



Edible Nostalgia: Intersection of Food and Memory in Hisashi Kashiwai's *The Kamogawa Food Detectives*

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Abstract. This paper presents the analyses of Hisashi Kashiwai's *The Kamogawa Food Detectives* through the theoretical lenses of Pierre Bourdieu's habitus and Marcel Proust's involuntary memory. Kashiwai portrays the cherished memory associated with a partially forgotten dish of the clients who visit the father – daughter duo, the proprietors of a discreet Kyoto eatery. The proprietors succour clients recover a treasured experience through detection and cautious culinary reconstruction. The gastronomic sleuthing works as tool for indicating how natural inclinations like tastes and social histories constitute Bourdieu's habitus. Yet refracted by the shifting conditions of contemporary Japanese society, each client's requirement is rooted in the sedimented cultural capital of their upbringing in terms of culinary heritage, class-coded dining etiquette, and tacit bodily know-how. The episodic narrative of the novel journey towards Proust's idea of involuntary memory erupted through senses by collapsing temporal distance and reanimating faded affective worlds. The sensory trigger is not the accidental madeleine but a deliberately crafted plate, clustered through oral testimony and the chefs' intuitive grasp of regional foodways. The recreated dishes serve as mnemonic keys which enables characters to reconcile estranged relationships. This study states how Kashiwai stages food as a site where habitus and involuntary memory intersect, where the remembered dish is not a pure retrieval but a re-embodiment of the clients' life trajectory. The novel's structure mirrors the cooking process, while its affective resolution hinges on the sensory immediacy of gustatory and olfactory stimuli. In mapping the narrative's interplay between memory and embodied social wisdom, Kashiwai's work contributes to ongoing conversations in food studies about memory, identity, and the cultural politics of taste.

Keywords: Culinary Nostalgia, Memory Triggers, Gastronomic Experience, Personal Historiography

1 Introduction

What and how we cook or eat varies across cultures, eras, and families, reflecting specific culinary knowledge such as ingredients, seasoning, food combinations, spices, and cooking techniques unique to each context (Sava 99). "Food, and all that is associated with it, is already larger than life" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1). *The Kamogawa Food*

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S. Sharma et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the International Conference on Emerging Food Studies: Intersections of Culture, Science and Sustainability (ICEFS 2026)*, Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 1017,

https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-583-6_17

Detectives presents food as a performance medium, as defined by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. Food is inherently performative and theatrical, functioning as a concrete art form that, like performance, is alive, transient, and deeply sensory.

"Memories themselves are also multifaceted, made up of parts that will themselves be remakings of perceptions, abstract thoughts, more memories and so forth" (Groes 63). Individuals' family and their material interactions with food, in addition to their own food-related memories, influence their present-day food experiences (Fox and Allred). The long-lost dish depicts the ritualized repetition of the socially constructed performance of habitus and the eruption of the involuntary memory, a spontaneous sensuous return to the period when that flavor held emotional weight. Through the recreated dishes, embodied social dispositions meet the sudden, unpredictable recovery of the self. Many writers spend a lot of energy and time describing the texture, flavor, and aroma of food as they create their realistic characters (Franks). In this affective realism, the act of tasting turns into a medium of existential inquiry. "Sensory affective reactions to foods, involve accepting or rejecting a food because of its sensory characteristics such as the taste, smell, texture or appearance" (Muhammad et al. 360). The restaurant is portrayed as a theatre of recovery where the detectives work to mediate between the psychological flash of sensory memory and the sociological sediment of everyday practice. Through the dual theoretical lenses of Marcel Proust's concept of involuntary memory and Pierre Bourdieu's notion of habitus, this paper presents how taste connects emotion and embodiment, self and society, time and its reclamation. The Kamogawa Diner's reimagined meals not only quell patrons' nostalgic appetites but also aid in their emotional healing and reconciliation with the past.

"Narratives, the act of telling stories, provide the site for the interpretive expression that decodes food-based memories" (Abarca and Colby 4). Marcel Proust's concept of involuntary memory is articulated most illustriously through the madeleine episode in *In Search of Lost Time* which posits that sensory stimuli such as taste and smell bypass intentional recollection to awaken memory in its unadulterated, most affective form. This spur-of-the-moment eruption collapses chronological distance: the self that hearkens back and the self that experienced merge through sensation. In contrast to voluntary memory, which is the result of a conscious act of recall, involuntary memory occurs unexpectedly irrespective of ages and is often triggered by intense emotional feelings. The sensory experience of taste and smell are strong triggers for memories due to their direct connections to the limbic system, the brain region linked to emotions and long-term memory. "In world literature, it is a unique novel on autobiographic memory" (Du Toit 5). Proust's idea is demonstrated in *The Kamogawa Food Detectives* by the way that tasting the reproduced dishes evokes recurring memories for the diner's patrons. The experiences shared by each client demonstrates how the taste, smell, and texture of food can elicit intense, personal memories of life-changing events. Since it explicitly recognizes food memories as a living thing, the idea of food memories as stories is essential (Lee). The central plot of the novel is around this impromptu, food-induced resurgence of the past.

"Habitus is formed in specific conditions and can be viewed as a system of dispositions that generate action and perception" (Husu). According to Pierre Bourdieu, the term

"habitus" influences how individuals view the world, respond to it, and make sense of their experiences. It is shaped by how societal structures and personal behaviors interact to produce a system of adaptable and enduring dispositions. Habitus includes the broader social and cultural contexts that shape an individual's preferences in addition to personal preferences. "habitus is collective" (Taha et al. 164), which encompasses the ideas, emotions, and behaviors that people exhibit as a result of their upbringing, education, and cultural milieu. Social distinction is likely to be established by the consumption of art and culture in any possible means. (Bourdieu)

2 Analysis & Discussion

"Food and cuisine are basic elements of every culture" (Lupton 666). This theoretical analysis aids us in understanding how eating preferences and behaviors are ingrained in social contexts and their influence in identity formation. *The Kamogawa Food Detectives* depicts that the characters' experience with food are profoundly shaped by their habits. In addition to serving as a catalyst for reminiscence, each recreated dish acts as a representation of social and cultural backgrounds of their patrons. The specific ingredients, agricultural landscape, cooking techniques, and culinary customs are all ingrained in the clients' routines and influence how they feel about food. It satiates the mental hunger.

When food is analyzed through both lenses, it becomes at once an involuntary eruption of feeling and a socially coded practice, an amalgamation of the profoundly personal and the historically collective. Kashiwai's tales trace this convergence, signifying that when a dish is reconstructed, they are not merely evoking nostalgia but re-enacting the social field that once produced the flavor. "Senses and emotions are crucial transmitters (not just triggers) of mnemonic cues" (Abarca and Colby 5). "Belief can be the understanding that is possessed by the individual without any justification. For example, beliefs are mental images that affect a wide range of specific attitudes that, in turn, influence the way a person to likely respond in food selection and rejection" (Muhammad et al. 360).

All the six tales are named after the dishes the clients tend to recreate symbolising that food turns into a vehicle through which the author expresses an array of emotions and experiences through the perspectives of the characters (Food). In the first tale, Nabeyaki Udon, Hideji Kuboyama reaches the Kamogawa Diner seeking to rediscover the taste of the noodle soup his late wife Chieko used to cook. He reluctantly recounts his memories, including the steam, the subtle aroma of yuzu, and the taste of hot noodles served in a pot. The investigators use details about temperature, texture, and aroma as the starting point for their research. "Hideji's nose twitched involuntarily" (Kashiwai 24). Hideji's response, when the dish is ultimately presented to him, is visceral rather than contemplative. Proust referred to this unconscious process as "involuntary reminiscence," which starts when a cue elicits intense emotion (Gisquet-Verrier and Riccio 01). However, the narrative also takes place on Bourdieu's plane. The nabeyaki udon is a uniquely local domestic habit rather than a universal comfort. Chieko's path through Kyoto's arcades—Masugata and Fujiya Market—formed the social geography of her

cooking. The unrecognised labour that created the rhythm of Hideji's marriage and those networks of local sellers are inextricably linked to the flavour that returns to him. The physical repetition of purchasing, soaking shiitake, layering kombu and soy, and other actions that encoded class, gender, and location into flavor are thus examples of how the dish incorporates a structure of feeling. Hideji returns to that embodied order when he eats. Through the involuntary flash, habitus is brought into consciousness by the investigators' reconstruction.

The second case, Beef Stew, shifts the focus from the household to public modernity. A life not lived was crystallised when Nobuko Nadaya asked for the stew she had eaten with a university student in 1957 in Kyoto. The stew itself, which is a demi-glace with a Japanese twist. Both the new feminine subjectivities looking for self-definition outside of the home and the Westernising habits of the time are shown by its rich roux and wine scent. The spontaneous recollection that floods Nobuko as she tastes the detectives' recreation of umami flavour and the buttery depth of the sauce is initially sensory, but it quickly turns into a moral and historical one. The flavor conjures up the image of a young lady, suspended in the cafe's gentle light, caught between duty and desire. Through the stew, she relives not only love but also the sophisticated experience of a generation that has tasted modernity. As she waited for the meal, Nagare says, "Nobuko sat here for half an hour waiting for her meal. All that time spent in anticipation can only have added to the flavour. I think the "spice" of nostalgia has been at work today" (Kashiwai 65). The flavor's slow simmer analogues the long steeping of regret. Kashiwai demonstrates how habitus shapes nostalgia itself, demonstrating how historically particular eating, etiquette, and aspiration practices give rise to what appears to be entirely emotional. The involuntary return allows her to see both personal loss and the social story it belongs to—the story of a Japan that absorbed foreign forms while preserving domestic sentiment.

In the third story, mackerel sushi, memory is redefined in terms of social relation. Author states, "This was his first visit to the restaurant, and yet the array of plates in front of him felt somehow nostalgic. Immediately forgetting how full he'd felt on the way here, he began by sampling the egg dish. The moment Tomomi tasted the dish, he involuntarily closed his eyes" (Kashiwai 78). Tomomi Iwakura recalls being a lonely child at a ryokan in Kyoto and being fed mackerel sushi by a neighbour. The investigators use ethnographic precision to describe the sushi's vinegared tang, the glimmer of sekisaba, and the harmony of sweetness and acid; they link these characteristics to a regional variation that has yuzu flavouring and yellow-tinted rice. The man closes his eyes involuntarily as he tastes it, reliving the neighbor's question, "Tasty?" and the wave of physical care that follows. According to Proust, the past is not just remembered but also re-inhabited. Food functions as moral currency in this working-class neighbourhood habitus, which is built on giving presents and mutual aid, according to Bourdieusian theory. Kashiwai transforms ordinary elements of mackerel sushi into something special and profound. The detectives' ability to replicate the meal exhibits that cultural capital is found in both care and refinement. The involuntary memory triggered by humble food thus brings back the sacredness of ordinary practice.

The fourth story, Tonkatsu, expands the investigation by connecting food to gender and professional identity. Suyako Hirose is looking for the tonkatsu, a dish that tastes

of hierarchy and love, that her ex-husband used to prepare in their restaurant. Sensual adjectives such as the cutlet's crispy exterior, the smell of heated oil, and the contrasting sauces (garlic ponzu, Yamaguchi orange jam) become emblems of marital exchange. She bites into the re-created cutlet, bringing up both bitterness and fondness in the instinctive recollection. The professional and the sensory are combined in the sound of frying. Suyako said, "Nagare sat down opposite Suyako. 'In the twenty years since we separated, tonkatsu has been my husband's constant companion. It's so delicately cooked . . .'" (Kashiwai 131). According to Bourdieu, this is interpreted as a collision of habitus: the wife's function as a listener and praiser is a component of the gendered economy of recognition, while the husband's culinary prowess represents male symbolic capital. Kashiwai uses food to illustrate the intersection of the home and professional spheres by staging taste as a conversation between status and sentiment. The involuntary flash clarifies rather than just heals. Suyako regains agency by comprehending the factors that had shaped her taste and by re-tasting the cutlet, which enables her to see the social mechanics of her marriage.

In the fifth narrative, Napolitan Spaghetti, involuntary memory is linked to intergenerational transmission and the battle against cognitive deterioration. Nineteen-year-old student Asuka Mizuki seeks for the ketchup-coated spaghetti she shared with her grandfather on a ferry when she was a kid. The dish consists of soft-cooked spaghetti combined with tomato ketchup, sausages, green peppers, and onions, occasionally with an egg on top. The scent of butter and caramelised ketchup suddenly gives way to an actual scene, complete with her grandfather's laughter, the swaying of the ferry, and the feel of his hand, when Asuka tastes the investigators' reproduction.

"'Mmm . . .' she murmured as she twisted the spaghetti onto her fork. She tried one of the frankfurters. There was a satisfying crunch as she bit into it and its skin burst. Meanwhile, the egg was cooking away on the plate, getting firmer and firmer. Asuka worked some of it into a forkful of spaghetti, then inserted the whole thing into her mouth. 'What a combination!' she said to herself. Tears were running down her cheeks. Her thoughts turned to memories of her grandfather" (Kashiwai 158).

The flavor-transported memory that arises spontaneously is one of the most literal enactment of Proustian theory. The food consumed by every individual reflects familial habitus. Napolitan is a common food custom that symbolised middle-class leisure and the adoption of Western modernism into Japanese family routines. Asuka withstands the memory loss brought on by her grandfather's dementia and relives that family rhythm through the recreated meal. This is where Kashiwai's ethics of taste is brought alive by presenting cooking as a means to provide care, a way to preserve humanity and cultural continuity through sensory integrity.

The last tale, Nikujaga, illustrates the notion that memory assures truth. The businessman, Hisahiko Tsuda longs to taste his late mother's nikujaga, a beef-and-potato stew in sweet soy. Nikujaga represents the mother's taste, the ideal of stability and warmth in the home, in the cultural imagination of Japan. Hisahiko says, "'All I knew was that if I ever had a comfort food, that was it'" (Kashiwai 181). When the investigators recreate the taste, Hisahiko's involuntary memory appears to validate the veracity of his memory—until Nagare's investigation shows that the recipe was actually his step-mother's, not his mother's. The purity is broken by the recognition. The authorship of

the stew is collective, but its comforting warmth is genuine. Those unique experiences may evoke emotions one has not previously recognized, precisely because one has had limited opportunity to perceive them in such distinctive, uncommon situations (Peacocke 309). Kashiwai combines Proust and Bourdieu in this instance: habitus explains why the involuntary memory is affectively real but socially misattributed. Through need and substitution, the family's cooking technique created a composite flavour that Hisahiko eventually idealised as unique. The disclosure reveals how the idea of mother's cooking, obscures the distributed labour and multiple histories behind common food, revealing how household habitus can naturalise ideology. The taste that comes back to him is genuine not because it is pure but because it exposes its own hybridity.

3 Conclusion

“Independently, food, memory, and narrative are quintessential to everyday practices as well as ceremonial/ritual events. Together, they provide a tool by which individuals give significance to their personal and collective subjectivities” (Abarca and Colby 4). Thus, an entangled ethics of taste is produced by the junction of Proust and Bourdieu in Kashiwai's fiction. The past is rescued from oblivion by involuntary recollection, while habitus explains why it was lost in the first place. Cooking, an activity that is both material and metaphysical, is how the Kamogawa Diner brings people together. The social becomes sensuous and the personal becomes social in the detective's kitchen. Each flavour delineates the legacy of relationships, gestures, and techniques—a palimpsest of hands and histories that melt away on the tongue.

“Spurred by encounters with new culinary habits and systems, a similar form of nostalgia for bygone culinary worlds is today coupled with the perception of a loss of cultural and biological diversity and has triggered a reconceptualization of food and foodways as heritage to be cherished and protected” (Bortolotto and Ubertazzi 410). When combined, these six vignettes demonstrate habitus as the residue of routine culinary practice, including regional techniques, gendered labour, intergenerational instruction, local shopping networks, professional prestige, and the political economy of ingredients. Kashiwai makes all of these elements tangible through sensory description. Every dish only lasts a little moment before disappearing, leaving behind not the food itself but the reconstituted subject who has tasted it. Finally, food is transformed into a narrative philosophy of memory and social being in *The Kamogawa Food Detectives*. Every dish that is recreated is a performance that breaks down time and shows how our bodies retain memories of the past through taste, scent, and habit. As stated by Angelika and Sarwono, “habitus as the disposition of historical products is intertwined with both mental and physical processes, which happen with or without intention within oneself” (267). The tale makes the argument that healing comes from experiencing the past again and recognising the webs of love and effort that created it, rather than by repeating it. By combining Bourdieu's habitus with Proust's involuntary memory, Kashiwai presents food as the most democratic of the arts, belonging equally to structure and emotion, the private and the public spheres. His Kyoto diner turns into a place where each dish serves as both proof and remembrance, each taste as a conversation between the fleeting and

the permanent. The third lesson is simple but profound: our memories are seasoned by the lives of others, and to taste carefully is to live ethically.

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