless, n.d.). The new gastronomy met their expectations by providing them with a code of conduct, essential to their integration into the new ruling class. Gourmandise slowly became a *law of the stomach*, and the culinary habits of these nouveaux riches became values and social norms (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Bonnet, 2015; Flandrin & Montanari, 1996).

At the turn of the nineteenth century, French magistrate Joseph Berchoux (1760-1835) published a very long poem in four parts entitled *Gastronomie ou L’homme des Champs à Table (Gastronomy or the Peasant at the Table)* (Berchoux, 1805; Simon, 2018). It marked the first appearance of the word ‘gastronomie’ in the French language, defining it as a codification of the art of eating and the pleasures of the table (Berchoux, 1805; Simon, 2018). Berchoux also began to legitimise gourmandise by identifying it as an accomplished act of consumption (Berchoux, 1805; Simon, 2018). Gourmandise was transformed, paving the way for Grimod de la Reynière to reconcile old and new and give gourmandise a noble connotation.

#### **4.8 The art of gourmandise – Grimod de la Reynière**

Even though he is nearly forgotten today, Alexandre Balthasar Laurent Grimod de la Reynière (1758-1838) has had the literary honour of being recognised as the founding father of *gourmet eloquence*.

Privileged by birth (he was the son of a wealthy farmer general) but ill-favoured by nature (he had webbed fingers, which he blamed entirely on his mother), his eight editions of the *Almanach des Gourmands*<sup>14</sup> (*Almanac for the Hosts*) published from 1803 to 1812

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<sup>12</sup>A parvenu is a person who has risen far above his/her original social status without having acquired the behaviours which would suit his/her new social standing – an arriviste, an upstart (Oxford Dictionaries, 2019).

<sup>13</sup> The Ancien Régime (Old Regime or Former Regime) was the political and social system established in the Kingdom of France from the fifteenth century until the latter part of the eighteenth century, prior to the French Revolution. Under the Régime, everyone was a subject of the King of France as well as a member of an estate and province. All rights and status flowed from the social institutions, divided into three orders: clergy, nobility and the “others” – the third estate, making up 98% of France’s population (Boundless, n.d.).

<sup>14</sup> The full title is *Almanach des Gourmands, où Calendrier Nutritive Servant de Guide dans les Moyens de Faire Excellente Chère*, which can be translated as *Almanac for the Hosts, or Nutritious Calendar Serving as a Guide in Ways to Make Excellent Food*.

impose a new literature genre: the gastronomic chronicle (N'Diaye, 1993; Onfray, 1995; Quellier, 2013). See Figure 5, below.

Image deleted due to copyright

Figure 5. First page of *Almanach des Gourmands*  
by Grimod de la Reynière, 1804.

Retrieved from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Almanach-des-Gourmands.jpg>

This proud Parisian – he considered the capital of France the “centre of all pleasures” (Garval, 2016) – regarded his primary responsibility, through his almanacs, to be to acknowledge and commend the culinary achievements of the post-revolutionary period, all the while encouraging his readers to do the same. Describing himself as a “professor, a judge, an historian of gourmands, the prime minister of the palate” (Garval, 2016, p. 55), he professed that, for gourmandise, “substantial good has come out of the Revolution” (Garval, 2016, p. 54): “the result of the changes of gourmandise is much more important to the happiness of man in society than that of social, administrative, or judiciary changes” (Grimod de la Reynière, as cited in Garval, 2016, p. 53).

From 1803, Grimod de la Reynière instituted a real semantic revolution by making a capital sin the mark of a positive distinction, even a value on which to re-establish a sociability shaken by the French Revolution (Garval, 2016). In his *Discours Préliminaire (Preliminary Discourse)*, he said that he wanted to fight against the prejudices of the *appetite detractors* who ignored the fact that most religious rites are acts of tasting. Considered as the exclusive privilege of civilised man, gourmandise was therefore for the person who connected with his fellow man and allowed a form a community beyond the mere sharing of an ordinary meal (Garval, 2016; Onfray, 1995).

Whereas the French had long regarded Paris to be the centre of almost everything, this 'Paris-centric' perspective was flourishing during Grimod's days. It was the era of unparalleled culinary growth (Garval, 2016; Onfray, 1995). Grimod was the first to seize and exploit the vast potential of this new gastronomic world. He invented his role as a mediator between the bourgeois consumers – the "new rich, ignorant of everything" (Bonnet, 2015) – and the burgeoning providers of food – the shops, wine merchants and restaurants (Garval, 2016).

Before the Revolution, aristocrats ate better in Paris than anywhere else; with the upturn of gourmandise, everyone could aspire to eat better. Grimod's almanacs served as guides for gourmandise. He experimented with a wide variety of topics:

From consuming summer oysters, to tenderising meat with electric shocks, to reviving a cook's sense of taste through regular purges; and from restaurant reviews to guidebook-type 'promenades' and 'itineraries' of purveyors and eating establishments, to *correspondence gourmande* with the almanac's readers, to product endorsements based on blind taste test. (Garval, 2016, p. 53)

These almanacs contained specific information about restaurants, pastry shops, bakeries and many other food-related establishments. Praise and criticism – at least in the beginning – were intended to be objective, written in a polished style, using humour, all the while trying to teach his readers good taste – his own (Garval, 2016; Vitaux, 2013, pp. 132-136).

From the *Almanach des Gourmands* to the *Manuel des Amphitryons* (1808), Grimod de la Reynière laid the foundations of the gastronomic press as we know it today, with its awards and star guides (Garval, 2016; Vitaux, 2013, pp. 132-136). He fought the press, which continued to make gourmandise the symbol of the appetite of the *fat* and *chubby*. With the help of "professors in the art of gourmandise" (Garval, 2016; Parkhurst Ferguson, 1998), he aimed for the establishment of a hedonistic community in which theatre, play, provocation, cynicism, irony and humour all worked towards the same purpose: providing rules of etiquette in the art of living well in a world where gourmandise, civility and good manners were intimately linked (Garval, 2016; Vitaux, 2013, pp. 132-136). However, at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, gourmandise was still condemned by the French Catholic Church. The French language did not yet possess a word for someone who is knowledgeable about cooking and food, and who enjoys it. The exquisite-sounding term 'gourmet' was yet to be affiliated with food – at that time, it only referred to someone experienced in the wine trade (MacDonogh, 1987). 'Gastronome' only appeared in the late nineteenth century. The only flattering term for someone knowledgeable about food (and cuisine in general) was 'friand', being a person who ate lightly, delicately, abstaining from any connotation of overindulgence (MacDonogh, 1987). Grimod took umbrage with the French

lexicographers, arguing that a gourmand would possess “an enlightened sense of taste ... developed through extensive experience” (MacDonogh, 1987, p. 141). Through his almanacs, Grimod attempted to ennoble gourmandise, disputing that true gourmandise encompasses all questions of moral philosophy “which only seems superficial to those of common minds, who see in cooking only pots, and in dishes served only a dinner” (MacDonogh, 1987, p. 154).

Despite all his faults<sup>15</sup>, Alexandre Balthazar Grimod de la Reynière remains an immense food lover who invented gastronomic guides and gastronomic literature as well as tasting panels, which still hold an important place nowadays. He knew how to adapt the requirements of gourmandise to the political changes of his time. He unearthed gourmandise itself, gave it “a much nobler meaning” (Garval, 2016, p. 55) and made it an independent subject. He succeeded in stimulating people’s curiosity towards gourmandise. He remains a model of food connoisseur and unrepentant *bon vivant* (Garval, 2016).

With exceptional foresight, Grimod de la Reynière predicted someone would succeed him and that the topics covered in his almanacs could be developed by someone of a more sedate temperament (Garval, 2016). His energy and exuberance lay the foundations for Brillat-Savarin’s work, published a few years later.

#### **4.9 Physiology of Taste – Brillat-Savarin**

Elevated by many as a great French gourmet following the success of his only work in the field of gastronomy, Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (1755-1826) retrospectively (and unknowingly) transformed himself into *the* representative of French culinary culture, seeing himself conceded the honour of having a cheese named after himself (Bibliothèque Municipale, 2005).

It was in 1826, two months before his death, that Brillat-Savarin anonymously published his famous *Physiology of Taste* (Bibliothèque Municipale, 2005) (see Figure 6, below). With the full title *Physiologie du Goût, où Méditation de Gastronomie Transcendante, Ouvrage Théorique, Historique et à l’ordre du Jour* (*The Physiology of Taste, or Meditation on Transcendent Gastronomy, A Theoretical Work, Historical and Up-to-date*) (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Brillat-Savarin, 1994), the book has been constantly re-edited to

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<sup>15</sup> Grimod de la Reynière was often implicated in various quarrels and lawsuits. While very passionate about the topics he discussed in his almanacs, he also attracted a lot of criticism by using phrases such as “vain aberration” and “these sad abortions of a clouded, delirious mind” (Garval, 2016, p. 59)

a total of more than fifty French editions from 1826 to the present day – it was also published in English for the first time in 1884 (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Quellier, 2013).

Image deleted due to copyright

Figure 6. Inside page of *Physiologie du Gout*,  
by Brillat-Savarin, 1839. Retrieved from

<http://librairieanciennelecosmographe.over-blog.com/2016/09/physiologie-du-gout.html>

The work of a lifetime, the book had two goals: to lay the theoretical foundations of gastronomy and to define the meaning of gourmandise. As the book title suggests, the originality of Brillat-Savarin's work lies in an approach that aims to be prominently scientific (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Hache-Bissette & Saillard, 2007; Quellier, 2013). Self-proclaimed professor, he proposed a scientific theory of the pleasures of the table, a physiology of taste based on observations and experimentations. This new science was based on human physiology and physiognomy, borrowing from chemistry, anatomy, nutrition, but also history and ethnography (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Quellier, 2013).

As with Grimod de la Reynière before him, Brillat-Savarin declared that gourmandise is opposed to gluttony. It ceased to be a sin or a guilty passion to become “an impassioned, reasoned and habitual preference for everything which gratifies the organ of taste” (Brillat-Savarin, 1994, p. 132). Gourmandise had to be distinguished from gluttony or voracity, with which it was most often confused, as the same word was regularly used for both.

I have consulted all the dictionaries about the word gourmandise, and am far from satisfied with what I have found. There is an endless confusion between gourmandise, properly speaking, and gluttony or voracity; whence I concluded that the lexicographers ... have forgotten, utterly forgotten, social gourmandise, which combines Athenian elegance, Roman luxury and the delicacies of France, and which unites careful planning with skilled performance, gustatory zeal with wise discrimination. (Brillat-Savarin, 1994, p. 132)

For Brillat-Savarin, gourmandise could potentially influence one's health. Over-indulgence could lead to weight problems (obesity) and many other ill-health issues. But while he noted the facts, he preferred to leave the matter for doctors to deal with (Quellier, 2013).

His main distinction was that he advocated gourmandise as a virtue, concluding that "it shows implicit obedience to the commands of the Creator, who, when He ordered us to eat in order to live, gave us the inducement of appetite, the encouragement of savour, and the reward of pleasure" (Brillat-Savarin, 1994, p. 133). He therefore validated the ethics of the Christian faith but also eradicated all notion of sin.

For Brillat-Savarin, gourmandise was characterised by the co-existence of and interdependency between the public and "others of all descriptions concerned with the preparation of food" (Brillat-Savarin, 1994, p. 133). Furthermore, he ascertained its close relation to the prominence and superiority of French cooking, linking it to what is now recognised as gastronomic tourism (Brillat-Savarin, 1994, pp. 135-136).

Additionally, Brillat-Savarin asserted that gourmandise also contributed to the French economy because it "determines the relative price of things mediocre, good and excellent" (Brillat-Savarin, 1994, p. 133) and it supports travel and all the professionals working in the culinary industry at that time. Freedman (2007) stated that gourmandise, during Brillat-Savarin's time "played a direct role in making Paris the gastronomic capital of France" (Greene, 2015, p. 21) because it launched the careers of many chefs, using new and innovative recipes, "all of which bore witness to the bourgeois passion for fine food" (Greene, 2015, p. 21).

Brillat-Savarin's detractors at the time criticised his work for being similar to Grimod de la Reynière's *Almanach*.<sup>16</sup> While his playful tone and humorous writing set him apart, it is nevertheless clear that his series of aphorisms can be found, in a more rudimentary stage, in Grimod de la Reynière's *Almanach* (see *Table 1*, below).

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<sup>16</sup> Brillat-Savarin undertook to write the early stages of his *Physiology of Taste* at the exact same time Grimod de la Reynière was publishing his *Almanach* (Garval, 2016).



Table 1. Comparison of texts written by Grimod de la Reynière and Brillat-Savarin

| <i>Grimod de la Reynière</i>   | <i>Brillat-Savarin</i>  |
|--|---|
| How often has the fate of an entire people not depended on the relatively quick or slow digestion of a prime minister? | III. The fate of nations depends on the way they eat.   |
| Tell me whom you frequent; I will tell you who you are.  | IV. Tell me what you eat; I will tell you who you are.  |
| A great dinner without hors d'œuvres is as valueless as a woman without rouge.   | XIV. Dessert without cheese is like a pretty woman with one eye.  |
| A true gourmand never makes others wait for him.   | XVII. To wait too long for an unpunctual guest is an act of discourtesy towards those who have arrived on time. (Garval, 2016, p. 60) |

#### **4.10 The age of articulate gourmandise**

Throughout the nineteenth century, France's lexical contribution to the gastronomic world can be observed in other European countries. The term 'gourmet' entered the English language in 1820. It was preceded and followed by many neologisms (some with a short life span) testifying to France's leading role in the acknowledgement of the pleasures of good food: gastronomy (1814), gastronomer (1820), gastronome (1823), gastronomic (1828), gastrology (1810), gastrologer (1820), gastronomist (1825), gastronomous (1828), gastrophile (1820), gastrosophy (1824), and the charming gourmanderie (1823) (Quellier, 2013).

The birth of the notion of 'good taste' marked the emancipation of gourmandise. The art of eating well went hand in hand with the art of talking (and writing) about it. The search for delicacies, the love of good ingredients, the art of recognising them, the pleasure of talking about them were all praised and considered a sign of erudition (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Quellier, 2013). The restructuring of the French political scene facilitated the understanding and acceptance of gourmandise, which explicitly claimed that people eat to please themselves (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Bonnet, 2015; Garval, 2016; Flandrin & Montanari, 1996): "Animals fill themselves; man eats. The man of mind alone knows how to eat" (Brillat-Savarin, 1994, p. 13). See Figure 7, below.

Image deleted due to copyright

Figure 7. *Réunion Gastronomique ou les Gourmands à Table (Gastronomic Gathering or the Gourmands at the Table)* [Nineteenth century drawing]. (n.d.).

Retrieved from <https://www.vice.com/fr/article/435xxd/decadent-comme-le-festin-dun-bourgeois-parisien-du-xixe-siecle>

The use of food metaphors<sup>17</sup> to distinguish between the beautiful and the ugly proves that the preoccupation with the taste of food was not only a topic of interest but also a real aristocratic concern. The pleasures of the table – which included gourmandise – became an avowable attribute (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Bonnet, 2015; Flandrin & Montanari, 1996). Gourmandise became, above all, social. The table developed into a place where the legendary ‘douceur de vivre’ (sweetness of life) flourished. The dining experience became the most important aspect of daily life and was to be taken solemnly. Dinners were devised to stimulate all the senses, including smell, taste, texture, visual presentation and complementary flavours (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Bonnet, 2015; Greene, 2015). It was within this new framework that a new ‘cuisine’ was developed. More refined, more inventive, it was the direct ancestor of France’s ‘haute cuisine’ (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Hache-Bissette & Saillard, 2007; Jeanneret, 1987, 1993; Quellier, 2013). Furthermore, the proliferation of cooking books, and with it the development of a precise culinary language, contributed to elevating French cuisine to the rank of ‘beaux arts’ (fine arts) (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Hache-Bissette & Saillard, 2007; Jeanneret, 1987, 1993; Quellier, 2013).

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<sup>17</sup> Ridée comme un pruneau (wrinkled like a prune) – An old (ugly) wrinkled person; Un petit boudin (a little black pudding) – A (young) ugly girl; Tranche de cake (slice of cake) – Someone very stupid (France, 2010)

Complementing an increase in printed words in various formats and the profusion of dining and entertainment establishments, gourmandise entered a new level “expressed in a tongue-in cheek manner” (Greene, 2015, p. 17), aimed to place taste and the pleasures of the table (eating) at the centre of French culture (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Bonnet, 2015; Freedman, 2007; Greene, 2015).

#### **4.11 The entertaining gourmandise of today**

Given today’s food explosion, it is not surprising that gourmandise is still present in our daily lives, although in different forms. While it retains some of its earlier/original meanings, today it is more socially recognised and more multifaceted than in the past.

While the historical gourmandise sought the pleasures of eating in moderation, viewing the dining experience as a holistic undertaking, today it is more about the food and its related ingredients (Greene, 2015).

The past meanings of gourmandise, including guilt and purification, still influence its contemporary meaning but, because of its increased secularisation, gourmandise in the twentieth and twenty-first century is no longer the prerogative of the clergy and the moralists (Telfer, 1990).

It is widely believed that there is a conflict between the quest for food pleasure and health. While many people agree that only luck can generate both at the same time, the general assumption is “the more you have of one, the less you can have of the other” (Telfer, 1990, p. 158). However enjoyable gourmandise is, assumptions in the twenty-first century are focused on the need to maximise health, as it is life sustaining and therefore more important than food pleasure (Telfer, 1990). Challenging these assumptions, with the popularisation of food-related social media, gourmandise is now celebrated as a source of fun, pleasure and entertainment. It is considered to be “the ultimate indulgence, or reward for a hard-day’s work” (Greene, 2015, p. 27). Partaking in gourmandise often has a social element because drinking, eating and feasting are encouraged during celebrations, social events, including contemporary business cultural phenomenon of Friday night drinks (Greene, 2015). Within popular culture, it is often viewed as a guilty pleasure, a secret, with tantalising appeals, which can heighten satisfaction (Greene, 2015).

Social media is using a number of strategies affecting our perception of and perspective on gourmandise. These strategies establish a set of key messages which delineate the relationship between food consumption and excess, and seem to quantify and qualify

the nature of gourmandise (Freedman, 2007; Flandrin & Montanari, 1996; Greene, 2015):

- offering to appeal to our sense of self-control and freedom of choice;
- placing an emphasis on the quality and/or quantity of the food consumed; and
- vindicating excess as necessity (Greene, 2015, p. 39).

Additionally, social media offers an aspect of social acceptance via individuals posting food selfies of themselves eating food items in restaurants, which in turn puts pressure on the restaurant scene to constantly provide experiences that are ‘worth’ posting.

Now directly related to the focus of quality, gourmandise is displayed in an aesthetically pleasing way to function as a form of seduction (Greene, 2015). Even though the connections to gourmandise are represented through photos and images, they serve as a marker to encourage our desire for real food.

#### **4.12 Digital gourmandise**

Once regarded only as sustenance, food today is a celebrity, a cult object, a visual stimulation of the senses. Posting photos of food on digital platforms (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) has become a compulsion. This confluence between food, daily life and media is such that in March 2012, a video released on YouTube<sup>18</sup> which ridiculed this current behaviour attracted more than 2.7 million viewers (Greene, 2015). Gourmandise has gone digital, with food images and videos now an endless source of culinary greed.

Today’s gourmandise comprises a blend of experiences which coerce the public to further immerse themselves in a wide variety of adventures and experiences (Greene, 2015). Mimicking a bygone era, gourmandise is selected based on individual and personal tastes, preferences and aesthetic feelings, such as being drawn toward one particular image/photo and not to another. Therefore, by selecting such image, the sense of control is imbued with the sense of freedom, which perpetuates the pleasures associated with adventure and involvement (Freedman, 2007; Greene, 2015; Onfray, 1995). Gourmandise is experienced using technology, stimulating the senses and recreating the sensations that would be felt while engaging directly with the food. This “visual media can appeal to a sense of touch through haptic visuality in which the eyes themselves function like organ of touch” (Greene, 2015, p. 96). The visual engagement with gourmandise invites emotional reactions; it may cause hunger, stimulate the taste

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<sup>18</sup> The video can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpNIt6UC8uo>

buds, and reinforce the incentive to interact further through these “embodied experiences and pleasures” (Greene, 2015, p. 97).

The “digital cornucopia” (Greene, 2015, p. 103) that is social media reinforces the idea that gourmandise has become an ordinary part of life, in which everyone can partake, with an abundant sense of immediacy. Gourmandise has become more attractive. It has lost its guilty/sinful connotation and is therefore about “both *the promise* of desire and creates a desire *for desire*” (Greene, 2015, p. 106), especially in terms of seeking and longing for it. Popular culture and food media have created an endless craving for gourmandise through an overabundance of promises. However, they also have raised questions about the cultural and social implications of gourmandise, in particular its meaning in the twenty-first century.

#### **4.13 Renaming gourmandise: Lionel Poilâne and his ‘Raison Gourmande’**

In January 2003, Apollonia Poilâne, daughter of the late world-famous French master baker Lionel Poilâne (1945-2002), along with her younger sister Athena, submitted a petition to Pope John-Paul II to remove gourmandise from the list of deadly sins. The text was signed by 28 personalities of the French cultural and gastronomical world, included renowned chefs Paul Bocuse (1928-2018)<sup>19</sup> and Alain Ducasse, as well as Baroness de Rothschild (Cariès, 2003; Decanter Staff, 2003; Poilâne, 2004; Reggiani, 2017).

Two years before his untimely disappearance in a helicopter accident, Lionel Poilâne and some friends founded the Association de la Raison Gourmande (Association of the Gourmand Purpose), to give the notion of gourmandise a better image (Cariès, 2003; Decanter Staff, 2003; Poilâne, 2004; Reggiani, 2017). A sponsorship committee immediately came forward to support this initiative, among them a couple of fashionable writers and two members of the prestigious Académie française. While several French priests intimated their support for the group, none would become a patron (Blume, 2003). The ethical vision of the association is to consider gourmandise not as a sin but rather as a virtue, and from its work a petition was born: *La Question Gourmande* (Blume, 2003; Cariès, 2003; Decanter Staff, 2003; Poilâne, 2004; Reggiani, 2017). This supplication did not entail the eradication of the seventh vice from the list of deadly sins, but that the term gourmandise simply be replaced by or renamed ‘goïnfrerie’ or intemperance, that

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<sup>19</sup> Paul Bocuse is reported as saying: “Gourmandise, companion of all my moments, purveyor of pleasure, you open the doors of culinary knowledge. Gourmandise, my dear, my muse, whether or not you are a sin, I am not about to deny you. To satisfy you, I want to go to Hell” (Cariès, 2003).

is to say, a term further representing the sense of excess and corresponding to the terminology found in other languages (Blume, 2003; Cariès, 2003; Decanter Staff, 2003; Poilâne, 2004; Reggiani, 2017).

“With humility, knowing that the suppression of the seventh sin is inconceivable,” Poilâne asked the Holy Father to kindly “modify its translation” (Cariès, 2003). Suggesting that the life of Jesus Christ was defined by associations with food (The Wedding of Cana, The Last Supper), Poilâne argued that gourmandise needed to be extracted from “the purgatory of verbal ambiguity” (Cariès, 2003).

The petition’s signatories did not therefore question the presence of gourmandise among the deadly sins, but its classification. For Poilâne and his friends, this “theological semantic impropriety” (Cariès, 2003) exposed the French culture to an injustice, since the word gourmandise does not have the same meaning in French as in other languages. In English gourmandise is translated as ‘gluttony’, in Italian, ‘gola’ suggests the throat of the swallower and in German, the word ‘Fresssucht’ describes the action of “eating like an animal, with unbridled greed” (Blume, 2003; Bonnet, 2015; Cariès, 2003; Poilâne, 2004; Reggiani, 2017). Gourmandise, adds Poilâne, is life enhancing, measured; it gives pleasure to the guests (Blume, 2003). It is “inseparable from French culture and indeed from the humility and pleasure he has detected in the Vatican’s kitchens and cellars with their bottles of Châteauneuf du Pape” (Blume, 2003).

The petition does not oppose the distinction between eating too well and eating too much, but offers a linguistic distinction. The “objectionable exaggeration” (Decanter Staff, 2003) would not be referred to as gourmandise but rather by its almost-synonyms goinfrerie or gloutonnerie. On the contrary, the term gourmandise in French would have a meaning far removed from the latter, a sense that is all the more worthy because it is part of the French culture, of the French genetic heritage, and which, for this reason, would become untranslatable in its diversity (Blume, 2003; Cariès, 2003; Decanter Staff, 2003; Poilâne, 2004; Reggiani, 2017).

The petition was presented to Monsignor Baldelli, Apostolic Nuncio in Paris, on 17 December 2002. He arranged for some of the petitioners representing the association to attend the papal audience in Rome in January 2003. It is said that the Holy See was not unsympathetic towards the plea and gave a favourable opinion (Blume, 2003; Cariès, 2003; Decanter Staff, 2003; Poilâne, 2004; Reggiani, 2017).

Historian Jean-François Fayard stated that the association’s intent is also to have the Académie française reconsider gourmandise and define it with more positive terminology in their famous dictionary. Having two academicians as patrons, he said, should be able to speed things up. Unfortunately, according to the academy’s secretary, the revision of

the dictionary has now arrived at the letter 'M' and "one cannot reel back to revise gourmandise but must wait (a very long time) until 'G' rolls around again" (Blume, 2003).

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

La gourmandise commence quand on a plus faim  
Gourmandise starts when you are no longer hungry.

Alphonse Daudet (1840-1897).

This study presents a comprehensive narrative history of the changes in the meaning of the concept of gourmandise. The established literature to date has tended to focus only on the historical or religious aspect of gourmandise, or has been confined to particular time periods. In order to extend the focus beyond those perspectives, the study expanded on the three key objectives stated in section 2.1. The present study provides a detailed analysis of the changes in the meaning of gourmandise, incorporating for the first time the interrelation between historical, religious, social, psychological and linguistic perspectives, and connecting those meanings to twenty-first century society.

From the data collected for this research, it is apparent that gourmandise can be defined as an insatiable appetite leading an individual to absorb an excessive amount of food. It also describes any food behaviour motivated solely by the intentionality of feeding oneself for pleasure and not for the sake of satisfying a biological need. This depreciative acceptance correlates with bodily disorder and self-discipline. In a positive connotation, gourmandise also refers to the attractiveness, taste and quality of food or dish. It alludes to an idea of food selectivity and preference (individual or collective) congruent with self-governance. It speaks of quality, refinement and over-flowing passion.

#### 5.1 Archival gourmandise

Since time immemorial, gourmandise has been considered one of the seven deadly sins by the Catholic Church. Throughout its early recorded writings, gourmandise was described as the disordered urge to eat or drink without having the need for it, which is to say in the absence of hunger or thirst. It was a moral affliction, a sin because it showed weakness and/or dependence on certain food or drink. This distinction was exemplified by the Fathers of the Desert, who asserted that the desire of the belly was the root of all evils and must not overcome the desire of the soul. Bantreil-Voisin (2011) described how these spiritual masters of early Christianity affirmed that gourmandise was not only a physical, psychological and moral predicament but, above all, a spiritual problem – that is to say a religious one. Based on their personal experiences, only through a wise practice of fasting was it possible to heal oneself from the slavery of gourmandise (Bantreil-Voisin, 2011; Shannon, 2016).



Often referred to as a venial sin, gourmandise was also a capital vice because it left the door open to other sins (pride, lust, greed, sloth/laziness, anger/wrath, envy). Pride supplemented it sometimes (an abundance of well-prepared dishes offered to friends can lead to a sin of vainglory), excessive drinking could lead to anger, and the desire to possess the best things in life could lead to avarice, greed and/or luxury.

Associated with the notion of quantity, gourmandise appeared scary. One who ate too much was suspected of eating more than his share and therefore breaking the rules of group sharing, of transgressing the (unwritten) laws of commensality. Gourmandise was tinged with selfishness and judged as inappropriate or even unacceptable by society. Furthermore, and keeping in accordance with the Church's point of view at the time, pleasure was at the heart of gourmandise and created another confusion. Both Bantreil-Voisin (2011) and Shannon (2016) asserted that, because gourmandise touches on the senses and therefore potentially on carnality, there was a kind of food puritanism that believed if it gives pleasure, it is necessarily bad. The excessive search for pleasure was a vice. Gourmandise was then tinged with judgement and moral condemnation.

In medieval times, gourmandise was no longer a folly of the stomach but of the throat. This organic displacement introduced a distinction between gratification from the feeling of satiety (of the stomach) and that provided by the oral 'touch'. Bonnet (2015) stated that while still defined by the Church as a capital sin, gourmandise was now devoted to a vain search for tasty food to satisfy earthy needs instead of raising the spirit by pious and charitable practices. Gourmandise thus threatened not only the physical integrity of the body but also the soul of the 'eater'.

While this religious/spiritual aspect is important to understanding the changes of meaning of gourmandise, this is not sufficient. All previously mentioned authors such as Bantreil-Voisin (2011), Bonnet (2015), Shannon (2016) did not attempt to acknowledge the significance of the rise of the digital social media in the twenty-first century. Furthermore, very few authors have been able to fully take into account the social and psychological influences which shaped the evolution of gourmandise in order to provide an in-depth understanding of the term.

## **5.2 Social influences**

Anxious to police social life through the refinement of morals, manuals on table manners multiplied during the Renaissance. In *La gourmandise et la Faim*, Jean-Claude Bonnet (2015) argued that when it comes to food, the goal was to domesticate the body, to restrain sensuality and to control the display of gourmandise. The meal was the ideal opportunity to instil respect in oneself and from others while sublimating gourmandise.

The stealthiness of the glances towards the food, the slow eating and deglutition, the refusal to smell the food or the mastery of the sounds of the body were all practices that legitimised gourmandise. While it was natural to experience pleasure while eating, it became essential to control the appetite and make the meal an experience of conviviality. Only then did gourmandise become acceptable. The misgivings about gourmandise were therefore constructed by the distinction between the need to satisfy the biological imperative and the capacity for an individual to act appropriately for this sole purpose.

The nineteenth century brought forward a change in attitudes in regard to gourmandise. In his book *Gastronomie française*, Pitte (2005) asserted that gourmandise was no longer associated with culinary practices only – the production and consumption of food. It was taken out of the dining room (and therefore the kitchen as well) into a much larger intellectual domain. Gourmandise was re-shaped to include a distinction between the material item (the dish, the meal and/or food in general) and the discourse, the review or debate on the said product. Gourmandise was transformed into an academic, creative and aesthetic practice. With a rapidly expanding publication of culinary discourses (cookbooks, treatises), the quintessential writings of Grimod de la Reynière and Brillat-Savarin contributed to the introduction of gourmandise into a cultural and physiological debate. Grimod de la Reynière used his culinary knowledge and his almanacs as a form of journalistic writing to establish gourmandise as socially acceptable, making it an art form.

More distinctively than Grimod de la Reynière, Brillat-Savarin took the stand that gourmandise was anything but the gratification of the senses. With its witty undertones, *The Physiology of Taste* elevated gourmandise to the rank of a science through its exceptional social usefulness. Brillat-Savarin claimed his work was created with theoretical and scientific knowledge<sup>20</sup> and made a considerable effort to distinguish gourmandise as “an impassioned, reasoned and habitual preference for everything which gratifies the organ of taste” (Brillat-Savarin, 1994, p. 132). Both authors aimed to classify culinary knowledge and contributed to making gourmandise a mark of positive distinction.

It has become commonplace to assume that gourmandise is no longer in existence because it faded from society at the end of the nineteenth century. And yet, rather than totally disappearing, I propose that by expanding beyond its historical origins,

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<sup>20</sup> The subtitle, *Meditations on Transcendent Gastronomy, A Theoretical Work, Historical and Up-to-date*, establishes such structural connection. Furthermore, while *the Physiology of Taste* was published anonymously, the title page stated that the author was a “Professor” and a “Member of several learned societies” (Brillat-Savarin, 1994, pp. 21-25).

gourmandise remains and even flourishes within our contemporary popular culture and food-related media.

### 5.3 Contemporary gourmandise

Today, we find gourmandise in our everyday lives, albeit in different forms, throughout popular digital platforms and the media. It is drawn upon and set apart by groups and individuals to create their own identity. It is used as a means of associating and labelling others. Because it is still related to eating, it is not surprising that gourmandise can also be found within many food discourses. Yet, although it retains some of its original meaning, today's gourmandise is more changeable than in the past. The historical gourmandise is no longer found within the dining societies where people used to enjoy a multitude of dishes at home and in the company of other connoisseurs. Its cultural persona retains a strong association between eating and pleasure but nowadays, within our contemporary society, it has a degree of flexibility.

Amongst the other 'food' that we absorb daily, the advertising discourse now holds a preponderant place. Counterbalancing the moralising discussion, advertising devotes a real 'cult' to gourmandise. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the consumer not only wants to consume but also to take pleasure in consumption, without feeling guilty. Gourmandise is enriched with a positive connotation. The value of gourmandise affixed to a product sells – and no longer applies only to food products.<sup>21</sup> We are thus witnessing a co-existence of a *good* and a *bad* gourmandise. Guided by the nutritional discourse, the *good gourmandise* is moving towards healthy food as well as equitable products. The *bad gourmandise* is embodied by snack food, chocolate bars, sodas and fast food. Despite the sustained return to moralising discourses, gourmandise is nonetheless perceived as a positive value. It is lived as an assumed pleasure, claimed as the expression of a vital force which expresses itself in the 'now' moment. It is linked with generosity and cheerfulness (commensality).

While intensifying its already captivating attraction, gourmandise offers one last measure of temptation. It invites us to partake in excess, mostly entrapping us by changing how we view excess. It promotes a stratagem of rationalisation of excess, enticing us nearer to it and compelling us to blend our needs with our desires. It entices us with quantity (and quality) to constantly *raise the stakes* as a mean of increasing and expanding our

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<sup>21</sup> In November 2007, French pâtissier Ladurée launched a line of macaron-shaped soap-bars, with 'delicious scent of Chantilly', 'gourmet bath salts' and violet-scented lip gloss as well as a glittering powder for the body 'with the sweet aroma of pastry buns' (Fashion Network, 2007).

desires. It also exerts an everlasting stimulation to lure us into following our mercurial and voracious appetites.

Because food today is omnipresent within our contemporary discourses, we need more precise ways to consider its complex and modern nature. Food is deeply entrenched within our lived experience. It is a life-sustaining force, which unequivocally influences our ability to interact within the world. We use food as a way to impress or influence others in many different ways – judging other people, separating ourselves into groups, using food artistically. Emulating the role of food in our everyday lives, I contend that the many forms of discourses about food also shape our relationship with gourmandise, foster its meaning and influence the choices we make about it. These discourses reflect (and create) a broader cultural gourmandise, based not only on food consumption but also, because of the media, on voyeurism. The digital gourmandise of today holds a vast amount of diverse information about individuals, cultural and societal roles as well as norms, customs, behaviours and rituals. Furthermore, since our experiences with food provide us with pleasure and stimulate our senses, today's gourmandise gives us an outlet for experimentation and innovation through the digital platforms of the twenty-first century.

The enticing attraction and rhetorical approach of the digital gourmandise not only captivate us but also seduce us into deeper engagement. While it creates experiences and heightens the senses, today's cultural and digital gourmandise also stimulates a more attractive sense of excess. When viewing content on digital platforms such as Instagram or Pinterest, it constantly lures us with its abundance. As with gourmandise of the past, we are relentlessly directed towards quantity. It also compels us to immerse ourselves within its visions of quality and aesthetics, while persuading us to engage in excess. Digital gourmandise operates as a visual replication by which we participate in voyeurism and surrogate consumption. While the food showcased is real, it is also representative and artistically presented and, more often than not, aesthetically exceeds what most people would consume on a regular basis. This digital gourmandise experience is therefore screened through such a specific lens that when we connect with the image, we engage in the (not so) guilty pleasure of eating but only visually consume the food. Through this interaction, we can undergo a wide range of pleasures and break the historical social taboo of gourmandise. Furthermore, these artistically presented images stimulate our imagination. We can “feel” the warmth of the open fire; we can “smell” the food cooking or the coffee brewing; we imagine the aroma of the spices. We conceptualise these sounds, these tastes and smells. As Laverty (2003) suggested, these images remind us of the real-life experiences. Just as gourmandise of the past filled the bellies, today's digital gourmandise fills the mind.

However we access it, and because it is immediately available, digital gourmandise increases our desires to 'consume', simply by posting or uploading content online. This emphasises the notion that our needs and cravings can be satisfied instantaneously. Furthermore, instead of viewing the same images repeatedly, we may find ourselves in the position of craving 'freshness' and novelty, looking for greater amounts, and therefore reinforcing the notion that gourmandise is reified.

Correlative to the views of Françoise Hache-Bisette and Denis Saillard (2007) in *Gastronomie et Identité Culturelle Française*, we immerse ourselves deeper in gourmandise and the more it entices us, the more these experiences become central to realising our food-borne illusions. Because it contributes to pleasures related to both the stomach and the mind, it constantly captivates us with the notion of excess, while also becoming intriguing. As in the prolonged and lengthy meals of medieval times, we may pursue gourmandise by lengthening the time spent on the various digital platforms, or engaging in it persistently.

However, as this "digital cornucopia" (Greene, 2015, p. 89) is frequently glamourised, realising these ephemeral pleasures will often be unobtainable, while increasing our longing for them. Whether inspired by the desire to recreate the dish or the experience, we will not consume the 'food' or partake in the 'adventure'. Consequently, our engagement with digital gourmandise can only constitute instances of verisimilitude.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

#### 6.1 Overview

As a result of the literature review, the lack of a comprehensive and up-to-date analysis of the changes of meaning of the French concept of gourmandise became apparent. Existing research seemed to revolve around a historical or religious/spiritual perspective, or it seemed to be confined to specific time periods.

Drawing upon established historical and contemporary literature, this research set out to investigate and analyse the influences that shaped the transitions of meaning of the French concept of gourmandise, from early Christianity to the twenty-first century.

This aim was achieved by meeting the three objectives set out in section 2.1:

- Present and examine the history of the concept of gourmandise, from early Christianity to the present day.
- Analyse the influences that shaped the changing meanings of gourmandise.
- Explain the emerging modern expression of gourmandise through the twenty-first century social media platforms.

The findings of this study suggest that, while the meaning of gourmandise changed over a period of two millennia, the aspect of excessive food consumption has been retained from the beginnings right through to the twenty-first century.

By tracing gourmandise from its early Christian representation, it was seen to emerge amongst a sea of social, cultural and religious transformations that had an overwhelming impact on its role. Gourmandise was an arbiter of everyday life, encompassing all of the pleasures that food had to offer.

Further addressing the relationship between food and excess, the changes in its social stature delineated a new era for gourmandise. In the nineteenth century, the two founding fathers of gastronomical discourse employed strategies which resulted in the creation of a new meaning for gourmandise. By extending beyond its negative connotations, gourmandise, through the writings of Grimod de la Reynière and Brillat-Savarin, ceased to be a sin and became a source of pleasure, even a virtue.

The first decade of the twenty-first century fully confirms the evolution of gourmandise observed by French sociologist Claude Fischler in 1990: “the sin of gourmandise, at the end of this century, has more easily been secularised ... than the sin of the flesh” (Fischler, 1990, as cited in Quellier, 2013, p. 203).

Gourmandise in the twenty-first century is undoubtedly interconnected with communication. The advent of the internet and social media platforms resulted in the immense technical developments which have facilitated and accelerated the emancipation of gourmandise. The wonder that gourmandise engenders in social networks has taken a significant place in twenty-first century consumer society, as a result of the intellectual and cultural legitimacy gourmandise elicits.

Gourmandise is now part of everyday and professional life. It still includes the phenomena of excess, sharing and exchange, but also transference in a more and more seductive and interactive way. This rediscovered gourmandise is now made of voyeurism instead of the gourmandise of the stomach.

The most significant finding to emerge from this study is the realisation that the aspect of excess of its earlier meaning has been maintained throughout history. This is perpetuated through to the twenty-first century via social media platforms, in the guise of texts and images focusing on quantity and quality. By continually emphasising the pleasures of gourmandise with enticing attractiveness and aesthetics, media and popular culture encourage one to view food as being based on social distinction, entertainment and most of all excess. Rhetorically, gourmandise can be described as intangible and transitory. Therefore, these discourses incite further yearning (excess) because the experiences are never completely satisfactory as the food is not literally consumed. And while gourmandise is ephemeral, it is continually linked back to excess, especially when reinforced by the aspect of fleeting pleasures.

Furthermore, the findings also support the idea that gourmandise can be defined as a product of its own culture, whose role heralded many of the changes of its meaning – mortal sin, extreme food consumption, technological advances and culinary delights – that have continued well into the twenty-first century.

Lastly, the results also suggest that, paralleling its growing prestige within popular culture and social media, the discourse on gourmandise is thriving. Amidst the ‘explosion’ of food-related blogs, vlogs, web sites and television programmes, gourmandise has become an engaging form of entertainment, trying to satisfy the appetites of a contemporary ‘food-crazed’ culture.

## **6.2 Limitation and recommendations for further studies**

It is beyond the scope of this study to examine the entirety of factors that have contributed to the evolution of the meaning of the concept of gourmandise.

Whereas existing literature has only focused on specific aspects, this study has successfully demonstrated how these meanings have transitioned from deadly sin to a contemporary digital visual concept by incorporating, for the first time, the interrelation between all perspectives, and connecting these meanings to twenty-first century society.

Although the key objectives of this study have been fulfilled, it is apparent that further research should be done to explore other contemporary perspectives affecting the meaning of gourmandise.

An investigation into the nutritional aspect of gourmandise and its impact on health would be useful in order to complement this research. This includes further exploration of the meaning of gourmandise within its contemporary significance and in relation to excess food consumption leading to obesity. This new perspective on gourmandise might reveal a new question emerging within social media and popular culture, one evocative of the current role of food in contemporary society.



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