

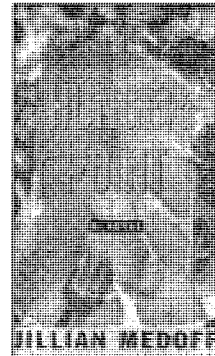
Food: The agony but also ecstasy

BY CATHERINE TEXIER

WOMEN have a particularly intimate and conflicted relationship to food, especially in America, where its consumption tends to be disconnected from its preparation and its production.

And two recent books by women — "Hunger Point," (HarperCollins) a first novel by Jillian Medoff, and "Never Eat Your Heart Out" (Farrar Straus Giroux), a memoir by Judith Moore — illustrate this complicated connection.

"Hunger Point," a witty, semi-autobiographical portrait of an anorexic and bulimic teenager, explores the dark side of food: food as compulsion, as instrument of guilty pleasure and torture. Author Medoff describes her past relationship to food as a way of "getting filled up, an emotional longing that was never satisfied."



Interestingly — and maybe tellingly — this was not a family of cooks. The meals were likely to be frozen dinners or Chinese food at the restaurant.

Medoff's description of anorexia is harrowing: "She takes a step and accidentally trips over her own feet. Her T-shirt flips up, and I can see her stomach and chest. Not only is her skin stretched so tight I can see the outlines of her ribs, but her body is covered with a soft down-like a baby chick."

What's especially disturbing is that, ultimately, the food disorders have very little to do with the flavor and pleasure of food. As a bulimic, Medoff says, she loved cakes with rich frosting, but after a couple of bites, she couldn't taste them anymore. And she would always end a binge with ice-cream, not for its luscious flavor, but because it was easier to throw up.

Judith Moore's involvement with food couldn't be further than Medoff's. A writer who lives in Berkeley, Moore's memoir "Never Eat your Heart Out," centers around her love of food. For her, food is about pleasure and art. It is about the many daily hours she spent cooking for her family when she was a young mother, it's about growing up on her grandmother's farm and seeing the hogs being killed, smelling the blood, watching the sausages being stuffed, just hours after watching Rosie the pig make her way through life. "I know the history of food, I grew it in my garden and on my grandmother's farm I learnt that eating causes death or costs death."

"Memories come back to you in your mouth." This Proustian statement is at the heart of Judith Moore's book. Whether she writes about the affair she had as a married woman — or meeting her husband again years later in a crosscountry train ride, each episode of Moore's life centers around the meals that were cooked or served at the time. Whether she writes about the "sharp, dolorous smoke" of a purple eggplant or the "lime-ginger-garlic-soy-molasses marinade for duck" she cooked during the year she "went out on [her] husband," Moore's prose is always lyrical. "I couldn't write about sex but I feel sure about food".

One cannot help wondering if Jillian Medoff had seen the hogs killed on the farm before being turned into sausages and had learned to can pickles and jellies, she might not have needed to become anorexic and bulimic.

