

## ‘OUR DAILY BREAD’: HISTORY... AND STORIES

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### **Abstract**

*Bread is one of the most popular wheat-based foods, often considered the essence of human civilization thanks to its significance that extends beyond simple nutrition. Often called ‘the staff of life’, it is part of the world heritage as all peoples on the earth have developed specific bread-centred myths, symbols and rituals. The importance of this essential aliment is reflected in its wide variety of shapes, flavours and recipes created over 10,000 years of existence, which acknowledges bread-making as a way to retrace the lost connection with Mother Earth and provides the simple enterprise with a mythical status. The metaphysical connotation of the common food has been extensively illustrated in universal literature, from the Bible to such renowned poets as Omar Khayyam, Kahlil Gibran and Dylan Thomas, and further on to contemporary writers like Anna Adams, Carol Rumens, Penelope Shuttle and Myra Schneider. Their lines praise the virtues of the gift of nature to humankind, the fundamental aliment that operates as an agent of communication and solidarity, contributing to the development of self-identification by reinforcing interaction with others.*

**Key words:** bread, crop, cuisine, nourishment, staple food.

### **INTRODUCTION**

We live our lives under the auspices of bread. We take it for granted, just like we take a breath or a chance. We share our joys and sorrows, worries and cheers with a little piece of bread every day, Monday to Sunday, summer or winter. We, sometimes carelessly, bite and chew the humble slice smeared with butter and jam, or filled with ham, salami or cheese. Have you ever stopped to think who made the first loaf of bread, what it looked like, where or when it was first made – or even why it has become so indispensable to our existence?

In what follows we attempt to unveil some of the mysteries of the modest and yet complex food.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Our paper proposes a double understanding of how important bread is both to the real world and the realm of ideas. Therefore, the first part deals with expository information, based on the scholarly monograph *Plante și miresme biblice. Hrană pentru suflet și trup (Biblical Plants and Scents. Food for the Body and Soul)* by Ovidiu

Bojor and Dumitru Răducanu, as well as *Biologia și tehnologia plantelor utile (Biology and Technology of Useful Plants)* by Dr Florea Dincă from the University of Craiova.

The second part consists in the literary analysis of several poems from classics (Omar Khayyam, Kahlil Gibran and Dylan Thomas) to contemporary writers (Anna Adams, Carol Rumens, Penelope Shuttle and Myra Schneider) whose lines praise the virtues of one of the oldest items of food in the world.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

#### **History**

Wheat is the main raw material for bread-making. Out of the 20 de species known nowadays, the most widely cultivated species is common wheat (*Triticum aestivum vulgare*). Grown in the plains of Mesopotamia and the Syrian Desert around 7500-6500 BC, it has spread to the Mediterranean basin, Europe, Central Asia and India, and then to the entire world.

The Egyptians are considered the first bread-makers in the world as archeological evidence indicates that unleavened bread was part of daily life in ancient Egypt while the unleavened

type was saved for ritual or sacred occasions. The Greeks came second, producing a large range of breads: it was reported that ever since the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD the ingredients included honey and milk, sesame or poppy seeds.

In Britain, cereal growing and bread-making were brought by the Romans. Stories from the Middle Ages tell of huge loaves, about 4.5-5 kg, made of a mixture of wheat, barley, millet and rye, aimed to feed the whole family for several days. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, a law called the Assize of Bread and Ale was passed, regulating the weight, quality and price of bread and beer; although unpopular with manufacturers, the law continued for about 450 years, which proves the importance of providing this item of food for the entire population.

It is perhaps worth noting that in medieval Europe, bread was not only food but the old pieces also served as plates, being eaten after the main course or given to animals or to the poor; it was only in the 15<sup>th</sup> century that it began to be replaced with wooden plates. Also, the aristocrats preferred white bread for centuries while poor people ate a darker version. The change occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when people became aware of the high nutritional value of the latter; nowadays white bread is associated with ignorance in issues of nutrition.

The history of wheat-growing and bread-making shows that *Triticum aestivum* has gradually become one of the most important agricultural crops, the raw material for bread, pasta, starch and glucose.

The main source of calories for humans, the seeds, known as grains, contain: mineral salts and catalytic elements (calcium, magnesium, sodium, potassium, chlorine, sulphur, silicon, zinc, manganese, cobalt, copper, iodine, arsenic), phosphorated fat, starch, vitamins A, B, E, K, D and PP, ferments, diastase.

The above chemical composition shows that wheat contains all the elements that are necessary for the proper functioning of the human body, as it is the basis of natural food, particularly as bread. It is prescribed in all chronic and degenerative diseases, in vegetative disorders, sterility, as well as endocrine, digestive, kidney, liver and heart

diseases. Last but not least, in neurological disorders: even though the brain is only 2% of the body weight, it uses 20% of the total energy; consequently, owing to the significant proportion of complex carbohydrates, bread is a reliable partner of the brain and its cognitive functions.

The nutritional effects of bread have been acknowledged worldwide and thus it has become a staple food on all continents, with various techniques depending on the wheat variety grown in the region, as well as the cultural specificities of each people.

Consequently, depending on the wheat variety, the ground seeds (flour) give various types of doughs when mixed with water, resulting in 'strong' (i.e., highly visco-elastic doughs holding gas during fermentation, preferable for bread-making) and 'weak' types (i.e., highly extensible doughs with low elasticity, used for producing cakes, biscuits and cookies).

On the other hand, the customs, traditions, culinary habits, and imagination of the different peoples around the globe have led to a wide range of breads. According to the manner of preparation, bread can be: hand-made or machine-processed, with or without yeast and other additives, topped with poppy, sesame or sunflower seeds, oats, cracked wheat, grated cheese, chopped olives, sea salt or herbs, etc.

Also, national variety should not be overlooked: flatbreads, unleavened or yeast breads, dry breads, quick breads, sweet breads, fruit breads, sourdough, pancakes, rolls, buns – they have specific names, most of them renowned brands: Italian *ciabatta*, French *baguette*, Greek *pita*, Portuguese *broa*, Swiss *zopf*, Mexican *bolilo*, Indian *chapati*, Chinese *mantou*, Ethiopian *injera*, Moroccan *rghifa*, Jewish *challah*, Armenian *lavash*, English *cottage loaf*, etc.

Although consumption has massively decreased over the past decades, bread remains one of the favourite food in the UK. Owing to its vast range and quality of flour available, the UK alone produces over 200 types of bread, among which typically national brands: *bannocks*, *bloomers*, *farls*, *stotties*, *scones*, *scufflers*, *Cornish splits*, the Welsh *bara briths*, the Scottish *buttery rowies*, etc.

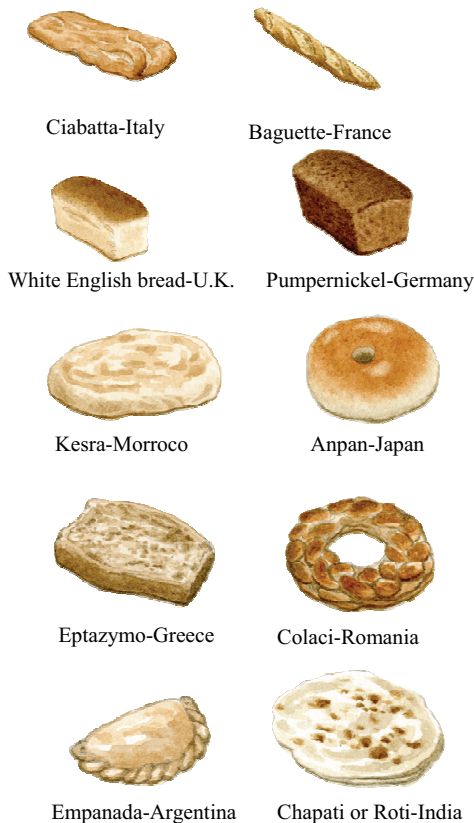


Figure 1. Different types of bread  
(Source: <http://letourdumondeen80pains.com/liste-des-pains/>)

Naturally, like all the languages of the world, English records numerous idioms related to this basic food. Here are some of the most frequent expressions that occur naturally in the everyday conversations of the English-speaking people:

- “*bread and water*” (a minimal meal);
- “*bread and butter*” (basic income or livelihood);
- “*a bread-and-butter letter*” (a thank-you note or letter);
- “*bread and circuses*” (activities intended to keep people happy so that they do not complain about problems);
- “*the greatest thing since sliced bread*” (a very useful invention);
- “*to break bread with someone*” (to share a meal);
- “*to cast one's bread upon the waters*” (to act generously);

- “*to know which side one's bread is buttered on*” (to be aware of one's source of income), etc.

The English language also includes numerous proverbs and sayings, independent fragments of millennial experience:

- “*Bread always falls on the buttered side.*” (*When things go wrong, they go completely wrong*);
- “*Bread is the staff of life.*” (*Food is necessary for people to survive*);
- “*Man does not live by bread alone.*” (*People need more than physical things like food and shelter in order to survive*).

### ... and stories

Often considered the most important food for survival, bread has acquired an undisputed importance since ancient to modern times, proven not only in the every-day human enterprises but also in the cultural representations of this essential aliment. In some languages, the word itself means “*food*” and in some cultures, bread is blessed before being eaten. It is perhaps worth remembering that most rebellions and revolutions were the result of famine – that is, the absence of bread.

The central prayer in Christianity, ‘The Lord's Prayer’, has a key phrase in the development of worship. “*Give us this day our daily bread*” is a personal request to the supreme authority for safety and durability, a humble appeal to moderation and communions, dispelling any high expectations of riches and abundance.

The Bible also contains numerous other references to this extremely important item of food. In old Israel, the bread offered by priests to God was made of flour. On Easter Sunday and throughout the following week, meals consisted, among others, of unleavened bread baked under hot ashes or on heated stone slabs. Bread, along with wine, is the great Christian symbols of prosperity and communion in the Old Testament. In the Genesis, Abraham charitably treats his God-sent guests with “*a little bread*” made of “*choice flour*” (Genesis 18:5-7). In the Exodus, the Lord tells the Israelites to take Passover: “*Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread*” (Exodus 12:15). Further on, worshippers are instructed to offer God “*unleavened bread, unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers spread*”

with oil”, made of “*choice wheat flour.*” (Exodus 29:2)

In the New Testament, bread acquires metaphysical connotations as the Holy Eucharist, established by Jesus Christ as both sacrament and sacrifice. Matthew recollects the Parable of the Yeast told by Jesus to his disciples: “*The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.*” (Matthew 13:33), while John appeals to the metaphor of the bread in an attempt to decode the mystery of Christ’s identity: “*I am the bread of life. [...] This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever...*” (John 6:48-51)

Bread-making, among all household activities, is constantly praised in poetry. From ancient lines to contemporary verses, the description of routine minutiae occasions reflections on inner tranquility and moderation as vital principles of life. Beyond their cyclical predictable nature, kneading and baking of the essential food have an empowering condition, securing spiritual accomplishment, peace of mind and certainty of identity.

In ‘Bread Recipe Poem’, the contemporary British poet Anna Adams (1926-2011) describes this routine activity whose intimacy and immediacy validate particular aspects of the self. The hyperbolic lines provide each ingredient and each action with a mythical status. Enlightened by the spirit, the concrete substances used for making the dough gain unique metaphorical meanings:

*“Sweet water, bloodwarm, makes  
yeast seabed breathe. It wakes.  
So boulders rise and surface, grow  
islands in archipelago.*

*This foaming land amalgamates  
to continents that swallow straits.*” (Adams 1-6)

The couplet rhymes and iambic tetrameter seem to mimic the repetitive movements of kneading the dough, conferring a metaphysical aura to the innocuous routine enterprise. It is the quiet rhythm of comfort, safety and peace provided by the domestic space which gains thus a mythical dimension, as the action seems

developed by giants in charge with the making of the world:

*“Omnipotence sees mountains rise,  
and arms itself – stirs and destroys.*

*Chaos is come with wooden spoon:  
mixes the sea in cratered moon.*” (Adams 7-10)

The stylistic patterns stress the cosmic order of the process in parallel constructions (“*Now desert lives, now cities swell, / societies grow cell by cell*” – Adams 11-2), as a perfect illustration of the Miltonian remark in *Areopagitica*, according to which “*a good cook is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life.*” (Milton 6)

However, religiousness dissolves in humour as the cosmic operation reaches its final stages:

*“but cataclysmic heatwave stills  
the social sponge, as oven kills  
each inmate, till stiff crust has sealed  
the micro-Pompeii yeast exhaled.*” (Adams 13-6)

In this domestic ritual where the cook becomes an enchantress performing magic for the benefit of a tighter or larger community, the supernatural potions gain uncommon importance. The bread-maker is both life-giver and sustainer, and making bread is a way to retrace the lost connection with Mother Earth: conceiving the very substance of life is going back to the essence of femininity whose positive energy acts like a spiritual link between the members (and close non-members) of the family.

The kitchen thus becomes the place of gastronomical alchemy where the mixture of ingredients and aromas open the senses toward communication, mediating and solving conflicts by mythical projections of the universe in the microcosm of the family. ‘Letter from a Far Country’ is an imaginary letter from a fictitious woman for all men, in which the Welsh poet Gillian Clarke (1937-) praises the creative contribution of anonymous women to the history of the world is immeasurably vast. Her bold ‘Letter’ is a small contribution to feminist protest, a meditation on traditional woman’s work – as the poet puts it herself, “*the sort of letter you write in your mind and never post.*” (Clarke 1) The symbolic “*far country*” is childhood, womanhood, the private place to which any woman is entitled.

The letter is addressed to men as an answer to their questioning of women's energies wasted in daily routine, looking after home and family – that is, in itself a great work, unfinished until the woman's life comes to an end:

*“Dear husbands, fathers, forefathers,  
this is my apologia, my  
letter home from the future...”* (Clarke 8-10)

The long poem about the daily management of household affairs appraises the religiousness of the familiar: cleaning, gardening, washing, sewing, ironing, cooking – all the small everyday gestures gain a spiritual value as the common heritage of humankind. Each activity requires persistent effort, accuracy, honesty, perseverance; their performance brings about spiritual improvement and a sense of personal and cosmic infinity:

*“The chests and cupboards are full,  
the house sweet as a honeycomb.  
I move in and out of the hive  
all day, harvesting, ordering.  
You will find all in its proper place,  
when I have gone.”* (Clarke 35-40)

For Clarke, women are the guardians of the race; their little jobs are often overlooked and minimised although their unuttered, customary relation with time has long gained a mythical dimension: *“There's always been time on our hands.”* (Clarke 60) There are anonymous generations of women who have passed obedience and duties on to their female descendants in unpretentious chronicles of labelled jars of pickles and marmalade, jellies and syrups. Cosmological performance or not, *“It has always been a matter of lists. We have been counting, folding, measuring, making, tenderly laundering cloth ever since we have been women.”* (Clarke 134-8)

It pertains to women's culture to ensure that human race survives, irrespective of governmental theories or policies. For love, the universal driving force, is the basis for the continuation of the routine rites performed by the meek house-makers, humble priestesses who preach and teach the religion of the quotidian:

*“It is easy to make of love  
these ceremonials. As priests  
we fold cloth, break bread, share wine,*

*hope there's enough to go round.”* (Clarke 181-4)

Commitment to action is verbalised through a transfer of moral responsibility for the bond of blood and experience is more powerful than fleeing to the land of imagination. Women's atemporal world is assertively related to traditions and customs, all quintessentially gathered in the ritual of bread-making, so it is but natural to pass the secret further on, like a mysteriously self-assertive globule of magical words having the power to reinforce spatial reference:

*“(The recipe for my best bread,  
half granary meal, half strong brown flour,  
water, sugar, yeast and salt,  
is copied out in the small black book.)”* (Clarke 210-213)

However, there is an awareness that their evasion would only lead to disturbance and anarchy: escape is illusive, for women are by nature home-makers and care-takers. Since they cannot abandon their caryatidic mission, they devise a strategy to connect to the world through the domestic space and culinary art, restoring thus individual peace of mind and harmonising the self with the others.

Mixing the ingredients together pertains to a ritual that projects human condition outside the self through the agency of emotions. As the Lebanese-American poet Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931) remarks in his philosophical reflections on labour and diligence, *“Work is love made visible.”* (Gibran 28)

In his view, work without passion has only one desirable alternative: retreating from action and appealing to others' charity, for *“if you cannot work with love but only with distaste, it is better that you should leave your work and sit at the gate of the temple and take alms of those who work with joy. / For if you bake bread with indifference, you bake a bitter bread that feeds but half man's hunger.”* (Gibran 29-30)

To Gibran, appreciation for the others is the perfect path to reach absolute knowledge. Without generosity and selflessness, the work of mind and arms cannot gain durability: the work of the soul is a pre-condition to attain ultimate bliss. Self-giving assigns value to immediate materiality and secures the preservation of the individual within a specific geography and chronology, a certain sense of

durability through temporal and spatial presentness.

This synchronicity with time and space, self and others, can be achieved not only by selfless giving, under the form of bread-making for family and friends, but also by taking, i.e. eating bread. There are numerous poems where the magic of creation is supplemented by the act of consumption, without overlooking “*that part that goes beyond merely eating to live – that is, the various social, anthropological, psychological, and philosophical gestures in the non-consuming aspects of food and rituals of eating. Eating our slice of daily bread, but not for the intake of that slice alone*” (Halpern 1), as the American ecological poet and publisher Daniel Halpern remarks in his 1993 book, suggestively titled *Not for Bread Alone. Writers on Food, Wine, and the Art of Eating*.

In his ‘Song of the *Poppadum*’, the Indian guru Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950) reiterates a ritual harmonised with ancestral vibrations captured in the description of the bread-making process and its metaphysical connotations:

*“Try and make some poppadums.*

*Eat them and your longing satisfy.*

*Don't roam the world disconsolate.*

*Heed the word, unique, unspoken*

*Taught by the teacher true who teaches*

*The truth of Being-Awareness-Bliss.*

*Try and make some . . . satisfy.”* (Maharshi 1-7)

The lines take over the apparently prosaic issue of kneading and baking the Oriental type of bread in order to draw attention to their significance, sometimes conferring them a mythical aura. The intermingling trochaic hepta and octosyllabic lines, as well as the occasional rhyme, bring to mind the mysterious dynamics of dough pressing, stretching and folding.

At the same time, the repetitive imperative “*satisfy*” at the end of each stanza to generate magic energies that give new meanings to the actual process, going beyond the physical action into the realm of philosophy. The urge to fulfill the needs extends from pure bodily ingestion of the life substance to the spirit, as bread also becomes food for the soul and spirit, while its making turns cosmic, as if reshaping the universe into free forms of intellectual energy and spiritual potency.

Kneading dough and shaping loaves becomes an identity quest that requires abandonment of

self-centredness in favour of benevolent public spirit:

*“Take the black-gram, ego-self,*

*Growing in the fivefold body-field*

*And grind it in the quern,*

*The wisdom-quest of ‘Who am I?’*

*Reducing it to finest flour.*

*Try and make some . . . satisfy.”* (Maharshi 8-13)

The “*fivefold body-field*” refers to the five sheaths recognised by the Hindu doctrines: the physical, vital, mental, intellectual, and the blissful sheaths; each sheath is included in the three human bodies: material, subtle, and causal. All the five sheaths function harmoniously to integrate the self into the physical and metaphysical world. And, owing to its spiritual significance, bread-making seems to be an efficient agent that facilitates closeness to the Absolute, since it is regarded not as a simple, profane technical operation but as a creative enterprise demanding imagination, patience, precision in order to reach completion to ultimate perfection.

Aromatic substances interfere subtly in the change into the new status, both shape and content, by transmuting the raw matter into a sophisticated corpus:

*“Mix it with pirandai-juice,*

*Which is holy company,*

*Add mind-control, the cumin-seed,*

*The pepper of self-restraint,*

*The salt of non-attachment,*

*And asafoetida, the aroma*

*Of virtuous inclination.*

*Try and make some . . . satisfy.”* (Maharshi 14-21)

Herbs, seeds and the omnipresent white crystal compete to the cosmological science of kneading dough, as if reviving the best-kept secrets of alchemy: they decompose and recompose the living matter, restoring communion with ancestral spirits and thus bringing the mortals closer to the paradisiacal state of bliss and peace. Only comfort and contentment can help the individual apprehend the essence of things: the *poppadum* is brought out of the oven and its consumption, materially and spiritually, provides another dimension of life – a new self-awareness in close relationship with both spirit and matter:

*“Eat and taste the Self as Self,*

*Abiding as the Self alone.*

*Try and make some . . . satisfy.*" (Maharshi 33-35)

Either Western or Oriental, the world shares the same perception of its primordial food. The lines of the Indian sage are echoed by Daniel Halpern who acknowledges the mental comfort and spiritual fulfillment induced by bread-making: "*The first time you make a loaf of bread, you usually experience, particularly if you are a child, an exciting sense that you are actually giving life to an inert lump of flour and water. You watch the dormant yeast become active [...]. Then you knead the dough and feel it transformed from a sticky, lumpy paste to a cohesive mass that is smooth and resilient and bouncy under the heels of your hands. When you poke it, it springs back at you. It is alive. Sometimes it forms bubbles and blisters in its eagerness to expand; it doubles, triples in volume. And then after it has been punched and tamed, it responds to the heat of the oven, rising again, settling into the shape you have given it, and sending forth the most tantalizing aroma as it bakes. No wonder that through the ages we've endowed bread with symbolic meaning: the staff of life, the bread of heaven, the body of Christ.*" (Halpern 36)

The Welsh poet Dylan Thomas (1914-1953) captures the religious significance of bread in his poem 'This Bread I Break', where the protagonist provides a philosophical interpretation of the act of ultimate giving – Jesus Christ's symbolic giving of his self to his companions:

*"This bread I break was once the oat,  
This wine upon a foreign tree  
Plunged in its fruit;  
Man in the day or wine at night  
Laid the crops low, broke the grape's joy."*  
(Thomas 1-5)

There is resignation in the speaker's tone: in an ecclesiastical reading, it could be Christ addressing his disciples in a narrative of consent to anticipated physical torment and psychic disturbance. The variation of iambic octosyllables with the diameter of the third line alludes to the acceptance of lonely suffering and, at the same time, the desire to transcend weakness and achieve psychological relief by converting matter into spirit. Transubstantiation occasions the gratitude of the soon-to-be-

dispossessed human body, as it is brought along to soothe the still-anguished soul:

*"This flesh you break, this blood you let  
Make desolation in the vein,  
Were oat and grape  
Born of the sensual root and sap;  
My wine you drink, my bread you snap."*

(Thomas 11-15)

The ritual of sharing bread aims to establish harmony and solidarity between individuals, to create communication and communion: by sharing the basic food, the self can search into the unknown inside in order to discover spiritual stability that can erase all differences. The result: an absolute balance that gives certainty and infallibility to the ritual practitioner.

The same equilibrium is remarkable in love poetry where private emotions function like a natural Eucharist, enhancing a vast range of possibilities for the development of identity in relationship with the other.

Like bread, love is food for the soul: it assigns worth and meaning to the individual reassessing existence according to unpretentious laws of mutual affection. In 'Ballad of the Morning After', the contemporary British poet Carol Rumens asserts the value of ardent passions that make the self become the perfect complement of the other, like "*liberty, equality, / Fraternity and bread.*" (Rumens 35-36)

Another contemporary British poet, Penelope Shuttle articulates a Biblical parable under the name of 'Bread and Butter', a mundane metaphor for the incomprehensible laws shaping wholeness and complete harmony between the lovers who "*drift into the fields of butter / the meadows of bread / They lie on warm beds of pastry.*" (Shuttle 1-3)

If Shuttle humorously reverses the poetic image of Plato's idealistic androgynous figure, the Persian poet Omar Khayyam (1048- 1131) preserves the symbol of original non-differentiation reunited in spirit through the power of infinite emotion. In 'Eleven', the poet proclaims the immortality of complex relationships in a sequence of enumerations whose accumulation creates the perfect paradise of simplicity, modesty and accomplishment:

*“Here with a Loaf of Bread beneath the Bough,  
A Flask of Wine, a Book of Verse – and Thou  
Beside me singing in the Wilderness –  
And Wilderness is Paradise now.”* (Khayyam  
1-4)

The quatrain appeals to verbal symmetry in order to construct an accomplished individual space consisting in bread – food for the body, book – food for the mind, and the beloved – food for the soul. This symbolic trinity encodes self-sufficiency and the joy of mirroring selfhood in the physically and spiritually equal other while simultaneously cherishing otherness (in its highly equivalent form) in the self. And, just as love intensifies common human experiences, leading to the discovery of the external self and the concurrent interior other, so does poetry, the *“Book of Verse”*, whose committed mission is to reconcile the different sameness and the familiar strangeness as a condition of absolute freedom of the self. Poetry, in its pure form, resonates within the being and creates signification by transgressing personal boundaries, while the poet’s purity of language and sincerity of self-expression connects inside otherness within with outside sameness, in a constantly interchangeable play. Myra Schneider, another contemporary British poet, praises the virtues of this very special art in her poem ‘Caedmon’, a long poem dedicated to the first known English poet and his tribulations of refining and his spiritual self for the aesthetic gratification of the others:

*“I began to pick words for a poem,  
wove lines together far into  
the night and next morning carried  
the new garment of song to the Abbess.  
She found it fitting, said:  
Like a grey dove on a tree, grace  
has settled on you. Your work should be  
crafting word pictures with pleasing sounds,  
for as bread feeds hungry bodies  
so your poems will nurture minds.”* (Schneider  
46-55)

The words of the Abbess (here, the metaphorical Muse of Poetry) consecrate Caedmon’s artistic completion. Just like dough, the word needs someone whose generosity of spirit and self-abnegation concur for the purpose of providing nourishment for those in need.

Just like bread, the poem is an artifact that is summoned to satisfy hunger. And poetry is the art that is summoned to make ultimate sense of the self by elevating personal and natural values, a process inconceivable without the freedom of the self.

## CONCLUSION

Human history is intertwined with the history of bread. If the grain seed symbolizes harmony and solidarity between plant and human being, bread is the essence of Nature’s philosophy: generosity, taught by the tiny grain that gives itself for nourishment and thus guarantees life on earth. The gift of human beings is the warmth of their heart, treasured as much as a piece of bread offered to the famished. With bread by his side, man has learned to overcome wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy and gluttony, and cherish peace, generosity, honesty, loyalty, courage, kindness and morality.

In the introductory interview to his 2007 book, *Ameliorarea grăului (Wheat Breeding)*, Professor Vasile Siminel, corresponding member of the Academy of Science of Moldova, metaphorically explained the undeniable fascination with this basic food all over the world: ‘... the bread phenomenon is the human phenomenon, the memory of bread is the memory of humanity. Can anyone measure the depth of such a memory, or the depth of human feelings?’ (Siminel 4)

Black or white, flat or leaf, loaf or roll, *ciabatta* or *baguette*, *pita* or *poppadum*, bread is revered and highly regarded everywhere in the world, for life without it would seem at least incomplete if not impossible.

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