Foreword

This book, like a great meal, has been a labor of love.

We are delighted to serve up *Feast: Poetry & Recipes for a Full Seating at Dinner*—a scrumptious offering for the mind and body that is both a poetry anthology and a cookbook.

Over the years at Black Lawrence Press our senses have been captivated by an abundance of food-inspired poetry in the many collections we have published. And our poet friends are not only writing about food but also cooking it up and sharing their photos and recipes all over social media. Frankly, they have left us salivating and wanting more for far too long now—and not just wanting more words but more *food*. We’re ready for a feast!

Lest we expire in this state of constant temptation and hunger, we decided to curate a genre-fusion work of art around a dinner party theme, and thus *Feast: Poetry & Recipes for a Full Seating at Dinner* was born. This book you hold in your hands is full of beautiful language, words and images, absolutely; but it’s also about the preparation, cooking and sharing of food—which is ultimately about relationships, shared memories, taking risks and getting messy.

It’s an exciting time to be a home cook. What was once the mysterious domain of elite chefs has become the stomping ground for anyone willing to roll up their sleeves and learn. Fiery flambés, soft soufflés, and rich risottos can be found sizzling, rising, and simmering in kitchens across the country. While a few of our poet contributors have been to culinary
school and written their own cookbooks, the majority are accomplished home cooks who have specifically created and tested, or uniquely adapted, the recipes that complement their poems.

*Feast* is structured like a classic cookbook, moving from drinks and appetizers to main courses and dessert. The poems are inspired by the spirit of the toast, that lovely old fashioned public declaration to invoke celebration, express gratitude, or acknowledge a loss. As you read through *Feast*, you will join a dinner party in progress. To name a few of the sweet and savory delights you now hold in your hands, consider: Juditha Dowd calls attention to citrus and lingering conversation shared over an orange, onion and watercress salad. Ruth Bavetta brings a fine catch of the sea, moonlight and Norwegian sardines to the table. Daniel Olivas introduces his friend Georgina, who is very particular about two things, and reveals the only way to make a margarita. Lynn Hoffman pours homebrewed beer in Eddy’s kitchen with a toast to Buster. Joe Wilkins mixes up white sangria with lights from a streetlamp to drink with a supper both animal and sacred. Michele Battiste cooks cabbage noodles and considers when the cabbage is not just a vegetable but something much more complicated. Daniele Pantano chops and dices ingredients for tomato sauce and swears never to wear his father’s mask. Eric Morris prepares pork spare ribs and offers a toast to animals slaughtered and yams candied. Arnold Johnston remembers once upon a distant New Year’s Eve as Scottish shortbread rises in the oven. Dolores Stewart Riccio spins a blue story of a sculptor to serve alongside fresh blueberry tea cake. Please consider sharing these poems aloud to begin or end your meal.

Lord Byron wrote, in *The Island*, “Since Eve ate apples, much depends on dinner.” We believe that much still does. Writing, like cooking, is difficult work. Hospitality, like writing, is personal and risky. Whenever we invite someone to read our creative work or into our home to share a meal, we create the possibility for friendship as well as disaster. Our daily bread of stress, deadlines, to-do lists and ubiquitous technology make it easy to retreat in exhaustion and avoid the inconvenience of hosting.
As writers we must persevere with the craft and discipline of poetry-making because we trust it’s worth the time and effort. As people we must protect and cultivate our relationships, even when the act of caring intrudes upon our word work. This book is an invitation to feast on rich poems stuffed with delectable words, while also chowing down with friends at a homemade dinner party. Think about sage gin fizzes and vegetarian stuffed artichokes, followed by pot roast, soda bread and coconut squash soup, with a grand finale of bananas foster and chocolate fondant. Prepare whatever sparks your imagination—what matters is that the meal is shared.

Tantalized?
We thought so.

Before we start reading and cooking we want to conclude with a toast of our own: May Feast, both its words and recipes, inspire many a nourishing gathering among friends and family both new and old. May there be thought-provoking words, ambrosial aromas, yummy bites and toothsome conversations. After all, much depends on the dinner you choose to have, and the company you choose to share it with.

Feast well, friends!

Anneli & Diane
In *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare has Duke Orsino begin the play with one of literature’s most famous invitations: “If music be the food of love, play on.” Music is what the “musicians attending” play for lovesick Orsino, and also what the playwright in his verse provides for us, the audience. The music of poetry serves as “the food of love,” and it is a music we the audience must also bid “play on” as the story’s love plots unfold. The poet’s words, artfully arranged, can, like Orsino’s musicians, provide us with love’s nutriment. Poetry feeds us, and it feeds our loves.

Poetry is music (and in fact, functional MRIs performed at the University of Exeter in England show that poetry stimulates the same part of our brain that music does), and poetry, like music, is essential to the feast. Can we even tell music, abundance, and poetry apart? In these pages, Dolores Stewart Riccio, in her “How to Make a Tomato Salad,” describes the fruit as “juicy and full of seeds, a woman ripe for love.” And who can resist the physicality of Natasha Saje’s invitation to a pear Napoleon, and perhaps, much more—the phyllo pastry “between whose sheets I’ll slip / toasted, slivered, blanched almonds. / I’ll cut the pastry into hearts,” and all of this goodness “in the hot oven waiting.”
Of course, poetry, like food, can give us one of love’s best physical equivalencies, a rush of sensory pleasure. And poetry can do far more: issue invitations; whet our appetites; provide toasts that focus a meal on its larger human meaning (a wedding, a birthday, a death); lament what is gone; and celebrate a world that gives us such things as plums, and melons, and even wine. Recall here how wine diverted John Keats even from the marvels of the nightingale, highjacking a ten-line stanza in “Ode to a Nightingale” from that “immortal Bird,” with its seductive “beaded bubbles winking at the brim.”

As long as poetry has existed, it has embraced the subject of the table. “The Salad,” attributed to Roman poet Virgil, describes the creation of a cheese and garlic paste that bears a strong resemblance to today’s pesto. In the 1600s, Japanese poet Basho wrote a haiku that did for melons what William Carlos Williams’ short poem “This Is Just to Say” did for plums: the “coolness of the melons/flecked with mud” reaching across time and oceans to embrace Williams’ plums: “delicious/so sweet/and so cold.”

In fact, many meals have not been considered complete without a poetic accompaniment, from the chanting of Robert Burns’ “Ode to a Haggis” for a haggis dinner in Scotland to the wedding prayer-poems of the native peoples of the Great Plains. The feast—with all the delights of the mead halls—was a mainstay of Anglo-Saxon poetry; at the table, so full of “rare dishes of the richest foods” that the table itself disappeared beneath them, Sir Gawain fatefuly encountered the Green Knight.

No less a source than the classic *Physiology of Taste, or Transcendental Gastronomy*, written by Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin in the early 1800s, mentions poetry multiple times, and stresses the historic importance of poetry to the great meal: “At that time [of the writing of the *Odyssey*] and long before, beyond doubt, poetry and music were mingled with meals. Famous minstrels sang the wonders of nature, the loves of the gods, and warlike deeds of man,” wrote the father of modern gastronomy.

Intertwined in the poetry of physicality is the physicality of poetry. Poets recognize this quality of poetry intuitively—that it calls out to our
senses in a special way among the literary arts—and strive to put language to the way poetry affects our bodies. Emily Dickinson wrote in a letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, “If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can warm me I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only way I know it. Is there any other way?” (If Dickinson had had this book in her hand, she might have added, “If I feel physically as if I must get up and make a Waldorf salad, I know that is poetry.”)

French poet Paul Valéry distinguished between prose and poetry by calling prose the form that readers respond to “only in spirit,” whereas he declared poetry the form that calls forth an inner physical response in the reader to a poem’s world, one which involves the body in “more of a complete act.” Therefore, in Valéry’s thinking, Amy Lee Scott’s poem “The Best Meal in the World Began . . .” is more than an artful arrangement of words; it is the inner savor of the pomegranate, the crisp sweetness of the dacquoise.

*Feast: Poetry & Recipes for a Full Seating at Dinner* is divided into four sections: “Starters, Sides and Sauces”; “Cocktails”; “Mains”; “Dessert.” As even the pleasure of dining alone evokes the possible community of the table, these poems bring people to life along with their dishes—the poet Yelizaveta P. Renfro’s mother, for instance, in “Here’s to My Mother Making Herring Under a Fur Coat” (“Here’s to greenery, to garnish, to the striped seeds she placed in a cellophane envelope and brought with her to America” —Renfro’s long lines can barely contain her mother’s exuberant spirit).

Some poems in this collection, like Eric Morris’s “Drink to the Animals” and John J. Trause’s “Cheers on the Cobblestones,” are lusty toasts; others, like Claire Van Winkle’s “Kitchen Histories,” have a note of elegy, of meals that, in their transience, might imply the transience of those who served them.

Some of these feasting poems celebrate those whom we love to nourish, and who nourish us. Robert Avery in “In Praise of Consumable Art”
celebrates his spouse’s creation of “another fine / confection only the two of us will know,” and Emily Bright in “At the End of a Busy Day” confesses “I have prepared this food for you. / There were other things I had to do.” Other poems, like Joe Wilkins’s “Eat Stone and Go On,” explore the scarcities of the table, the “burnt chuck” over which his grandmother said, “Isn’t it a shame . . . / how we have to go on eating?”

Of course, this book is only partly—though delightfully!—about the poems. (And perhaps if she’d caught a look at some of these recipes, Joe Wilkins’s grandmother might have perked up about the routine of eating.) Robert Avery’s example of “consumable art” happens to be a luxurious dessert tart composed of chocolate, raspberries, Chambord, butter and cream. We can’t indulge in such artworks every day, so we also have breads, fritters, a squash soup with coconut milk, pastas aswim in sauces simmered from ripe, fresh tomatoes. There are recipes to suit every skill level: from simple salads and quick meals like steamed mussels to a “revisionist” Caprese salad—actually a dessert—featuring basil ice cream and tomato “rocks” that will challenge those who treasure time spent preparing the unique and the wonderful in the kitchen.

“Animals feed themselves,” wrote Brillat-Savarin, “men eat, but only wise men know the art of eating.” How much wiser, then, are we who know the art of eating with poetry. And if poets are intrinsic to the feast, then how much more special the feast where the dishes—and the words—are poet-provided?

Elizabethan poet Ben Jonson wrote, in the poem “Inviting a Friend to Supper,” one of literature’s most charming poetic calls to dine:

Tonight, grave sir, both my poor house, and I
Do equally desire your company;
Not that we think us worthy such a guest,
But that your worth will dignify our feast . . .
Yet shall you have, to rectify your palate,
An olive, capers, or some better salad
Ushering the mutton; with a short-legged hen,
If we can get her, full of eggs, and then
Lemons, and wine for sauce; to these a cony¹
Is not to be despaired of, for our money;
And, though fowl now be scarce, yet there are clerks,
The sky not falling, think we may have larks.
I’ll tell you of more, and lie, so you will come:
Of partridge, pheasant, woodcock, of which some
May yet be there, and godwit, if we can;
Knat, rail, and ruff² too. Howsoe’er, my man
Shall read a piece of Virgil, Tacitus,
Livy, or of some better book to us,
Of which we’ll speak our minds, amidst our meat;
And I’ll profess no verses to repeat.

It is a poet’s invitation, complete with poems read aloud (including plenty of warlike deeds and loves of the gods; Brillat-Savarin would approve), larks, wine, and a refusal to promise not to lie. Like their forebear Jonson, these poets invite you to their table. And like Jonson, they can only promise to speak their minds, and repeat no verses. Do come in and enjoy the pleasures of the table.

¹. rabbit
². “knot, rail, and ruff” describes an edible English fowl
Starters, Sides & Sauces

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Loretta Oleck
Take Two & Mussels with Parsley and Garlic
Yelizaveta P. Renfro
Here’s to My Mother Making Herring Under a Fur Coat & Russian Salad
Claire McQuerry
What Remains & Fall Soup with Coconut Milk and Butternut Squash
Joe Wilkins
Eat Stone and Go On & Soda Bread
Emily Bright
At the End of a Busy Day & French Zucchini Tart
John J. Trause
Cheers on the Cobblestones & Cobblestone Cake
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Starters, Sides & Sauces

“The poets have been mysteriously silent on the subject of cheese.”
—GK Chesterton
Ode to Sardines

Ruth Bavetta

The northern sea,
immaculate and immense,
drops anchor
on my kitchen counter.
Moonlight reassembled
as layers of watered silk
head to tail
in a bright tin coffin.
Sardiner Med Senap
(Sardines with Mustard, a Norwegian recipe)

*Ruth Bavetta*

**Ingredients**
- Siljans Knekkebrod (crispbread)—2 large rings
- 3 cans King Oscar Tiny Tots sardines
- Pickled onion slices
- Dijon mustard

**Instructions**
- Break crisp bread into irregular pieces and spread with mustard. Top with sardines and onion slices.
salute!
to being here before
back in the hollow of my life
where I box-stepped with hungry ghosts
where dinner was dimmer-

a white of an egg
a chilled Chablis
a frantic search through
the spice rack to find a jar
of crushed red pepper-

anything, and I mean anything
to add a punch to the flatness
and the dead

salute!
to sitting at the same lopsided table
the same corner seat from that other life
ordering mussels served in a silver pot
watching my night unfold like a Spanish fan
snapped open with a flick of a wrist
god, I never knew there were dots of gold
curls of sea green on the fluttering fan
cooling down the flush across my cheeks

pressing my back against the brilliant red
lipstick walls cloaking me in a warm wanting
dream where day becomes night

I lick the tip of each finger
tracing my lips with pink salt and parsley
scooping up a mussel
slurping out the meat
drinking down the garlic broth

I didn’t understand, no I really didn’t
understand how much I love
sucking on mussel shells
in this out of the way place
I’ve been to before

salute!
to a new life opening
revealing itself
in a most flavorful broth
Mussels with Parsley and Garlic

Loretta Oleck

Ingredients
6 tablespoons unsalted butter, divided
½ cup finely chopped shallot
4 garlic cloves, minced
¼ teaspoon dried hot red pepper flakes (adjust to suit your taste)
1 cup chicken or vegetable broth
¾ cup water
2 pounds mussels (preferably cultivated), scrubbed well and beards removed
3 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions
Cook the shallot, garlic, and red pepper flakes in 2 tablespoons oil in a large skillet over moderate heat, stirring until softened (about 2–3 minutes). Add the broth and water; bring to a simmer. Add the mussels and cook covered, over moderately high heat until they open wide, checking frequently after 3–4 minutes. Transfer the opened mussels to a bowl. Any mussels that remain unopened after about eight minutes total should be discarded.

Stir in parsley. Whisk remaining butter, one tablespoon at a time, into the mussel broth and season with salt and pepper.

Divide mussels and broth among six to ten bowls. Garnish with bread that you can be used to dip into the broth, and serve.

Serves 6—10
Here’s to My Mother Making Herring Under a Fur Coat

Yelizaveta P. Renfro

Here’s to greenery, to garnish, to the striped seeds she placed in a cellophane envelope and brought with her to America, to the waist-high dill plants gone to flower that conquered our California yard—

(And here’s to mayonnaise, and Soviet lines, to scarcity and shortages, to “What’s the line for?” said gruffly, in the Russian way, and the answers: sausage, shoes, cheese, and one day, mayonnaise—)

And to beets, bleeding out their savage purple on counters, staining fingers, adding a dash of haute couture to the herring’s coat, or at least pizzazz, or at least a luminous borscht glow, and to the five-year-old who once told me she loved beets because they taste like purple mud—

(And to mayonnaise again, because the line was long, and sometimes Soviet lines didn’t move for hours, and sometimes the supply ran out long before demand was satisfied, so you never knew if you were going to get anything, and sometimes, it seemed, the weary Soviets didn’t even bother to ask what a line was for, because if there’s a line, there must be something good at the end of it, or at least the hope of something good, so standing in line gave them more than anything else could at that moment, and the line, if you stood in it long enough, became a life form of its own, a multi-segmented creature that flexed and angered and shed and, when all hope was lost, disintegrated—and all of this that day in 1987 waiting to buy mayonnaise—)
And here’s to eggs, to their ovoid perfection at the bazaar, but now you wonder—however did they get carried home? Perhaps they were cradled gently against the hollows of the body in buses chockablock with people, just like the day your mother stood in line to acquire a new butcher knife, wrapped only in coarse brown paper, and she curled herself around it on the teeming bus, cradling it like an infant, fearful of eviscerating one of the bodies jammed against her—such is the care we take with that which is fragile, that which is dangerous—

(And mayonnaise: you stood in line for two hours, but since you were a tourist, collecting experiences, seeking exotica, you never grew defeated or weary; you always knew you had an out, a return to the land where mayonnaise jars gleamed from ceiling to floor like museum specimens, each with its own identifying label—)

And here’s to carrots, and to the ancient crone outside the metro selling her lassoed bundles of carrots as crooked as her bent, arthritic fingers, perched on a shipwreck of a crate, wincing as she counted out kopecks in her burled hands—

(And oh, the mayonnaise: we lavish it on with a knife, like frosting, like something plentiful and delicious, because this is the Russian way—to spend days scouring the city, bartering, negotiating, so the final spread seems effortless, a quick laying out of a few things on hand, and never mind that the local store offers nothing but white vinegar and brown cakes of soap, the food is nothing at all, a trifle—)

To onion, because there are tears, always tears, and later, more tears with the vodka or the homemade currant wine, and talk of souls wrought with Dostoyevskian intensity, because Russians are as familiar with their souls as they are with their beet-stained fingers, and with the soul talk, more tears—
(And decades later, when she makes the salad in your kitchen, she will always use up nearly the entire jar, leaving only a smear around the sides, a clot in the bottom, and for months you’ll be reminded by the marks she’s left: a glimmering of beet along the rim, or a single purple thumbprint on the Hellman’s label—)

And here’s to potatoes, because if you have potatoes, she always intones, you will never starve, and here’s to digging the new potatoes in the earth of the dacha, some hardly larger than peas, and though you are only nine years old, you recognize that this has never happened to you before and will never happen to you again: digging potatoes with your Russian grandfather, who was born in czarist times, whose own mother was an illiterate peasant, and whose forbears were serfs—

(And mayonnaise again, because when you ask for the recipe, she sends you a mere list of the layers in order, with no quantities, no directions, save one: “The mayonnaise must be used in between.”)

And finally, here’s to herring, which your mother still demands come directly from a wooden barrel, though she’ll settle, when necessary, for the jarred fillets, because that’s what Russians do, they settle for what’s at hand, and she’s settled for a lot in America—but here’s to America anyway, and here’s to the labor of each layer, to queues and digging and roubles, to rolled Russian R’s, but more than that, here’s to the layers of the past, to the thick deposits of nostalgia, slathered on, glomming it all together.
Herring Under a Fur Coat
(Russian Salad)

Yelizaveta P. Renfro

Ingredients
3 medium beets
4 eggs
4 carrots
3 medium potatoes
1 medium onion
2 cups mayonnaise
12 ounces of salted or pickled herring
Sprigs of fresh dill or parsley

Instructions
Place the beets, eggs, carrots, and potatoes in a pan of water and boil until cooked through. After cooling, peel the beets, eggs, carrots, and potatoes, and then coarsely grate them, placing them in separate bowls. Grate the onion, and dice the herring. Now you are ready to assemble the salad.

In a large, glass bowl, place the ingredients in the following order, creating layers: herring on the bottom, followed by ⅓ cup of mayonnaise, then potato, ⅓ cup mayonnaise, onion, ⅓ cup mayonnaise, carrots, ⅓ cup mayonnaise, eggs, ⅓ cup mayonnaise, beets, topped with ⅓ cup mayonnaise. Once assembled, the salad should resemble a frosted torte. Garnish with dill or parsley. Refrigerate several hours before serving.

Serves 8–10
What Remains

Claire McQuerry

When one season is at the brink
of spilling over, you recall
the way you walked, ankle-high
in yellow leaves, a year ago,

or maybe two—
it could have been two
months for all the lapse, except
the light now, its bright tone

of between: the vibration
that gathers before winter’s coma.
A kaleidoscope of Novembers—
where did you hear that time

is a thing like a crystal,
the facets remaining unchanged
when it fractures ever smaller?
Confirmation class. A vine

and leaf stitch rimmed the altar,
the mantles green, for epiphany.
Here, lichen and helicon moth, sun
caught in descent. Teach us to number
our days, the reverend had read—
   a hope that something is saved
in the contemplation, saved in your waking
   one morning to recall

the voice of wind in this burnt-out
gully, branches black, arterial,
leaves fallen deep
   on the path over the ridge.
Fall Soup with Coconut Milk and Butternut Squash

Claire McQuerry

Ingredients
¾ cup low-sodium chicken broth
1½ tablespoon brown sugar
1 tablespoon salt
2 tablespoon tomato paste
1 teaspoon crushed red pepper
¼ tablespoon black pepper
1 (14 ounce) can coconut milk
2 cups butternut squash, peeled and cut into ¾ inch cubes
1 cup red bell pepper, cut into thin strips
1 pound raw, cubed chicken breast
2 cups hot cooked basmati rice
¼ cup fresh lime juice
3 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro

Instructions
Combine chicken broth and next 6 ingredients (through coconut milk) in a large saucepan and stir with a whisk.

Stir in squash and bell peppers and bring to a boil. Add chicken. Reduce heat and simmer for about 10 minutes or until squash is tender and chicken is cooked through.

Stir in rice, lime juice, and cilantro. Heat for 2 minutes.

Serves 6