A Culinary Revolution: The First Celebrity Chef and the Unification of French Culture

Lindsey Teel

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Lindsey Teel
Candidate

Foreign Language and Literatures
Department

This thesis is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication:

Approved by the Thesis Committee:

Dr. Stephen Bishop, Chairperson

Dr. Lorie Brau

Dr. Charlie Steen
A CULINARY REVOLUTION:
THE FIRST CELEBRITY CHEF AND THE UNIFICATION OF
FRENCH CULTURE

by

LINDSEY TEEL

B.A., EUROPEAN STUDIES, 2010

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Lindsey Teel
B.A., European Studies, University of New Mexico, 2010
M.A., Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies,
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ABSTRACT

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw tremendous change and
social upheaval in France. The monarchy was overthrown because of the French
Revolution, a new system of government was being implemented and the country of
France was starting to come together as one nation. Many different cultural aspects can
be credited, but one in particular was the cuisine. Antonin Carême, the first celebrity
chef, embodied Enlightenment ideals and believed that all people regardless of their
status should have the ability to eat well. He challenged old cooking methods and
techniques and presented France with a new cuisine that would help bridge the gap
between the aristocracy and the lower classes. His approach toward food and cooking
was revolutionary and his influence greatly contributed to the formation of a new
gastronomic reality in France that would come to help define France as the culinary
capital of the world.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

“The French cook is the King of Cooks because he is of a nation of cooks. Some kind of fine taste is perceptible in the kitchens of all classes in France.”

- William Blanchard Jerrold

The country we know today as France is the product of centuries’ long evolution and development; it was not a linear process, but instead one with many twists and turns that eventually shaped the country we now know. The late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century was a time when France saw great change politically, socially, and culturally. This time period witnessed the French Revolution of 1789 and its aftermath, events of radical social and political upheaval that would profoundly affect French culture. However, this period was also one of the most centralizing times in the history of France since it, among other social upheavals, also saw the unification of the French language and the strengthening of the government in Paris. As this political concentration of “French-ness” was taking place, both the social and cultural aspects of France were following suit. One way that the cultural identity of France was changing and contributing to the creation of “French-ness” was through food and the new and different ways one could approach it. These changing attitudes toward eating and dining would eventually lead to the creation of a modern cuisine that would spread throughout France.

For this thesis I will examine the work and influence of a man who had a huge impact on French cuisine and culture. He was one of the first great chefs to emerge in France and was so influential he earned the nickname “King of Chefs, Chef of Kings.”

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His name was Marie-Antoine Carême. He was named, ironically, in honor of Queen Marie Antoinette, despite being born to a poverty-stricken family in 1783 shortly before the start of the French Revolution. He would later come to be known simply as Antonin. While he did not directly take part in the political turmoil that was occurring at the time, he capitalized on some of the ideals of the Enlightenment and changes in the structure of the society that emerged from that turbulent time in France. This Enlightenment influence would later be seen in both his written works and the effect he would have on French cuisine and culture. Thus, this thesis will examine the relationship between the political climate, namely the French Revolution and its aftermath, and Antonin Carême’s influence in both the culinary world and French culture, and how the evolving political and social atmosphere in France in turn influenced Carême. In this regard, it will be argued that the profound social changes following the French Revolution, including the processes of unification of the language, culture and cuisine, are reflected in Carême’s work. As far as the development of a national cuisine is concerned, the thesis will examine how his writings and influence as “the King of Chefs,” helped to solidify the unification of the nation around the cultural concept of cuisine.

This thesis will be broken into two different sections as a way to better understand both the political and social impacts that were occurring during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The first section will explore the changing political climate both before and during the French Revolution of 1789 while the second section will focus upon Carême’s unique place as a chef being buffeted by the winds of Revolution. The Enlightenment and the revolutionary changes in public perceptions of a monarchy of
divine right led to new ways of thinking about the fairness and rationality of the pre-revolutionary structure of French society. This new assessment of French social norms, in turn, led to social and cultural movements of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that emphasized individualism and reason instead of tradition and doctrinal reliance on religious principles. Intellectuals began to challenge entrenched ideas that had been grounded in both faith and tradition thereby resulting in the planting of seeds of social and cultural change. Consequently, the political and social climate following the French Revolution and the rapidly evolving circumstances of this time period created an atmosphere in which Carême could, and would, influence cultural development within his specific sphere, that of food, food preparation and cuisine, and, more generally, the development of a national identity for the French people centered around food and cuisine.

Prominent among Enlightenment notions that would influence Carême is the concept of experimentation grounded in science. The Enlightenment, to some degree, stood on the shoulders of the Scientific Revolution, which occurred toward the end of the Middle Ages in the 1400 and 1500s. During that time, European thinkers and intellectuals challenged long-standing “scientific” beliefs that had been maintained by the Church. These emerging scientists sought to discover the true laws behind the phenomena they observed in nature. Individuals like Nicolaus Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, and Johannes Kepler, all mathematicians and astronomers, began to question “accepted” truths and formed new theories to explain natural phenomena. The Scientific Revolution witnessed the refinement of scientific methods and exploration, which
included hypothesizing, experimentation, and analysis. From these new scientific developments came a number of fundamental concepts that would characterize Enlightenment thought; two prominent ideas being individualism and rationalism. Individualism focused on understanding the individual and his or her inalienable rights while rationalism promoted the notion that through rational thinking, people could come to better understand the truths of the world and thereby improve it. As will be discussed, these beliefs in scientific methods would also permeate Carême’s experimentation in the kitchen leading to a standardization of technique and methodology.

The Enlightenment was not simply a philosophical movement; it was also a call to action. It placed an emphasis on the application of ideas to the surrounding world and challenged traditions and notions that had been in place for years. Tradition and ritual were no longer appropriate answers to the question “Why is it done this way?”

The Enlightened thinkers who emerged during this time had great confidence that men could change and direct the world in which they lived. Thus, they urged governments to put the best interests of all the people first, not just those of the elite. They pushed the idea that no one person or group of people should have the ability to control the masses. Thomas Paine, a participant in both the American and French Revolutions, believed in man’s natural rights and that the needs of people should prevail regardless of traditions or ideals that had been in place for centuries. He stated in his political treatise titled “The Rights of Man,” “There never did, there never will, and there never can, exist a Parliament, or any description of men, or any generation of men, in any country, possessed of the right

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or the power of binding and controlling posterity to the ‘end of time,’ or of commanding forever how the world shall be governed, or who shall govern it.”

Paine, like many other thinkers during the Enlightenment, strongly believed that the present generation should take precedence over the past. The ideas of a more responsive form of government spread to those people who were a part of the middle class and who were familiar with revolutionary thought. These prevalent Enlightenment attitudes of confronting traditions would later surface in Carême’s belief that no aspect of traditional French cooking should go unchallenged or unexamined.

Those people who were promoting Enlightenment thought resented social and economic benefits that those in the aristocracy were receiving. As alternatives, they promoted a number of possible paths that those in power could take that ranged from a complete overhaul of the government system to a more efficient version of the monarchical system. When the French Revolution broke out in 1789, Europe and the rest of the world witnessed “the middle and professional classes resorting to force in order to achieve the changes that they sought in French society and institutions.”

The French people wanted a change and challenged the monarchial government that had been in place for centuries. The Enlightenment ideals that developed in the years leading up to the French Revolution spurred popular action by encouraging people to stand up for their

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rights and engage more with the culture at large. Culture and cuisine did not escape the impacts of this new Enlightenment thinking. Rather than remaining static in the face of social and political upheaval, cuisine would experience a radical transformation that would result in the democratization of foods and techniques previously only available to the elite. Carême would lead the vanguard of this transition.

The food culture before the French Revolution was vastly different from the food culture that emerged afterwards. Prior to the Revolution, there was a vast gulf between the food available to the peasantry and that which was available to the aristocracy. During the period of rule under the Ancien Régime, royalty and the aristocracy had foods available to them that could only be dreamed about by the peasantry. Such delicacies as peacock, swan, venison, and whale were frequently on the tables of the entitled, but elsewhere, among the lower classes, diet was dominated by more traditional foods such as pot-au-feu or other basic, simple stews, which were closely tied to regional communities and based on what was locally available. The social hierarchy that was in place in the years leading up to the Revolution mirrored the eating practices of the people in France. In other words, the elites ate much more luxuriously as they could afford the higher quality ingredients and had the manpower available to them to create and serve lavish feasts. However, the peasants were not nearly so lucky in what they were able to put on their plates and were left with the little they could gather, buy locally, or grow themselves. This economic disparity between the different social classes would eventually lead to tensions and unrest among those of the lower and middle classes. The

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Revolution would be the result of those tensions coming to the surface and the people of France demanding change in the fundamental structure of their country.

The second section will look more closely at Carême, his writings, and the influence that he had on French culture in the years after the French Revolution and during the Napoleonic Era. Carême was well known throughout his life as an esteemed chef who was respected by aristocrats and bourgeois alike, both in France and abroad. In his writings, Carême presented his observations and thoughts on the state of French cuisine, both in the past and the present. Examining his writings provides insight into the influences that helped shape his ideas on the culinary profession and how he helped to alter French culture and its cuisine.

In order to understand the impact that Carême had on both French cuisine and French society, his life must be examined to determine how he was able to attain an important place for himself at the culinary table, despite a tumultuous start to his life when his father abandoned him at age ten. After wandering the streets he was taken in by a cook who gave him a place to live and food to eat in exchange for work. As a cook’s apprentice, he came to understand and appreciate that his place in the world was in the kitchen. Carême was saved from the turmoil of the streets and from that point, he began to learn the ways of the kitchen and started to work his way up the culinary ladder. As Ian Kelly notes in *Cooking for Kings: The Life of Antonin Carême, the First Celebrity Chef*, “Carême’s [story] was, it seems, the perfect Revolutionary and Romantic background: the child who would create order and triumphant classicism in the kitchens
of France emerged from the gutter and the turmoil of the Paris Terror.”7 His background imbued him with a certain mystique that would not only stay with him throughout his life, but would help him in his endeavors as a chef and a writer. When Carême was around sixteen years old he became the apprentice of Sylvian Bailly, a pâtissier. Kelly notes that this was “a fortuitous move. Some art forms survive revolution better than others and the evanescent luxury of confectionery never fell victim to political attack.”8 Carême gained a significant amount of experience while at the patisserie and it was because of his employment there that he was able to start carving out a niche for himself in the culinary world. As he continued his culinary education, he also spent a great deal of time in the library researching other cultures, including their cuisines, as evidenced by the long food history he narrates at the beginning of his iconic set of cookbooks titled *L’art de la cuisine française au dix-neuvième siècle*. His experiences and education in the culinary world allowed him to find his place in the kitchens of the upper class.

As Carême moved up the ladder of culinary significance, he would eventually become the chef not only to aristocratic Frenchmen such as Charles Talleyrand, a high-ranking French diplomat, but also great international monarchs and political dignitaries including Tsar Alexander I in Russia and King George IV in England, all of whom he immensely impressed with his talent. In 1819, Carême went to St. Petersburg to be the head chef for Tsar Alexander I. However, upon arriving, he found that the Russians were rediscovering their non-European heritage and were resistant to his style, which

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8 Ibid., 35.
incorporated imported French cuisine. As a result, “Russian cooking ultimately influenced Carême more than he it.”

Carême was able to observe the Russian way of dining including the decorations, the service, and the food. His experience at the Russian Royal Court proved influential in that he observed and adopted some of their practices such as the way they set the table, decorated the table and ate meals in courses (service à la russe), which is now seen as the “French” manner of dining. Kelly notes that “Carême’s time with the Romanov court came to influence Western cooking.”

Carême’s experience in Russia cooking for a foreign sovereign inspired new creations while enhancing his reputation, which endowed him with more credibility in the redefining of French cuisine. While he did not invent French cuisine from scratch, he did rely on existing elements, as well as his own talent and experience to create something new and henceforth, identifiable as “French.” It should be noted that certain elements of French cuisine existed before and during the Revolution, such as the use of sauces and cooking techniques, but it took someone like Carême to synthesize these elements into something new, that could be recognized as belonging to all of France. He utilized new ingredients, or used them in innovative ways, refined cooking methods, emphasized the use of sauces, and the balancing of flavors, and was generally innovative in his approach to the preparation of food.

Carême was not just well known as an extraordinary cook, but also for the many cookbooks he wrote. He was proficient in the kitchen and wanted to share his knowledge with others so as to promote good French cooking. His writings were a significant part of

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9 Ibid., 167.

10 Ibid., 181.
his influence on French culture and cuisine because of his determined attitude to change the face of French cooking so that it would last into the future. His cookbooks came at a time when gastronomic literature and discussions regarding food were becoming more prominent within French culture. His cookbooks gave him a voice within this new sphere of society and allowed him to take part in the conversations. While the system of cooking he created was intended to and did redefine French cuisine since he believed that those who came before him had not done a worthy job, it was also the culmination and refinement of years of cooking evolution within French kitchens. By specifically criticizing old cooking methods and publishing his own cookbooks with “correct” recipes and techniques, Carême put his own stamp on French cuisine.

In both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, recipes and techniques started to become more refined and gained wider acceptance by the general public. Barbara Wheaton explains in her book *Savoring the Past* that the cuisine which emerged in the mid-seventeenth century:

resulted in part from the techniques employed, such as the many ways of binding sauces or the use of vegetable mixtures as flavorings and of forcemeats\(^\text{11}\) as adjuncts to roasts and ragouts, and in part from the systematic organization of dishes of varying scale and complexity in a patterned array set out on the table.\(^\text{12}\)

Cooking and the way people approached cooking was evolving by the mid-1600s and soon the cookbook would emerge as a way to standardize the techniques and practices in

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\(^{11}\) Forcemeat is a combination of meat, fat and seasonings that are blended together through grinding or puréeing to form an emulsion. Forcemeat is used as the main ingredient in making sausages, pâtes and terrines.

the kitchen. Before this time, many recipes and techniques had been passed on orally, a practice that was not ideal for efficiency or consistency. In 1651 François de la Varenne published what is considered the first “French” cookbook, which Wheaton contends stands “at the beginning of the tradition of haute cuisine. In [the cookbook] we see the specialist cook setting up his kitchen and practicing his skills.”\textsuperscript{13} With the rise of the cookbook, French cuisine began to assume its status as a prominent feature of French life; however, the cuisine was still in its infancy, which allowed a man such as Carême to take it to a new level.

Carême thought that those chefs who did write down their recipes did not do justice to the great cuisine that he believed France should have. He did not agree with contemporary ideas of proper cooking techniques that had emerged during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and believed that the genre was lacking. He felt that it was his duty to set the record straight and redefine what French cuisine really was. Ferguson notes, “Carême modernized cooking by creating a cuisine in what he saw as the ‘spirit of analysis of the nineteenth century,’ a self-contained set of rules and procedures governing culinary production.”\textsuperscript{14} Before Carême there had been no real strict written procedure to follow when it came to cooking, despite the written works that had come before him. This was a practice that Carême found unacceptable since it failed to uphold the standards he believed to be appropriate for French cuisine. Thus, Carême established what could be called “Enlightenment cooking” since he challenged the methods and

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 120.

techniques of previous chefs and established a new set of rules and norms that anyone who might find himself in the cooking profession should maintain.

With his success in the kitchen as an excellent cook with a distinctive artistic style, Carême developed a unique expertise, which lent credibility to his opinions on cooking, style and cuisine. His books proved to be just as influential as his cooking since he was able to comment on the state of French cuisine that came before him as well as explain the rationale behind his ideas and changes. However, it is important to note that Carême, like those before him, cooked for the wealthy; in order to be recognized as a great chef, this background was a necessity. Despite this fact, Carême was a child of the French Revolution and thus embodied many of the ideals that came out of that time as well as out of the Enlightenment. Carême’s work was French and was intended to be for all of the French. While he may have worked for those in the aristocracy, he actualized Enlightenment thought. Carême felt that good food should be available to all no matter their status in life. He had one foot in the past working for members of the aristocracy while also looking to the future and visualizing how his culinary innovations would change the face of French cuisine not only for the wealthy, but for the average Frenchman as well. His influence would stretch into the nineteenth century and into the distant future. His writings allowed him to present new ingredients, flavors, and techniques that he could then disseminate through his words as representations of his approach to the craft, which would later become the foundation for a modern form of cooking.
One significant event in the evolution of French cuisine that emerged before the French Revolution was the appearance of the restaurant. The restaurant began to develop about fifteen years before the French Revolution and gained a stronger presence in its aftermath. The emergence of the restaurant was an important cultural aspect during this time period in France’s history and indirectly helped Carême influence the culinary scene in French society. It was a contemporary development in a changing France that would serve as a building block for Carême, helping to expand his philosophies on food and cooking. Carême and his writings appeared at the right time and place since there were new ideas evolving on the topic of good eating. The restaurant would pave the way for the spread of these new thoughts regarding food and dining. It helped to create a new, broader public that was more conscious of culinary taste. Stephen Mennell in his book *All Manners of Food* explains, in the “same way that the social roles of composers, writers and artists were transformed by the emergence of literary and cultural publics, so was that of at least the élite of cooks by the creation of a culinary public.”15 Both food and cooks were beginning to assume new roles within a French cultural movement that was being legitimized by the fact that there were people who were interested in and sought out good food to eat. While Carême did not take part directly in the restaurant scene, it still contributed to his rise in influence because it gave him the opportunity to join in the conversation and voice his opinions through his cookbooks and promote what he believed to be quality French food. The evolution of the culinary public laid the groundwork for the French population’s broader embrace of a new culinary standard.

Carême would use this new foundation to foster his beliefs of what constituted French food so as to educate the growing culinary public. However, it should be noted that during the time after the French Revolution there was not a complete transfer from great chefs working in private homes to those chefs serving the public in restaurants. A number of chefs, Carême included, still worked for aristocrats, but the emergence of a public which was developing a greater appreciation for an evolving cuisine opened the door for culinary refinement outside of the aristocracy.

In addition to the rise of the restaurant, the early years of the nineteenth century saw the beginnings of gastronomic literature, a genre that flourished after the French Revolution. Gastronomic literature provided another avenue by which the newly emerging culinary public could take part in the cultural evolution of a French cuisine, as well as a way to “disseminate knowledge of élite standards beyond the élite.”¹⁶ The authors of gastronomic literature were considered to be gastronomes, or those who not only refined their own culinary palates, but also the palates of others through their writings. Carême and his writings fit within the genre since he was determined to educate people on good food and eating. He wanted to share his knowledge with larger audiences, thus attempting to reach more people than just those who made up the elite class. Carême and his writings came along at the right time and in the right place since there was developing opinion on food and what was considered to be good quality food. Without the emergence of gastronomic literature in the early nineteenth century when Carême was writing his cookbooks, he may not have had the same impact on French

¹⁶ Ibid., 266.
culinary culture that he did since people may not have been as aware of or open to the discussion. The Enlightenment ideals that had emerged during this time promoted the sharing of ideas and created new dialogues about food.

While Carême was certainly not the only influential chef who emerged during this period of French history, he was notable for his celebrity status that extended beyond the kitchen. It would seem that he understood the period in which he was living and was therefore able to adapt to the changing times. Ferguson states that because “Carême understood that modern society favored the many, not the few, he realized that even the most celebrated individuals who ate the glorious meals that he set before them would ultimately count less than the readers of his books.”

Carême understood that society and attitudes were evolving and so he tried to address that change in his writings. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, France was a country that was facing continual turmoil and upheaval as a result of the French Revolution and its aftermath. However, throughout this period and despite the turmoil, Carême worked to redefine French cuisine and raise it to the level he believed was appropriate and deserving. He was able to carve out a part of French culture, the cuisine, which provided some form of stability within the culture and which would eventually lead to a unified national cuisine that France would not only accept, but of which it could become deeply proud. It was because of this transition that Carême was able to find his niche in both the kitchen and in the literary world. He wrote a number of books in which he expressed his observations on both the cuisine of the past and what he thought of it for the future. With political, social, and institutional changes of the early years of the nineteenth century, including

17 Ferguson, “Writing Out of the Kitchen,” 40.
such elements as Carême’s writings and the cooking techniques and methods he refined, Carême contributed greatly to the formation of a new gastronomic reality in France. This transition would lead not only to the development of a culinary profession that would not have been possible without his influence, but also to a culinary tradition of excellence in cuisine, which, for many, would come to define France as the culinary capital of the world.
Chapter 2: Disparity Among the Classes

“Tell me what you eat, and I’ll tell you what you are.”
- Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin

Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin coined the phrase quoted above in his book *Physiology of Taste* in 1826 while contributing to the larger culinary discourse. There is truth to this statement since food and the customs surrounding food reveal much about a culture and a society. On a basic level, all people consume food. It is necessary to sustain life but that fundamental need conveys little about people on a social level. Similar to class, education, race, and other social elements, food can communicate important details about a person or a culture. Upon closer examination of the food consumed within any given society it is possible to learn a great deal about the role food plays and how it helps to construct traditions that shape a nation. The way in which people relate to food lends understanding as to who they are on individual levels, but it also shows how they connect to a larger society or world. Looking at France, with its rich food history, we can see an example of the impact food and dining has had on the culture and how food and cuisine helped shape the country in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and will continue to shape it in the future. How did this process begin and what political, social, and individual influences have allowed cuisine to maintain a continued prominence in the world? There are many different variables that factor into the making of an haute cuisine, including techniques, the products, and especially the creators without whom the cuisine would cease to exist. Thus, through a combination of these factors, working over time, cuisine can define and contribute to the distinctiveness of a culture.

French food has frequently been thought of as the best; it is not unusual for someone wanting a superb dinner to seek out a French restaurant. French food has gained a certain amount of prominence throughout the world and has come to represent fine dining and sophistication. French food, therefore, is the source of a number of myths that have come to enhance its position within the culinary world. The structuralist, Roland Barthes, who tried to understand how elements of human culture become significant and how they are culturally shaped and socially controlled, introduced the idea of cultural myths.\(^{19}\) Many cuisines have myths associated with them including France. Thus, if we apply his line of thinking to French food, we find that it does have a number of myths associated with it. Barthes himself demonstrated some of these myths in “Wine and Milk” and “Steak and Chips.”\(^{20}\) Complexity and richness typically come to mind when assessing what French food is or what qualities help shape it. Despite the persistence of Julia Child pushing the notion that anyone can learn to cook French food, there is still an air of difficulty associated with the making of anything French. The methods and techniques require a certain amount of skill and attention to detail to ensure that the final product is one of good quality. In addition, while French cuisine does include some basic components such as vegetables, meat, and butter, it is also characterized by a number of ingredients that are more familiar to the French population such as escargot and foie gras. These precise elements of French cooking, the cooking methods and ingredients, make it something to be esteemed, valued and sought after when looking for a high quality dining experience. Looking back at history, it is possible to discover how, when, and why a myth took hold, thereby revealing how it works within


\(^{20}\) Ibid.
a given society, such as French culture. To examine the myth of French food we need to delve into its history and study its evolution from a burgeoning cuisine to its position as a full-fledged dominant cuisine.

To begin, we must ask the question: what is cuisine? According to the Oxford English Dictionary, “cuisine” is defined as the “manner or style of cooking.” This definition is fairly general when one thinks about all that is involved in the process of cooking and making a final dish that started from nothing but simple ingredients. However, throughout the centuries, the French have found a way to perfect the manner in which they cook, which in turn has led to the formation of what can be considered an haute cuisine. Interestingly, “haute cuisine,” as also defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, is “high-class (French) cooking.” This definition infers that it has been widely accepted that the French have set the standard for what is considered good and superior food.

Sidney Mintz draws attention to these two concepts (“cuisine” and “haute cuisine”) in order to better understand the differences between them and what they mean within a given culture. In his article “Cuisine and Haute Cuisine: How Are They Linked?” Mintz argues that within a society there will be both a “high” and a “low” aspect to the culture. He uses the term “internal differentiation” and explains that the “term has to mean that specifiable differences in foods or ways of preparing and eating food, or both,


exist from one group to another inside the same society (no matter how defined).”

By examining one culture at a time it is easier to see the varying elements that help to create that culture, especially the internal differentiations in the food and eating habits of the people. Thus, if “haute cuisine” is attributed to a class, or a more privileged group within the society, it can be compared with another group that may have differing food standards or habits. It is possible to distinguish these differing sections of society, but what exactly determines what “haute-ness” is? Mintz attempts to answer this question by describing various elements that are commonly associated with food and eating. His answer explains how “haute-ness” is formed and the different elements that help make up an “haute cuisine” within a class:

*By what it cooks and serves*—nightingales’ tongues and caviar—sometimes ensured by sumptuary distinctions. *By supplying things out of season*—the first fruits, only the best at the season’s height, the last available. […] *By how it cooks*—number of person hours and quantities of accumulated skills (often as functions of each other) invested in each mouthful.

Depending on what class of people cook, the products they use and how the food is cooked, one may draw conclusions as to whether or not the cuisine of that class can be considered as haute cuisine or something lesser. The elements listed above mark the elite status of its consumers. In other words, those who are eating meals that meet the criteria of “haute-ness” can consider themselves as part of the upper echelon of society. However, there are other important elements to consider in determining the “haute-ness” of a cuisine, which is who actually prepares the food and for whom? These new elements,

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24 Ibid., 187.
combined with the ones above, signal a type of distinction in Pierre Bourdieu’s sense: social class tends to determine aesthetic concepts of taste and what is believed to be worthy of the upper class.\textsuperscript{25}

Out of all the European countries, France is the one that is most famous for its \textit{haute cuisine}. The French created an everlasting cuisine, through the efforts of many people, but most prominently Carême. The development of an haute cuisine came from the culmination of different factors and events throughout France’s history. Amy Trubek, author of \textit{Haute Cuisine: How the French Invented the Culinary Profession}, briefly describes the rise of haute cuisine. She asserts that the “courtly home of the medieval and early modern period housed the beginnings of a French haute cuisine. With the development of the public sphere and the advent of the French Revolution, food production and preparation were transformed.”\textsuperscript{26} To reach the point where French food could be considered “haute cuisine” it had to go through refinements of ingredients, cooking skills and techniques, and public acceptance that were all the products of French history. The types of food that were being consumed in the eighteenth century along with where the food was being consumed, in the great houses, both played a large role in the formation of French cuisine. Trubek continues her discussion on the emergence of haute cuisine by noting that the large, elegant houses “were the site of professional cuisine’s precursor and the places where chefs were first employed to ply their crafts, which consisted of complex preparations presented to the aristocratic consumer in elaborate,


multiple-course feasts.” The cuisine was closely linked to the social hierarchy because the food that was produced by the chefs in the aristocratic households was considered to be superior to the food that was being produced and consumed by the peasants and other members of the lower classes. Thus, the chefs that were working for the upper class were able to set the bar for what French cuisine would become. For his part, Carême, essentially defined haute cuisine: he worked for royalty and members of the aristocracy cooking for lavish events for dozens of participants, if not more, he created magnificent centerpieces based on ornate architectural drawings that would grace the tables of the highest echelons of society, and he created dishes of such complexity that even modern chefs require several days to recreate a recipe. Heavily influenced by Enlightenment ideals, Carême’s approach to cooking would contribute to the standard for haute cuisine for decades to come and thereby create the enduring myth that equates French cuisine with the very best of dining experiences.

By the time France had entered into the seventeenth century, a culinary change was evident. This transition included not only new types of food being used and consumed, but also new methods to prepare it. At the same time, another significant event emerged which would alter the public’s approach to food and dining. This event was the appearance of cookbooks. Barbara Wheaton explains that in the “decade of the 1650s the dearth of French cookbooks ended as chefs overcame their longstanding

27 Ibid., 3.

28 Bill Buford, “Cooking with Daniel: Re-Creating Classics of French Cuisine,” The New Yorker, July 2013, 46. This story illustrates how complex and demanding some of Carême’s recipes could be. The author describes an attempt by modern world-class chefs to recreate some of Carême’s dishes, the effort for which required three days of preparation and experimentation.
reluctance to commit their ideas to paper.”

It is somewhat unclear exactly why chefs began writing down their recipes at this point in time, but there were social changes occurring that may have had some influence in the dissemination of culinary information in writing. As the demand for good eating grew, it is probable that chefs were unable to keep up and learn the different, popular recipes using only the oral tradition of handing down those recipes. Thus, the written version of recipes allowed for a more efficient kitchen since chefs were able to cater to the demand for both the new foods and the new techniques for preparing them. Roy Strong, in his book *Feast: A History of Grand Eating*, continues the discussion on cookbooks by noting that “appeared an array of French cookbooks presenting a new system of cooking, one which incorporated an integrated repertory of techniques making use of certain basic mixtures and raw materials subject to what were in fact a series of rules.”

While the cookbook was a relatively new concept, it was the beginning of a more systematized way of running a kitchen. As new cooking techniques developed and new ingredients were introduced the cookbook also evolved. Cooking and food preparation was influenced by a number of prominent players throughout history. It is important to understand this time period, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in order to better appreciate the influence that Carême would have on the kitchen and French culture in the years to come.

As mentioned above, the mid-seventeenth century witnessed some of the first major changes in food, techniques and the way cooking information was disseminated. In 1651 François de la Varenne wrote what is considered to be the first “French” cookbook, *Le Cuisiner François*; it was the first of what were more or less original

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30 Strong, *Feast*, 226.
cookbooks that were emerging. What made this one original was the fact that it did not just contain medieval recipes, but also new recipes that were decidedly different from the old medieval ones. His book contained new recipes for bouillons or stocks, both meat and fish, that would serve as the base for French cookery to come.\textsuperscript{31} It was the foundations laid by la Varenne that would be later built upon and refined in the following century.

In the time period between la Varenne’s cookbook and the turn of the eighteenth century there was not much advancement in the area of cooking and cookbooks. However, by the 1730s, a new type of cuisine was starting to emerge. There were a number of new authors touting their books as representing the new style, which came to be known as \textit{la nouvelle cuisine}. Despite the fact that it was supposed to be a new cuisine, there were no new recipes emerging. Instead, many old recipes were reappearing, but they incorporated new techniques for preparation and cooking.\textsuperscript{32} In addition, some of the ingredients were beginning to evolve which included the use of “exotic” spices that came from the East, including cinnamon, saffron, and ginger to name a few. Another trait of \textit{la nouvelle cuisine} was that the same recipes would be published in cookbooks that were written by different authors; there were a number of recipes that would be similar, but that still had some differences.\textsuperscript{33} Essentially, different chefs or cooks would alter a recipe based on personal methods or ideas and then republish it as their own. Nevertheless, the mid-eighteenth century was a time when cooking began to see changes

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\textsuperscript{31} Strong, \textit{Feast}, 229. \\
\textsuperscript{32} Takats, Sean, \textit{The Expert Cook in Enlightenment France}, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2011), 96. \\
\textsuperscript{33} Wheaton, \textit{Savoring the Past}, 169.
\end{flushright}
that would persist into the future, but that would also continue to be modified by people such as Carême. One cookbook that not only highlights, but also boasts of the changes is *Les Dons de Comus* written by François Marin. He presents a number of recipes using simpler, more refined techniques, and also explains how one is to serve food according to the newest fashion.\(^{34}\) During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, cookbooks went through a number of transitions and started to become more organized in their presentation of recipes. However, none of these transitions or changes would match what Carême would later do in the early nineteenth century when he took on the task of creating a new, modernized French cuisine that would endure into the future. Since Carême firmly believed that he could make French cuisine better, he contested the methods of those before him and introduced the world to a new way of eating well.

At the same time that cookbooks were becoming more popular during the seventeenth century, French cuisine experienced a number of other notable events. Some of those events occurred at the courts of the monarchs who wielded great power and influence. The social conduct at the court of Versailles helped to solidify what would become the new model for social engagements and eating habits. Louis XIV, also known as the Sun King, was known for his gluttonous ways. Jean-Robert Pitte writes in his book *French Gastronomy: The History and Geography of a Passion* that the “energy he [Louis XIV] expended throughout his reign called for abundant food, while the heights of prestige he claimed for France required that food to be original and refined.”\(^{35}\) In addition, he expected grandness in all aspects of his life, which is readily apparent since

\(^{34}\) Mennell, *All Manners of Food*, 75-76.

he is the man who built the palace of Versailles outside of Paris; he was not a man to skimp on the pleasures of life. Louis XIV’s extravagant lifestyle contrasts greatly with that of peasants, many of whom were living in severe poverty and barely had enough to eat. It is important to understand the economic and social disparity that existed during this time in French history since it would eventually culminate in the French Revolution. In contrast to the lavish food consumption at the Court, Carême believed that people of different classes should have the ability to eat well and thus promoted recipes that could be created by anyone no matter their status in society.

Several paintings of the era depict the grandness and the importance of food in the years leading up to the French Revolution as well as the simplicity that those in the lower classes knew. As noted, Louis XIV was a man of large appetites who demanded great splendor. One such example of Louis XIV’s extravagant taste can be seen in the engraving titled Festivity Given by Louis XIV by Jean le Pautre in 1674 (Figure 2).36

The engraving depicts a “fête” in the lavishly decorated Cour de Marbre, a small courtyard at the original palace that was built by Louis XIII. This particular “fête” was a part of the celebration that was occurring through the months of July and August in 1674 in honor of the second conquest of the Franche-Comté region by Louis XIV. What was unique about this particular event was the fact that it was a “media-noche” or a midnight feast, as indicated by the dark sky in the engraving. The grand spectacle in the middle of the engraving is a large structure to showcase the food. It was built over one of the fountains in the courtyard and was meant to impress. Divided compartments surrounded

the large buffet table on which the food sat. Each of the compartments housed figures playing musical instruments and were decked out with garlands and candles. The whole structure was further embellished with the addition of an eighteen-foot column that also had burning candles spiraling their way up to the top. The food that was displayed consisted of “a sugar collation, huge pyramids of preserved fruits interspersed with flowers, vases of ice and pyramids of iced sweets.”37 Surrounding the commanding structure, we can see onlookers in the windows of the palace as well as a crush of spectators in the courtyard itself being held back by members of the guard.

The Festivity Given by Louis XIV highlights the importance of the food during the reign of Louis XIV. The viewer’s eye is drawn immediately to the center of the

37 Strong, Feast, 262.
engraving where all of the food is on display, emphasizing its prominence within this court culture. Clearly, the food is a large part of the celebration and meant to take on a primary role in this depiction. The food is more than food: it is a type of performance or theater that people come to witness whether they are able to participate in consuming it or not. The people in this engraving are decidedly secondary elements. While it is difficult to determine who the people are, it can be assumed that they are members of the aristocracy. It is evident that this was a spectacle that was meant to be seen since taking part in it was likely unattainable for all but the highest members of the elite.

Louis the XIV was not the only monarch who enjoyed a spectacle of eminent proportion. Almost a century later, we can still see celebrations occurring that highlight the grandeur and lavishness that the monarchy had come to expect. In the painting by Martin II Meytens titled *Coronation Banquet of Joseph II in Frankfurt, 1764* we again see a magnificent display (Figure 3).38 Despite the fact that this painting does not represent a French monarch it is still a good representation of the time period for a number of reasons. Joseph II, whose coronation was being celebrated, was the brother of Marie-Antoinette, the wife of King Louis XVI and queen of France. The event may not have taken place in France, but it is likely that the experiences would be similar in both grandeur and elegance.

Another similarity to the period leading up to the French Revolution is that the painting represents a *grand couvert*, which was a public dinner for the King where courtiers could come and watch. Because the painting is done in one-point perspective, it draws the viewer’s eye to the back placing emphasis on the monarch who is sitting at the back of the room. The *grand couvert* is taking place in the Frankfurt City Hall, which has a gothic cathedral appearance. The grandness of the room draws a spectator’s eyes up, to heaven, as if it is a ritual that is sanctioned by God. It is clearly an important space that is ornately decorated with banners along with gold and silver decorations to emphasize the significance of this tradition and the importance of the divine right monarch. These events were high points of the aristocratic world in the late eighteenth century. The banquet was most likely attended by the aristocrats, which we can assume...
because of the stately setting and the manner of their dress; there are no peasants in attendance. This painting clearly shows the extravagance in which those in the upper class lived. These functions would cease to exist after the French Revolution since there was a new emphasis on equality. Carême took part in the development of ideas of equality by presenting recipes that reached beyond the elite class. Thus, for those people who were not in attendance at the *grand couvert* because of their social status, there would come a day, after the Revolution, when they could aspire to being able to make and experience good food for themselves.

Furthermore, and most importantly, is the presence of the food. The tables are set with silver service, yet no one appears to be eating. This is for the most part because everyone is waiting for the newly crowned King to finish himself. Another important element of the painting, one that draws the viewer’s eye down to the foreground, is the depiction of the *service à la française* style of serving, demonstrating the practice of service at the time. This method of service was used for years both before and after the French Revolution; it would not be until the 1860s that it would be completely replaced by *service à la russe*. *Service à la française* “reflected the seventeenth century’s concern for order, balance, good taste and elegance.”

39 This method was commonly used at the tables of aristocrats. Depending on the number of diners the number of dishes needed would be calculated on a fixed ratio. In addition, all dishes for a given course were brought out at once and carefully arranged on the table. If there were more diners present, it would not mean a greater quantity of a particular dish. Instead, it meant that more, new dishes needed to be added. As shown in the painting, the dishes are arranged

symmetrically with larger dishes, usually meat or fowl, serving as the anchors with a plethora of smaller dishes surrounding them. Carême was a big promoter of *service à la française* and insisted that the meals he created be served in that manner, which was consistent with his beliefs of what was considered to be correct. Carême commented on a dinner he attended while in Russia in his book *Le Maitre d’hotel*:

> J'ai donc joui d'un spectacle bien imposant, en pouvant voir à table les impératrices, les grands ducs, les duchesses, les princes et princesses et la noblesse de Russie ; le souvenir de cette pompe sera toujours présent à ma mémoire. Tout en contemplant cette noble assemblée, je regrettais de ne pas voir la table couverte du service à la Française ; il aurait infiniment mieux convenu dans cette fête solennelle.\(^{40}\)

Carême touted the idea that *service à la française* was the appropriate method of service that should be used for grand feasts with important dignitaries in attendance. However, despite having observed another method of serving when he was in Russia, *service à la russe*, he never embraced it as a proper method of food service and instead stuck with *service à la française* as he believed it was more appropriate for grand meals.

The two images described above are examples of how food was largely incorporated into court life and the status that was placed upon it. These depictions not only represented the grandeur of the aristocratic and nobility lifestyles, but also what elements helped comprise them. The lifestyle of those in the upper class was vastly different from that of the lower class who did not live nearly in such extravagant conditions. In fact, their lifestyles were much simpler and much more humble. An

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\(^{40}\) Antonin Carême, *Le Maitre d’hotel française* (Paris: 1822), 152. “So I enjoyed a very impressive spectacle, being able to see at the table the empresses, the grand dukes, duchesses, princes and princesses and nobility of Russia; the recollection of the procession will always be present in my memory. While contemplating this noble assembly, I regretted not seeing the table covered with *la service à la française*; it would been have much better suited for this feast.” (Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own).
example of the way the different classes lived is found in a painting from the seventeenth century and its depiction of the peasant class. *Peasant Interior with Old Flute Player, 1642,* painted by Louis Le Nain,\(^{41}\) highlights the plainness and simplicity that the lower class experienced (Figure 4).\(^{42}\)

![Figure 4](image)

In this painting, there are no grand decorations of gold and silver, no platters piled high with food and there are definitely no people clamoring to witness the spectacle that is taking place. Instead, what we see is a group of peasants seated around a table and elsewhere throughout the drab room wearing simple clothing. The older woman and older man bear the look of a long, hard life. There is nothing grand about the scene. The way the light is used helps focus the viewer’s eye on the table on which we can see a loaf

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\(^{41}\) There were three Le Nain brothers who produced a number of paintings depicting peasant life and who would often times work together. This particular painting is believed to have been done by Louis Le Nain, the middle brother and considered the genius of the family.

of bread, an empty bowl, and a wine glass sitting atop a white tablecloth. The tablecloth, the wine glass, and the bread are reminiscent of the Eucharist suggesting that religion plays a central role in their lives just as it does in the lives of their aristocratic brethren. Their meal is not anywhere near as lavish or complex as those presented in the images above. However, the peasants depicted are somewhat idealized; while their clothing is simple, it is still clean and unworn looking. In addition, there is what appears to be a crystal wineglass on the table before the flute player, an object that would have been highly unusual in a peasant household. Nevertheless, this painting is representative of a much simpler side of French life. While the peasants portrayed in this image are from the seventeenth century, the peasants of the Ancien Régime may not have looked much different.

There was great disparity evident between the upper and lower classes. In the years following the Revolution, steps were taken to try to alleviate this vast divide and give everyone a more equal chance at succeeding regardless of a person’s social status. For his part, Carême touted the thought that all people of all fortunes should have access to good food. He followed through with this idea by providing cookbooks with recipes that would be feasible to make no matter the class of the cook or the consumer. French cuisine would not remain static while the rest of French culture was evolving. Instead, amidst the social and political upheaval that was occurring, the cuisine would undergo its own significant changes thanks in large part to Carême.

In order to understand the importance the events that took place after the Revolution in an effort to create a more unified nation, it is necessary to understand some details about the events leading up to it. The three images discussed above are illustrative
of the great disparity in lifestyles between the aristocracy and the peasants. This deep gulf that existed between the classes would ultimately lead to friction and unrest culminating in the French Revolution.

French society during the Ancien Régime was hierarchical, the structure of which many believed to have been created by God. The king of course was at the top, and below him was the rest of French society divided up into three estates. It is important to note that estates were not the same as classes since they were not derived from economic status. In order to be a part of the nobility, a person had to prove noble status and the Church had to certify your status as clergy. Anyone who was not a part of either of those two groups would fall into a third group known as the Third Estate.\(^4^3\) The French Revolution would challenge this structure and citizens who were considered to be equal would eventually come to replace it.

There are a number of factors that contributed to discontent and unrest prior to the Revolution. One factor that helped lead to the Revolution was the class conflict that was evident within France. The tension between the classes was due in part to the existence of noble privilege. Tradition and the honoring of already established values kept the nobility in their role of power. Roger Price explains in *A Concise History of France* that “the old concepts of ‘honor’ and ‘dignity’ continued to influence social relationships. […] Nobles of ancient lineage saw themselves as belonging to a race apart, with its identity maintained by breeding and a cult of honour.”\(^4^4\) The nobles saw themselves as a literal class above the rest of French society, seeing themselves as inheriting through

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blood a sense of honor and family pride that needed to be preserved. These pretensions led to discord among the other classes, particularly with the middle class.

The middle class, or the bourgeoisie, played a large role in the events leading up to the Revolution. They were becoming increasingly unhappy with the French government and the position they held within French culture. Despite there being some members of the bourgeois class who were quite wealthy, the people in the middle class were constantly excluded from various aspects of French society simply because they were not part of the nobility. They were unable to occupy certain jobs, thus their opportunities were limited. As “had been the case from time immemorial nobles occupied all the important offices of church and state. [...] Nobles were thus both the agents of a centralising power and, in the provinces, its most determined opponents. It would take the Revolution to impose a greater sense of unity.”45 The Revolution promoted the idea that some form of equality needed to be put into place so that all French citizens would have equal opportunity. This push towards unity would come in a number of ways, one of which was through Carême and his work to help shape a national cuisine. Following the Revolution, Carême would step to the forefront in bridging this divide by offering all classes the opportunity to experience and savor good food. Carême’s work in the kitchen and his writings, which promoted the notion of equality, would help bring together disparate classes. His work was fundamental in helping to unify the French culture and the final result of his efforts would be the development of a French national cuisine that would not belong exclusively to the elite classes, but to the

nation as a whole. Carême helped form a national cuisine that French citizens would be proud to call their own not only in the nineteenth century, but into the present day as well.
Chapter 3: The Age of Carême

La France est la mère-patrie des Amphitryons; sa cuisine et ses vins font le triomphe de la gastronomie. C'est le seul pays du monde pour la bonne chère; les étrangers ont la conviction de ces vérités.  

- Antonin Carême

Marie-Antoine Carême was a man who helped revolutionize French cuisine not only because he was a great chef, but also because he was a “cultural entrepreneur” who took an acute interest in writing and sharing his recipes. He came to be known as the first celebrity chef, and his stardom extended out of the kitchen and into French culture, thanks in large part to the books he wrote. His books contained not only the recipes and the methods he used to create his dishes, but also his views on French cuisine and the history of cuisine prior to the French Revolution. The emergence of Carême’s writings was a critical development that resulted in a new and more refined cuisine in France, spurred particularly by Carême aiming his books toward a larger audience so as to introduce more people to good food and proper technique. Through his efforts and appeals to a larger audience, he succeeded in shaping French cuisine and culture thereby contributing to the unification of the country as one nation.

Before the French Revolution, France was not a united country, quite the contrary in fact. Under the Old Regime, France was broken into many different provinces. Even after a king incorporated a province into his kingdom he and his successors frequently

46 Antonin Carême, *L’Art de la cuisine française au dix-neuvième siècle, Tome II* (Paris: Adamant Media Corporation, 2005), i. “France is the motherland of Amphitryons, its cuisine and wines are the triumph of gastronomy. It is the only country in the world for good food; foreigners have the conviction of these truths.”

47 Ferguson, “Writing Out of the Kitchen,” 40.
allowed the provinces to retain their own laws, traditions and customs.\(^{48}\) As a result, there were many different administrations and judicial rules all throughout France. One Enlightenment thinker, François-Marie Arouet, also known as Voltaire, expressed his discontent in *A Philosophical Dictionary* written in 1764 by stating, “There are, it is said, one hundred and forty-four customs in France which possess the force of the law. These laws are almost all different in different places. A man that travels in this country changes his law almost as often as he changes his horses.”\(^{49}\) Voltaire, along with others, called for alterations to the structure of the system that was in place before the Revolution as it was inefficient and confusing. Furthermore, there was not one common language that was used by the French. Instead, people spoke different languages and dialects depending on the region from which they came. Scott Haine explains that on “the eve of the Revolution of 1789 much of the population of France did not speak French and often had customs that varied greatly from those of Paris.”\(^{50}\) In the years leading up to the Revolution, there was no unity among the French people regarding their laws, customs and language, which created a divided nation searching for some form of harmony.

As the French Revolution progressed, members of the National Assembly, inspired by Enlightenment thinking, sought to abolish the old provinces and redraw the map of France. They wanted a set of uniform governmental units to promote equality throughout the nation. Their goal was to “create uniform and equal French states. Provincial differences were to be effaced and erased and a national culture


\(^{50}\) Haine, *Culture and Customs*, 5.
implemented." While it would take many years to reach this goal, there were a number of key moments and implementations that helped lead France down the right path, but in order to be successful the French needed a central figure who could take charge and drive France to become more unified. That man was Napoleon Bonaparte.

Napoleon gained prominence during the French Revolution as a military leader who demonstrated a determination to bring France together into a strong, unified nation. After he became Emperor in 1804, he began implementing liberal reforms, which included a single set of written laws that applied to everyone throughout the country; thus was born the Napoleonic Code, one of his longest lasting legacies. The Napoleonic Code was based on three main principles: personal status, property, and the acquisition of property, which helped move France in the direction of a country that was starting to allow greater equality regardless of social status. The principles underlying the codification of laws were to afford the people of France equal opportunity under the law. The civil code “guaranteed individual liberty, recognized certain rights such as equality before the law and in taxation, freedom from arrest without due process, religious freedom, and the right to choose one’s work.” The people wanted a country where everyone was on equal footing and where they were able to advance within society based on their merit. The early nineteenth century witnessed France becoming more streamlined and as a result, more egalitarian. Carême’s work in the kitchen and his writings on French cuisine reflected this period of transition and reinforced those ideals


53 Ibid., 47.
since he promoted his work to all levels of society. Central to Napoleon’s vision for a new French social structure, the people of France would not be constricted by their social class, but were free to rise on their ability. Similarly, Carême sought to educate the French people on the topic of good food regardless of social position. He promoted his cookbooks to those beyond the aristocracy in an effort to gain broader appeal for French cuisine. Carême himself was the epitome of success based upon merit having been born impoverished and yet rising to become the first celebrity chef.

While the Napoleonic Code was hugely influential, it was not the only social reform to have an impact on French culture and people’s way of life. Napoleon was also instrumental in promoting education for the French. He believed that it was necessary to direct “the political and moral outlook of the next generation”\(^{54}\) and wanted to train them so as to produce the “officers and obedient administrators he required.”\(^{55}\) The education system that Napoleon implemented would promote two purposes. One was to educate members of the elite so that they could then help run the country. The other purpose, however, may have had a larger impact on the country than the first. The system was “also designed to provide for an increased middle class; a middle class that would be successful and hence non-revolutionary.”\(^{56}\) The people of the middle class would learn how to read, how to think critically, and how to discuss ideas and concepts. This new educated class was significant because, as previously mentioned, a new public sphere was emerging in which people were conversing and debating on topics of the time. While


\(^{55}\) Ibid., 115.

trying to unify France on a political level, Napoleon also helped to bring the cultural and social aspects of French society together, which created an environment conducive to the discussion of food and culinary taste. With a more educated population, there would be more room for discussion of new ideas on food and good eating. Carême was the right man who came along at the right time because his ideas on food and cooking were revolutionary. His beliefs and writings were reflective of some of the ongoing social and political changes, specifically those regarding equality for all French citizens. As the country was evolving and becoming more unified, Carême stepped in with his own thoughts and ideas on what good food was and how the average person would be able to create his or her own meal that was consistent with the standards of French cuisine while also redefining what those standards were. Carême too was looking to educate the French people and his methods were not entirely different from those of Napoleon’s. Carême was a man who used the evolving aspects of French culture to his advantage and who would help shape a more unified France.

The social upheaval brought about by Enlightenment thought, the French Revolution, and the Napoleonic era affected all aspects of French culture, the culinary scene included. Carême understood that his books would be more influential if they were focused on the many, instead of the few. In turn, his writings would affect the future development of the culture of the country. Print media began to fill a niche opened by the new awareness of cuisine, specifically gastronomic literature. The culinary texts that emerged in the early part of the nineteenth century were an important part of the reformation of the French nation because they brought with them new ways to approach food and began to allow more people to participate in the culinary scene. Because of
these emerging texts, people who were not considered to be a part of the elite now had more access to knowledge and awareness of the food that was consumed by those of the aristocracy. Armed with this new knowledge and increased access to different foods, more people were able to participate in the great cuisine thereby helping it become a national symbol that would come to help signify a united France. The texts that Carême contributed were significantly different from those that had been published before since they outlined new ways to approach French cuisine, which included both the ingredients used as well as the methods needed to prepare them. His passion for the cuisine and his insistence that it be the best helped, in part, bring a struggling nation together since they could start to rally around a national cuisine.

The idea that food can help connect people from different localities and unite them as a nation is consistent with Benedict Anderson’s theory on “imagined communities.”\(^\text{57}\) Anderson draws attention to the fact that a nation is socially constructed because it is imagined as such by the people who consider themselves as part of that country. Through imagination it is possible for individuals to envision themselves as a part of a greater whole in which they are able to share customs, traditions, and values. Thus, a group of people who, without knowing each other personally or without ever actually encountering each other, are able to see themselves as members of the same community. Anderson argues that print-capitalism or the mass emergence of books and periodicals is what “made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways.”\(^\text{58}\) Print-


\(^{58}\) Ibid., 36.
capitalism allowed members of a country to contemplate their relationships with their nation and fellow citizens. However, Anderson’s argument can also be applied outside of the political realm. When looking at a nation as a whole, we find that there are many facets that comprise it. The food or cuisine of a nation makes up one of those facets. Thus, if we examine Carême’s work in light of Anderson’s theory, we find that the work that Carême produced, his cookbooks, helped unite a nation that was working toward finding harmony. Carême’s intent was to create a cuisine that would be representative of the French culture. In order to accomplish this goal, Carême produced a number of cookbooks that included thousands of recipes as well as his thoughts and opinions on his expectations for French cuisine.

Carême’s cookbooks allowed him to share his expert knowledge with his audience. His goal was to educate the French people on French food and the proper way to make it. He explained the different methods and techniques needed to complete recipes with explicit and direct instructions. In so doing, he was working to help unite French culture by presenting a cooking style that could be adopted by the citizens of France. It is important to note that the recipes he included in his cookbooks were not just for those in the upper class. Instead, he included recipes that were a part of the lower classes. This inclusion of recipes that existed outside of the aristocratic realm was important because those recipes were the building blocks of a national cuisine. Ferguson explains that the “culinary country is not to be found in the extravagant creations of celebrated (male) chefs in fancy modern restaurants but rather in the unpretentious, familiar dishes made every day in ordinary kitchens by ordinary cooks.”

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inclusion of recipes that were not considered to be aristocratic signified his desire to
reach out to a larger audience so as to teach the citizens of France about the dishes that
helped make up their country. No national cuisine comes from one individual; instead, it
comes from the households of average families making what is within their means.
Carême recognized this fact and sought to include recipes in his cookbooks that would be
more available to the people of France. Thus, through printed cookbooks, more people
would have access to these recipes and know the proper techniques in order to
successfully create the dishes.

Despite the fact that Carême was well-known in France during his lifetime,
especially during the first half of the nineteenth century when he was writing his books,
he is not very well known today. Instead, the household name in the culinary world is
Auguste Escoffier who was born in 1846, thirteen years after the death of Carême. There
was little doubt, however, from those who knew Carême or experienced his culinary
creations, that he was a great influence and that his impact on French cuisine would last
well into the future. Carême’s contemporaries saw a man who had the ability to create
cultural elements that could rally the French people and unite them around a common
aspect of French society: cuisine. Alexandre Dumas, the author of the famous books The
Three Musketeers and The Count of Monte Cristo, wrote another book, the Grand
dictionnaire de cuisine (1873) in which he commented on Carême and his life. Dumas
was considered to be quite the gourmand and his interest and expertise are reflected in his
book, which is a combination encyclopedia and cookbook. Dumas’ goal was similar to
that of Carême’s, which was to provide a book to be “lu par les gens du monde et
pratiqué par les gens de l'art.” Like Carême, he looked to the past and the history of cuisine and compiled “toutes les recettes culinaires qui ont acquis droit de cité sur les meilleures tables.” He wanted everyone to be knowledgeable on the subject of cooking and cuisine and dedicated this Dictionary to that effort. Dumas, who lauded Carême and his goals for French culture, noted in this Dictionary that Carême is “un homme qui représente l'art culinaire arrivé à sa perfection.” Dumas further commented on the success of Carême as a chef noting that he did not die of coal poisoning (otherwise known as carbon monoxide poisoning), but that he was “tué en réalité par son genie.” Carême may have died at his own hands, so to speak, but he did so in pursuit of his ultimate goal: transforming French cuisine into something that would be accessible to everyone. His success is evident; the cuisine he inspired would eventually come to represent the nation.

After the Revolution, a new type of cuisine began to emerge, which was spearheaded by Carême, having established himself as an authority figure on the subject. With the decline of the “cuisine ancienne” (the cuisine of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), a new more modern cuisine started to develop, a cuisine that would come to be known as the “cuisine classique.” Carême reveals his thoughts on the “old” and “new” cuisines in Le Maitre d’hotel when he says “Je considère l'ancienne cuisine

60 Alexander Dumas, Grand Dictionnaire, (Paris: 1873), 104. “read by the people of the world and practiced by the people of art.”

61 Ibid., 105. “All the recipes that have acquired their rightful place at the best tables.”

62 Ibid., 359. “A man who represents the culinary art reached at its perfection.”

63 Ibid., 365. “actually killed by his genius”

64 Strong, Feast, 281.
Carême saw the dawning of a new era for cuisine starting at the French Revolution and its Enlightenment influences. Just as a major element of the Enlightenment was the challenging of “accepted” truths, the “accepted” truth that Carême challenged was the state of French cuisine. The “old kitchen,” as he called it, was something of the past and something that needed to be corrected. With the new transitions that French culture was undergoing in the aftermath of the French Revolution, Carême confronted the methods and techniques of the past and transformed them into a methodology that would survive long into the future. His vision would become not only the foundation on which French cuisine would be built, but also a contributing factor to a larger cultural transformation.

Carême worked on his writing during the second half of his life after gaining a great amount of knowledge and experience on the subject of food. He realized early that he needed much more knowledge than “hands-on” experience alone would give him. Thus, he spent many hours in the public library and turned himself into a scholar on the history of cuisine, specifically French cooking, but also the cuisines of other countries so that he would be well educated on all aspects of food and its preparation. For example, in the first volume of his most impressive multivolume work *L’art de la cuisine française au dix-neuvième siècle* he gives many examples of broths and soups that were common to French culture, but he also includes a number of foreign soups. He writes “Les potages

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65 Carême, *Le Maitre d’hotel*, 3. “I consider the old cuisine as belonging to the end of the eighteenth century, while the modern takes hold at the beginning of our most well known and unfortunate revolution.”

The soups mentioned are not considered to be French, yet he includes them in his book so as to give his readers a clear idea of what is encompassed in cuisine throughout the world. By studying foreign cuisines, he established his credibility in the field of cooking, which in turn allowed him to critique the cooking practices that had come before him and to work toward his goal of transforming the cuisine of France. Being a scholar of food gave Carême the gravitas necessary to be a credible commentator on food and a practitioner of food preparation.

As noted above, in order to attain his goal of transforming French cuisine, Carême looked to the past and critiqued what had previously been done regarding the cuisine. As a result of his studies on the history of food and cooking he was well versed in the characteristics of French cuisine before the French Revolution and he was not pleased with what had come before him. Carême did not believe that what had passed for French cuisine before the Revolution was up to the appropriate standard. Thus, he took it upon himself to not only challenge the techniques and methods that had come previously, but to “correct” them so that they would follow what he believed to be the appropriate path. He explained his goal, rather bluntly, in his book *Le Maitre d’hotel français*:

> Dans le discours préliminaire de mon premier ouvrage, j’ai réfuté fortement ces livres ridicules qui font la honte de notre grande cuisine nationale. J’ai prouvé incontestablement que tous ces livres écrits jusqu’à présent sur notre cuisine, étaient médiocres et pleins d’erreurs; j’ai voulu

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67 Antonin Carême, *L’Art de la cuisine française au dix-neuvième siècle Tome I*, (Paris: Adamant Media Corporation, 2005), 117. “The soups of Persian orchid flower, arrowroot, oatmeal and corn are rarely served, and yet, they are suitable soups for an ordinary family.”
venger la science, et je crois avoir réussi dans les trois parties que j’ai démontrées aux Amphitryons français et étrangers.\textsuperscript{68}

From this passage, it is clear that Carême did not think highly of the practices that came before him, which were supposed to highlight the cuisine of the time. In fact, he saw the cooking practices that emerged as a terrible representation of the cuisine and believed that the genre was corrupted. Carême decided to challenge the old style of cooking and change the standard to which French cuisine should aspire, resulting in a new cuisine that would persist into France’s culinary future. Channeling Enlightenment thought, Carême wanted to “avenge the science” of French cooking. He saw French cooking as an experiment and as such, it was necessary to follow the scientific method, which had been laid out over a century before during the Scientific Revolution. This scientific inquiry was required in order to produce the highest quality food.

Carême made direct observations about the methods that previous chefs had employed and expressed his disbelief over them. However, despite these “ridiculous books,” Carême was able to use them as a foil to contrast his own thoughts on cooking. And because Carême presented both the old and the new in the way that he structured his works, he achieved more authority in the culinary world.\textsuperscript{69} By being able to directly confront and then refute methods, techniques, and ingredients that had been done previously, as well as to present a counter method for the “correct” way to proceed, Carême was able to establish himself as a culinary expert. Thus, because of his superb

\textsuperscript{68} Carême, Le Maître, 1. “In the first draft of my work, I strongly refuted these ridiculous books that are a disgrace to our great national cuisine. I proved beyond doubt that all these books written until now on our cuisine were poor and full of errors; I wanted to avenge the science, and I think I succeeded in all three parts that I have shown to the French and foreign Amphitryons.”

\textsuperscript{69} Ferguson, Accounting for Taste, 53.
knowledge of cuisine there was little doubt that he had a great influence over its refinement and future development.

Carême felt it was his duty as a chef to reinvent French cuisine. In the first volume of *L’art de la cuisine française au dix-neuvième siècle* he references a number of cooking moments in history with which he vehemently disagrees and offers his criticisms in a rather blatant and direct manner. He specifically looks at the beliefs of previous chefs and is clearly astonished by what they thought of certain practices. For example, Carême admonishes other writers over their approach to making sauces. He states in one of his many observations: “Tous ces hommes ignorants se sont plu à dénigrer ce précieux procédé. […] O pitoyables écrivains, que vous êtes impertinents et sots.”

Carême was unabashed in expressing his feelings on the works of previous chefs since he believed their work to be substandard. Another example where Carême is in utter disbelief over the viewpoints of previous chefs is based on their approach toward soups. Carême wholeheartedly believed that soup was an integral part to any good dinner: “les potages sont et resteront toujours les agents provocateurs d’un bon dîner.” However, he must contend with the opinions of old gastronomes on this topic who believed that soups were not a necessary part of a French meal. In response to this attitude Carême exclaims “Je ne puis croire que des hommes qui ont trente ans d’expérience gastronomique prétendent que nous devions faire disparaître le potage de nos dîners.”

Based on Carême’s own

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70 Carême, *L’Art de la cuisine française, Tome I*, 56. “All these ignorant men were pleased to denigrate this precious process. […] O pitiful writers, you are impertinent and foolish.”

71 Ibid., 71-72. “Soups are and will always remain the provoking agents of a good dinner.”

72 Ibid., 72. “I am not able to believe that men who have thirty years of culinary experience claim that we should make soup disappear from our dinners.”
written observations, there is no doubt that he did not think highly of the chefs and the practices preceding him. The obvious failings of these writers underscored his belief that French cuisine was off track and that he was the one who would be able to not only save it, but also create a more refined form of cooking that would elevate French culture and help unite French citizens around this common experience.

Throughout his books, there is an arrogant overtone, especially when he claims to be the savior of French food. He boldly states “arrive tôt ou tard le praticien éclairé, qui dévoile la bassesse du charlatanisme, et, vengeur de la science, les fait disparaître de la scène du monde.” In this passage Carême is talking about himself and how he will be the one to avenge the science of cooking. He previously stated that he wanted to “avenge the science” by challenging the cooking methods and techniques that had come before his time and to prove that those earlier cookbooks were full of errors. Carême was the man who revealed the low level to which the cuisine had been taken, and proclaimed with complete authority that he would be its one true savior. While his attitude may be based upon his unquestioned expertise, it still has an arrogant ring to it, which is a trait that is typically ascribed to those in the aristocracy. Despite his occasional aristocratic tone, though, Carême still focused his books, specifically his iconic five-volume set, on a larger audience, one that was outside of the elite class.

Carême is widely known as the King of Chefs. His status as a prime chef was recognized and accepted by those who were in the upper echelon of French society. The name “Carême” was enough for people to conjure up his unmatched artistic culinary skills. Even Louis XVIII recognized Carême’s supremacy in the kitchen and endorsed

73 Ibid., 57. “Sooner or later comes the enlightened practitioner who reveals the baseness of charlatanism and, avenger of science, makes them disappear from the stage of the world.”
the nickname “Carême de Paris.”\textsuperscript{74} Nevertheless, it is important to remember that Carême was not born at this level in society. Instead, he was born into a family that lived in severe poverty and he was abandoned by the time he was twelve years old. Since there was some luck on his side, as well as a motivation to work hard to survive, he was able to work his way up the social ladder and become the famous chef whom everyone knew. However, given this background, it is ironic that he later became known as the King of Chefs. Consistent with the Napoleonic drive to reward people based on their abilities, Carême’s talent carried him far above the station to which he was born. However, his celebrity status and accumulated wealth did not necessarily make him an equal among the aristocrats in France. As observed by Kelly:

> Foreigners always stand outside the local class-structure, and Carême’s status in St Petersburg was as an international celebrity rather than an imperial servant. The truth was that he found himself more socially mobile in autocratic Russia than he had ever been in post-Revolutionary France.\textsuperscript{75}

Ironically, Carême was not accepted as an equal in Paris even though French society ostensibly was extinguishing distinctions based on class. While those in the aristocracy may have respected him, he was not considered as their equal. However, the upper class was not willing to reject him or his work, which was considered to be exquisite and refined. He rose from one of the lowest stations in society to a position of high importance and developed important skills that would allow him to better serve those in the aristocracy who enjoyed taking part in his meals. Indeed, he received many requests from the likes of Alexander I, Tsar in Russia, and King George IV, King of England, who both wanted him to cook in their houses, as they believed his food and creations to be

\textsuperscript{74} Ferguson, \textit{Accounting for Taste}, 49.

\textsuperscript{75} Kelly, \textit{Cooking for Kings}, 172.
outstanding. This popularity and renown most likely assisted him in gaining his credibility. Had he not had the experiences he did and the respect of those in the aristocracy, it is probable that his works may have gone unnoticed or at least would not have gained the prominence that they did.

Carême became reputable with those in the upper class because of his ability to cook and make exceptional meals and other confections. However, the books in which he wrote his recipes and his observations on food in general were aimed at a much larger audience. The aristocracy was not his main audience despite the fact that it was for them that he cooked. Instead, as Carême explains:

Je veux également que la ménagère trouve dans mon livre de quoi occuper ses loisirs: sa lecture lui découvrira une infinite de choses faciles à exécuter; elle pourra instruire sa cuisinière sur ses goûts sensuels; elle pourra préparer de ses propres mains des mets succulents, qui lui attireront les plus douces louanges de la part de ses convives.

Carême intended that his book be of use to the housewife of either the bourgeois or upper class. We can assume that this was his intended audience since he specifically observes that either the woman or her cook could take part in the cooking. If there were a designated cook within the household, we can conclude that the financial status of the household was well off enough to place it in either the bourgeois or upper class part of society. In his quest to be more inclusive, Carême emphasized the work of the housewife so as to appeal to that part of society.

This desire of his to educate a larger audience allowed him to reach a larger public that was then able to create for itself good food to eat. He was sharing food that

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76 Carême, L’Art de la cuisine française, Tome I, liv. “I also want that the housewife finds in my book enough to occupy her spare time, her reading will unveil an infinite number of things to execute; she will be able to teach her cook about sensual tastes; she will be able to prepare with her own hands succulent meals that attract her the sweetest praises from her guests.”
was typically associated with the aristocracy with the common people, thereby acting as a bridge linking two factions of society together through the mutual element of food. Because his books were aimed at those outside of the aristocracy and to the public at large, his recipes, techniques, and thoughts on food percolated throughout France and began to install themselves as the norm for cooking. In being inclusive of all members of French culture by following Revolutionary ideas of equality, Carême was aiding in the effort to unite a country that had been suffering from multiple factions.

Carême explicitly mentioned the housewife in the opening chapters of his book in an attempt to reach out to a larger audience. He believed that those in the aristocracy should not be the only ones who could eat well, but that others within French culture should have that same opportunity. Thus, in the introduction of the first volume of his epic five book series, he clearly stated, “Mon livre n’est donc point écrit pour les grandes maisons. Je veux, au contraire, qu’il devienne d’une utilité générale. […] Je voudrais que, dans notre belle France, tout citoyen pût manger des mets succulents.”

His intention was that good food be accessible to all. Here we see Carême being inclusive of all members of society. Furthermore, he even goes as far as to recognize that many of his recipes and their ingredients may be out of reach for some people, but that should not mean that they still cannot eat well within their means. He believes that all people should have access to good quality food and states in the introduction of Volume I: “La lecture de mon livre rendra d'importants services à toutes les fortunes et à toutes les personnes

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77 Ibid., lvii-lvix. “My book is not written for the great houses. Instead, I want it to become of general utility. […] I want that in our beautiful France, every citizen can eat succulent meals.”
Carême recognizes that not everyone will be able to afford the same ingredients, especially some of the ingredients found in the meals of the upper class. Nevertheless, he believes that no one should be hindered from being able to enjoy good quality food. Perhaps this encompassing outlook stems from his childhood with his family living in such severe poverty that they most likely did not have quality food to eat. Either way, Carême understands the reality of the lifestyles outside of the upper class and counsels that correct cooking methods are available to all even if the exotic ingredients are not. He notes “le point essentiel en toutes choses, c'est de connaître les procédés à employer pour bien les exécuter dans leurs moindres détails.”

He tried to instill confidence in his readers and make them believe that they too could create good food with the help of his books and still stay within their means. Carême, by appealing to people of all fortunes, helped to shape a cuisine in which all members of French culture could take part. Thus, if all the citizens of France had the ability to create good French food within their ability, then they would be able to participate in the forming of a national cuisine.

For a fuller appreciation of Carême’s influence on the French kitchen and the culture at large, it is important to look closely at his recipes and how they connect with the French people. Incidentally, Carême’s first recipe in his multivolume work is pot-au-feu, which is followed by the section on broths, stocks, and other stews. On the first page he notes the importance of pot-au-feu to the French people, specifically the working class.

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78 Ibid., lviii. “The reading of my book will make significant contributions to all income levels and all people who love, by choice, to take charge of the preparation of their cooking.”

79 Ibid., lvii. “The key point in all things, is to know the methods to be used to perform them well in every detail.”
He states “c’est la nourriture principale de la classe laborieuse de la nation.” Right out of the starting gate, Carême recognizes the significance of the pot-au-feu to not only French cuisine, but to France itself. What is even more significant is that Carême is including simple, low class recipes and arguing that they are a huge part of the “French-ness” of the nation. Pot-au-feu, a simple preparation of long simmered meat and vegetables, can in no way be considered as a meal of the aristocracy, yet he includes it as a valuable and significant component of French cuisine. Furthermore, Carême tells us that those people who comprise the working class find a large part of their nourishment in the form of this stew. He states: “Dans le ménage de l’artisan, le pot-au-feu est sa nourriture la plus substantielle.” By highlighting this pot-au-feu recipe in his book, Carême is recognizing that it is a major element of French cuisine that cannot be ignored. If he was to reach out to those people who were not a part of the upper class, then it was important for him to express appreciation for the food they ate to live and survive.

What is even more noteworthy is the fact that Carême addresses women directly in the introduction of L’Art de la cuisine française au dix-neuvième siècle, Tome I. This is significant since women were the cooks in the average households, but never in the great houses of the elite; those jobs were left for men since the eighteenth century strictly enforced gender roles and managerial jobs were not appropriate for women within the kitchen. Women outside of the aristocracy played an important role within their own households. As Wheaton explains, a “cuisinière could make a domain for herself in the

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80 Ibid., 1. “It is the main food of the working class of the nation.”
81 Ibid., 2. “In the household of the artisan, the pot-au-feu is his most substantial food.”
82 Wheaton, Savoring the Past, 99.
kitchen. Her skills were an important part of the household economy." Because of this fact, Carême speaks to women and even expresses his admiration for the work that they do within the household. He explains, “C’est la femme qui soigne la marmite nutritive, et sans avoir la moindre notion de chimie; elle a simplement appris de sa mère la manière de soigner le pot-a-feu.” Carême follows this statement by discussing the steps the housewife goes through as she makes the pot-au-feu concluding with: “par le simple procédé d'avoir conduit doucement son pot au feu, la ménagère a obtenu un bouillon savoureux et nutritif, et un bouilli tendre et de bon goût.” Women were an important aspect of the lower class kitchens and were well adept at running a kitchen and providing for families. Carême respected that role and wanted to address his book to them as a way that would make their jobs in the kitchen easier. Nevertheless, it is remarkably inclusive of Carême to include a dish as simple as a pot-au-feu. It illustrates his desire to share his knowledge on what good food was and how others, in this case, women, could attain it.

The approach that Carême chose in disseminating his knowledge on cooking was to be concise and descriptive in his instructions, a trait that was not often apparent in the cookbooks written before Carême came along. This method of expressing information in a clear and concise manner is important because it is less ambiguous in both the techniques and ingredients needed to follow and successfully complete a recipe. Thus, his recipes were not relegated to those people who already knew how to cook. As he was

83 Ibid., 99.

84 Carême, L’Art de la cuisine français, Tome I, 2-3. “This is the woman who looks after the nutritional pot, and without the slightest notion of chemistry; she has simply learned from her mother how to care for the pot-au-feu.”

85 Ibid., 3-4. “By the simple process of slowly cooking her pot-au-feu, the housewife obtained a delicious and nutritious broth, boiled tender and tasteful.”
trying to reach a larger audience he apparently tried to instruct those who were not proficient in cooking so as to educate them on how to make good quality French food. In looking closely at his pot-au-feu recipe, we can see the simplicity and straightforwardness that Carême provides to his readers. The recipe is as follows:

Mettez dans une marmite de terre trois livres de tranche de bœuf, deux livres de ruelle de veau, puis une carbonate de mouton (la partie du filet après les côtelettes); ayez soin que ces viandes soient bien dégraissées; ajoutez une poule colorée à la broche, deux litres de demi d’eau froide, deux carottes, un navet, un clou de girofle piqué dans un oignon, deux poireaux et un demi-pied de céleri; couvrez la marmite de son couvercle; ajoutez autour un cordon de pâte faite de farine et d’eau, un peu mollette; observez qu’elle doit clore la marmite bien hermétiquement, afin que la vapeur soit concentrée. Maintenant vous placez la marmite dans une grande casserole de quatre pouces plus large que la marmite; elle doit contenir de l’eau bouillante dont l’ébullition ne doit pas être interrompue pendant six heures; pour cet effet, vous devez avoir soin d’ajouter d’heure en heure un peu d’eau bouillante au bain-marie, dont l’ébullition reste toujours la même. Après ce laps de temps, vous retirez la pâte qui a luet le couvercle de la marmite; vous passez le bouillon au tamis de soie, et le servez de suite pour potage ou pour consommé.  

Carême, in explaining how to make a proper pot-au-feu, is very specific with his instructions. He not only gives precise quantities for the ingredients, but also gives approximate cooking times; these were details that were not common before this time. This approach implies that he did not believe that everyone knew how to cook, and therefore needed more explicit instructions in order to successfully create the recipe. In keeping with his all-inclusive style, it was imperative for him to address his audience as

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86 Ibid., 7-8. “Put in a clay pot three pounds of sliced beef, two pounds of veal steak then a carbonate of sheep (the part of the filet behind the chop); take care that the meat is well degreased; add a spit-roasted chicken, two and a half liters cold water, two carrots, a turnip, a clove pricked in an onion, two leeks, and a half-foot of celery; cover the pot with its lid, add a cord around it of fresh pastry made of flour and water, a little soft. Watch that the pot is well sealed so as to concentrate the vapors. Now place the pot in a large casserole four inches larger than the pot; it should contain boiling water whose boiling should not be interrupted for six hours. For this effect, you should take care to add a little boiling water every hour to the bath so the boiling stays the same. After this time has passed, remove the pastry that covered the lid of the pot; pass the broth through a sieve and serve it immediately as a soup or clear broth.”
though they did not have any previous knowledge; he wanted to teach people how to cook and gave them the tools needed so that they would be able to learn.

Comparing Carême’s recipe with that of la Varenne, which was written in 1651, we can see noticeable differences in the styles and the language used. La Varenne was much more simplistic in the instructions he gave to make many of his recipes. In the recipe “boeuf à la mode,” the French version of pot roast, we can see simplicity in the instructions; there is not much information or direction given to make the “boeuf à la mode.” The recipe is as follows:

Battés-le bien et le lardés avec de gros lard, puis le mettez cuire dans un pot avec bon bouillon, un bouquet, et toutes sortes d'espices, et le tout etant bien consommé, servez avec la sauce.87

Juxtaposing the recipe with the pot-au-feu by Carême, this recipe pales in comparison. Through this examination, we can more fully comprehend the transformative effect that Carême had on French culture and its cuisine. In the “boeuf à la mode” recipe, there are neither specific amounts for ingredients provided nor are there approximate cooking times that would help a cook know how to successfully create this recipe. This instruction style suggests that users of the cookbook may have had prior cooking knowledge and were already familiar with the techniques and methods of preparation that went along with making a dish. Carême took a vastly different approach in his writings so as to reach out to a larger audience with the intent of educating them on French food and the proper way to make it. Because he was so precise in his instructions, he was able to educate a larger number of people who could then successfully make a French dish, thus helping to establish a national cuisine in which all French citizens could take part.

87 François de la Varenne, Le cuisiner François (Paris: chez Pierre David, 1659), 38. “Tenderize the beef well and lard it with bacon fat, then put it to cook in a pot with good broth, a bouquet, and all sorts of spices, and when everything is well cooked, serve with the sauce.”
Looking at a recipe from *Les Dons de Comus*, written in 1758, by François Marin we can see some advancement in both the style and the language used, but not nearly to the extent that Carême revolutionized recipes and techniques. Much like la Varenne’s cookbook, most of the recipes included in Marin’s call for a certain amount of previous cooking knowledge in order to successfully make the recipe. This style is evident in the following recipe “Bouillon ordinaire, ou mitonnage pour la base des potages et des sauces:”

Ce bouillon doit être fait avec toute l’attention possible. On prend la quantité de viande nécessaire. La meilleure est la tranche, le gîte et le trumeau. On y ajoute une poule ou jarret de veau. Quand il est bien écumé, vous le salez légèrement, et y mettez les racines convenables, comme navets, carottes, panais, oignons, cellery et poireaux, avec un clou de gerfle et une racine de persil. Ce bouillon ou mitonnage sert à faire cuire tout ce qui se met sur les potages, comme volailles, gibier, grosse viande, etc. et toutes les garnitures ou légumes, excepté les choux, radix, gros navets et quelques autres légumes dont on fait le potage à part. Une partie de la bonté de tous les bouillons dépend de l’attention et du soin que l’on prend.88

In this recipe we can see some basic tips such as giving the broth as much attention as possible, since the goodness of the broth depends on it. In addition, there are specific mentions of what ingredients are needed: chicken or veal shank, and suitable roots such as turnips, carrots, and onions; however, that is the extent of his directions. The rest of the recipe consists of information on what a person can do with the final broth. While this recipe from Marin is more detailed that that of la Varenne, it is still not nearly as

88 François Marin, *Les Dons de Comus ou l’art de la cuisine, réduit en pratique* (Paris: chez Pissot, 1758), 2. “The broth must be made with all possible attention. Take the amount of meat needed. The best is the beefsteak, topside of beef, shin of beef. Add a chicken or veal shank. When well scoured, lightly salt it and put in suitable roots like turnips, carrots, parsnips, onions, celery and leeks with cloves and parsley root. This broth or slow-cooked soup is used to cook everything that goes into soups, like poultry, game, meat fat, etc. and all the trimmings or vegetables, except cabbage, radix, large turnips and some other vegetables that are made for soup separately. Part of the goodness of all broths depends on the attention and care that one takes.”
instructive as Carême’s. In order for Carême to reach a larger audience, it was necessary for him to write his cookbooks as though he were teaching a new cook. Carême certainly has recipes that are complex and require some cooking knowledge, but he presents them in the same manner as his pot-au-feu recipe: detailed with specific steps to follow. In turn, many of Carême’s recipes build on one another and often times he will tell his reader to refer back to a previous recipe so as to successfully continue on with another. This form of presentation harks back to the scientific method in that through practice and experimentation, a person can learn how to cook. It further illustrates Carême’s belief that learning a specific technique was of supreme importance to continue to build upon the basic foundations of cooking. Whether or not the cook had expensive ingredients to add to her soup, she could remain secure in the knowledge that the bouillon base was superb and could stand proudly on its own merit.
Chapter 4: Conclusion

“O France! Ô ma belle patrie! Toi seule réunis dans ton sein les délices de la gastronomie!”
- Antonin Carême

France has had a rocky, albeit influential history. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries specifically saw great change politically, socially and culturally with the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Era. Many of the changes were brought on by Enlightenment thinkers who challenged institutions, such as the monarchy, that had been in place for centuries. The Enlightenment promoted ideas regarding the individual, rational thinking and scientific exploration for explanations of natural phenomena. These ideas were a call to action and would come to reshape France through the people who acted upon them. After the French Revolution, France was struggling to become a more unified nation. One of the largest changes France saw was the democratization of political, social, and cultural elements. One element of French cultural life that saw a dramatic transformation during this period was the cuisine and the new way people came to approach food. New attitudes toward both eating and dining would eventually lead to the creation of a modern cuisine that would one day make France the culinary capital of the world.

Antonin Carême was a man who had a desire to create a French cuisine of which all French citizens could be proud. As a man who was born into poverty and had to make his own way in the world at the age of ten, Carême epitomized the social and cultural changes that would occur in France, following the upheaval of the Revolution of 1789. Starting from his fist work as an aide in a kitchen, he grew into his work, largely self-educated, but destined to be a transformative force for French cuisine. He embraced

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89 Carême, L’Art de la cuisine française, Tome II, 292. “O France! My beautiful homeland! You alone unite in your breast the delights of gastronomy!”
Enlightenment thought, adopting the “scientific method” as the basis for his approach to cooking, and furthered the Revolutionary cause of creating a more equitable society with opportunity for all by finding a way to bring a truly unifying cuisine to the masses through publication of detailed, how-to type cookbooks which presented recipes alongside his own philosophical points of view on food and culture.

The French Revolution and the Napoleonic era had a large impact on Carême and his influence on both French cuisine and culture. Carême’s work reflects some of the changes that were occurring within French culture including unifying elements that were starting to emerge such as the development of French as the national language following the Revolution. Because Carême’s writings were intended for the many instead of the few, he followed Revolutionary ideas of equality and promoted the creation of a national cuisine. Thus, Carême was a man who was in the right place at the right time because he lived in an era of change at a time when the French nation was looking to find unification and harmony. He looked to impart his wisdom on the culture so as to help bridge the gap between the aristocracy and the lower classes. His goal of spreading his knowledge of French cuisine and of educating the public about its characteristics was different than those of his predecessors. Since he disagreed with most everything they presented on the subject of food, Carême took it upon himself to refute cooking concepts that he believed to be wrong or inferior. He channeled Enlightenment concepts and reworked hundreds of recipes so as to create a new cuisine that would be worthy of France and the French people. Carême wanted his cookbooks and recipes to be available to French citizens because he truly valued a high standard for French food and wanted to share that standard with the nation. By challenging old cooking methods and techniques that had been the
norm before the French Revolution, he brought French cuisine to a new level of which the French people could be proud.

Carême’s cookbooks containing his recipes and thoughts on cooking outlined proper methods and techniques that were revolutionary, yet approachable. He included recipes and detailed, step-by-step instructions that anyone could use to successfully complete a recipe and have a high-quality dish that met the standards of French cooking. It is clear that his intention for his cookbooks was to reach a larger audience outside of the aristocracy. The methods and techniques Carême promoted for the making of French cuisine gradually became incorporated into French culture and established themselves as the basis for the new, modern cuisine of France.

Carême’s writings demonstrate that he was neither afraid nor intimidated by the thought of tearing down old standards of cuisine and rebuilding a new modern cuisine that would come to help define France as a whole. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in France were a time of tremendous transformation as the political, social, and cultural realms of the country were changing. However, through the power of his writings, Carême was able to help establish some unity within French culture and help bridge the gap between the upper and lower classes. The recipes he presented in his iconic five-volume cookbook set, *L’art de la cuisine française au dix-neuvième siècle*, set the stage for the formation of a national cuisine since he accommodated people of the lower class and their typical meals. He passionately believed that all people should have the ability to eat well no matter their income level. The cookbooks that Carême introduced to France in the early nineteenth century helped the French people rally around a national cuisine because it provided a set of common rules and procedures on
how best to approach the making of French food. Thus, in turn, French citizens could participate in the creation of French cuisine and help solidify it as a national symbol that would become an iconic facet of France and French identity.

Carême firmly believed that all people should be able to eat well no matter their station in life. He dedicated his life to seeing that goal achieved through his cookbooks and the recipes he presented therein. In 1868, thirty-five years after Carême’s death, William Jerrold, Englishman and author of the *Epicure’s Yearbook and Table Companion*, would observe that “some kind of fine taste is perceptible in the kitchens of all classes in France.” This statement clearly indicates that Carême was successful in his ambition to bring good food to all people. Long after his death, the French were eating well as noted by an Englishman suggesting that French food had become a cultural icon of French identity. Today, French cuisine is well known as being one of the best cuisines and this is in large part because of Antonin Carême’s revolutionary culinary ideas, practices and writings.

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Bibliography


