



JOHN FINN,
Professor of Government, Selects
The Supper of the Lamb:
A Culinary Reflection
by Robert Farrar Capon

What are we to make of the following recipe for Swedish meatballs?

3 TABLESPOONS MINCED ONION
2 TABLESPOONS BUTTER
1 POUND EACH OF BEEF, VEAL, PORK
GROUND TOGETHER
1 TABLESPOON ALLSPICE
1/4 TEASPOON GROUND GINGER
1/4 TEASPOON GROUND CLOVES
1/4 TEASPOON GROUND NUTMEG
1/2 TEASPOON FRESHLY GROUND PEPPER
1 CUP FINE DRY BREADCRUMBS
1/2 CUP CHICKEN OR BEEF BROTH
(APPROXIMATELY)
2 EGGS
1 QUART BEEF BOUILLON, BROTH,
OR STOCK

Sauté onion in butter until golden. Combine all ingredients except the last, and mix well by hand. Shape into balls and fry until nicely browned in a little butter or oil. Put in a large pot with the bouillon and simmer for 45 minutes.

This dish is better made one day in advance and refrigerated. The hard-

ened fat on top then can be removed easily and used in place of butter to thicken the gravy.

4 TABLESPOONS FAT OR BUTTER
4 TABLESPOONS FLOUR
GRAVY FROM PAN

Make a roux of fat and flour, add gravy, bring to a boil, whisking well, and simmer for five minutes. Add meatballs, reheat, and serve.

How quaint. Why make meatballs by hand when we can buy them pre-made and precooked at the supermarket? Who makes meatballs from beef, pork, and veal, when ground turkey is so much healthier? Sauté (in butter?) and simmer for 45 minutes? Our meals must be made, served, and eaten in less time than that—the dishes thrown in the Bosch by then, too. Save the fat (horrors!) and make a what? Isn't that why God invented cream of mushroom soup?

Robert Farrar Capon's *The Supper of the Lamb: A Culinary Reflection* is full of such relics and other peculiarities, all of which seem equally unfashionable—such as “Finnan Haddie Rabbit” or “Scrap Soups,”—or, even worse, utterly needless, such as a recipe for “Grilled

SACRAMENTS AND SWEDISH MEATBALLS

Cheese Sandwiches.” Capon’s recipes seem, at first glance, to be of interest only in the way that the clothing fashions of earlier generations are of interest—as a source of wonderment and amusement. People actually *wore* those clothes? You mean folks actually thought Swedish meatballs made for fine and elegant dinner party fare, especially if served in a silver-plated chafing dish? What *were* they thinking?

Nothing about Swedish meatballs seems obviously to invite serious scholarly reflection. But if there is any underlying theme to Capon’s cherished and enduring little book, it is that it tells us recipes are not so much about food, but more about who we are and what we believe. And because those issues are contemporary and eternal, *The Supper of the Lamb*, as dated as its recipes seem, continues to appeal to readers, and sometimes to cooks.

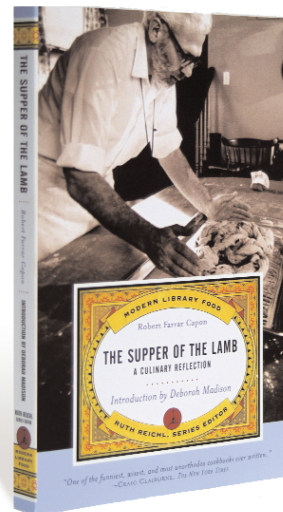
An Episcopalian priest, Capon begins with the premise that cooking is an “epiphany of the greatness of our nature—or, to use the most accurate theological word of all, it is a sacrament, a real presence of the gorgeous mystery of our being.” Capon insists that a recipe “is a way of life” and a way to God; that nourishing the body and nourishing the “sole” are intimately con-

nected. His message anticipates the Slow Food Movement and, perhaps, our current fascination with all things culinary. But Capon implies that watching television cooking shows and following the exploits of chef personalities is not unlike televangelism, more a spectator sport than authentic experience.

None of this, by itself, makes for much of a book. What makes the book special is Capon’s insistence that it is the *experience* of cooking that connects us to the sacred. “I shall,” he writes, “spare you the chapters on aesthetic principles, personal integrity, popular taste, and political morality...” What follows is an intensely detailed discussion on the care and use of good knives. The divine, Capon tells us, is in the details.

His opening recipe is “Lamb for Eight Persons Four Times.” First up is the cutting of the onions, no small matter. “You must firmly resist the temptation to feel silly...You will note, to begin with, that the onion is a *thing*, a being, just as you are. Savor that for a moment. The two of you sit in mutual confrontation. Together with knife, board, table, and chair, you are the constituents of a *place* in the highest sense of the word...You have, you see, already discovered something: The uniqueness, the *placiness*, of places derives not from abstractions like *location*, but from confrontations like man-onion. Erring theologians have strayed to their graves without learning what you have come upon.”

So. Why make Swedish meatballs (and “mix well by hand”) when we can buy the Healthy Choice version, nuke it, and be done eating it in less time than it takes to read and prep Capon’s original? Because, as Capon notes, “One real thing is closer to God than all the diagrams in the world.” Forget “30-Minute Meals” and “Bamm!!” Capon’s book is one real thing.



BOOKS

Writing in the Dark

In her fourth work of fiction, *Awake* (Henry Holt, 2004), Elizabeth Graver '86 confronts such universal themes as parenting, identity, and love in her tale of a mother whose son has a rare disease. The author reveals how her latest novel draws upon subjects she had explored in her past writings.

"Follow the accident—fear the fixed plan," wrote the novelist John Fowles, advice I sometimes share with my students at Boston College. When I start a new piece of fiction, I begin (I think I begin) with very little—a seed, germ, glimmer. I consider myself a writer who doesn't plan ahead much—who works, at least in early drafts, almost entirely in the dark. And yet something curious has started to happen to me over the years as I've kept on writing: I've begun to be able to track my obsessions backwards, so that subjects that might seem, at first, to have risen of their own accord out of the dim, murky mud of my unconscious turn out to have visible footprints leading up to them, tracks I can only stop to identify after the fact.

My third novel, *Awake*, is narrated by a woman named Anna, who has been living in the dark ever since she gave birth to Max, a child with a rare genetic disease called xeroderma pigmentosum (or XP), which means that he cannot be exposed to daylight without an enormous risk of skin cancer. The book is set largely at a camp for children with XP, but at its center, it's about Anna—her relationship to her sons, her abandoned life as a painter, her stale marriage, and what happens to her own sense of self when she finds herself at a place where Max is finally safe and free.

I started the novel in 1999. Why this subject? At the time, I'd have said I had no idea. In 1990, I'd read a cover story in *People* magazine about two sisters with XP. I'd tossed the article into a box where I save clippings that grab my inter-

est. Most of the articles founder there; somehow, years later, this one rose to the top. I was, at the time, trying to get pregnant. I was thinking, I suppose, about family, about safety and danger, about the ways my identity might shift when—if—I became a mother.

All of this was inchoate, though, as I groped my way toward a new project, not at all thought-through. Mostly, I was drawn toward something that seemed, at the time, quite simple—an image of children living in the dark. I looked up XP on the Web and learned about a camp for kids with the disease, a place where the whole family came along and everything took place at night. Two days later, I drove to upstate

New York and spent the night at Camp Sundown. After my visit, I became a quiet listener on an Internet listserv for people living with XP.

That summer, I began the novel. A few months later, I got pregnant. *Awake*—which is about a woman whose sons are 9 and 12 and whose marriage is falling apart—was written during a period when I, in a fulfilling marriage, gave birth to two daughters. I finished it—breathless, exhausted—when my first child was nearly 3, my second, 8 months old.


But when did I *really* begin this book? When I stop to think, I can track the concerns of the novel back to fifth grade, when I volunteered in the class for children with special needs, compelled, even then, by what I experienced as both difference and sameness, for I was always a bit of an outsider and saw, in those children, something of myself, even as they clearly inhabited foreign worlds. I can go back, too, to the paper I wrote in twelfth grade about collective child-rearing on a kibbutz, for in *Awake* I am fascinated with the idea of communal life, of a place set apart, where boundaries blur and families take on new shapes.

I can go back (though, oddly, this never crossed my mind as I wrote the novel) to a feature story I wrote for the *Berkshire Eagle* during a summer internship in college, a piece on camps for "special" children. I visited a camp for kids who'd had open-heart surgery, a camp for children with mental disabilities, and a camp for kids who were (or thought they were) overweight. That was 19 years ago. I had a great editor at the *Eagle* who let me pick my own subjects and dive in. That same year, I took my first writing workshop with Annie Dillard, who, in addition to being a wonderful teacher,

writes wisely about writing and has observed that "appealing workplaces are to be avoided. One wants a room with no view, so imagination can meet memory in the dark."

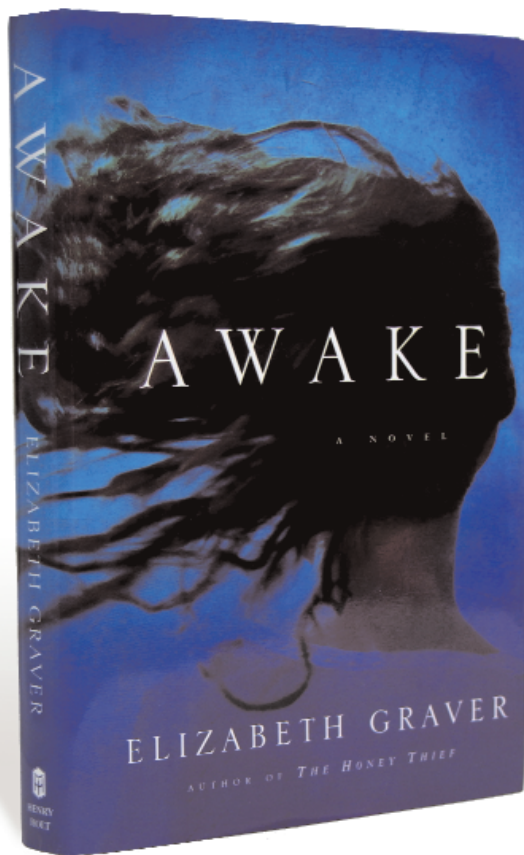
Awake is itself set largely in the dark, and as I wrote it, I convinced myself that it was, at least in its early drafts, written in the dark as well (in fact, my study has four nice windows, though my desk faces a broad, blank wall). But what of all those footprints? I cannot shake the feeling that to have sought them out in the middle of the project might somehow have jinxed me, made me self-conscious, trapped me inside the rigid borders of a feared "fixed plan." I'm glad I didn't look back much during the journey; I will, in

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whatever I write next, try to stay focused on the path ahead, for this is where the real pleasure lies for me: in how the characters do seem to take on a life of their own; on how the fictional world does become itself, not a patchwork of where I've been or what I've seen, not a literal or even a figurative cobbling together of my past, but a mysterious, evolving place where "imagination . . . meet[s] memory in the dark." 

Elizabeth Graver '86 is the author of a story collection, Have You Seen Me? and two previous novels, Unravelling and The Honey Thief.

Her work has been included in Best American Essays, Best American Short Stories, and Prize Stories: The O. Henry Awards.



Summer 2004 Books

Our seasonal selection of noteworthy books by Wesleyan alumni, faculty members, and parents.

NONFICTION:

STEVE ALMOND '88, *Candyfreak*

(Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2004)

KAREN BORZA ARABAS '84 AND JOE BOWERSOX, EDITORS, *Forest Futures: Science, Politics, and Policy for the Next Century* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2004)

CHARLES L. BOSK '70, *Forgive and Remember: Managing Medical Failure* (The University of Chicago Press, 2003)

ELLEN K. FEDER '89, KARMEN MACKENDRICK, AND SYBOL S. COOK, *A Passion for Wisdom: Readings in Western Philosophy on Love and Desire* (Prentice Hall, 2004)

MICHAEL FOSSEL '73, *Cells, Aging and Human Disease* (Oxford University Press, 2004)

JOEL PFISTER, PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH, *Individuality Incorporated: Indians and the*

Multicultural Modern (Duke University Press, 2004)

JEFF TAYLOR WITH DOUG HARDY '78, *Monster Careers: How to Land the Job of Your Life* (Penguin Books, 2004)

ARTHUR T. VANDERBILT II '72, *Gardening in Eden: The Joys of Planning and Tending a Garden* (Simon and Schuster, 2003)

FICTION:

STEPHEN POLICOFF '70, *Beautiful Somewhere Else* (Carroll and Graf, 2004)

MARK SABA '81, *The Landscapes of Pater* (Vineyard Press, 2004)

OF NOTE:

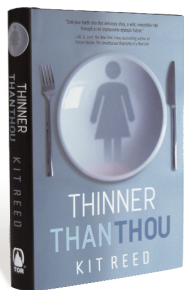
MARC STEIN '85 is the editor of *The Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History in America* (Scribner's, 2003), a three-volume survey

KIT REED,
ADJUNCT PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH

Thinner Than Thou

(Tor, 2004)

In the not-too-distant future of America portrayed in Reed's fast-paced satire of dieting obsessions, the body beautiful has become a religion. The masses worship the doctrines of Reverend Earl, who rules over Sylphania, a supposedly fabulous weight-loss spa where the overweight can be transformed through grueling exercise, controlled meals, and herbal supplements into perfectly thin specimens ready to enter the heaven of Afterfat. Attached to Earl's powerful domain are the Dedicated Sisters (the Deds), a fanatical female religious order devoted to curing the anorexic, the bulimic, and the obese through torturous methods. When the anorexic young Annie Ambercrombie is sent by her parents to a convent run by the Deds, her twin younger siblings, Betz and Danny, and her boyfriend, Dave, hit the road to rescue her, encountering along the way competitive eating contests, unsavory overweight



strippers, and an underground railroad of religious people from various denominations who hope to stop Earl's growing domination. Reed takes the reader behind the impenetrable walls of Sylphania and the Deds convent, where she skillfully explores the trials of several vividly drawn characters with weight issues and gradually reveals the dark secrets of Earl's kingdom. Her imaginative tale is entertaining, thought-provoking, and sometimes horrifying.—David Low '76

BRUCE ERIC KAPLAN '86
This is a Bad Time: A Collection of Cartoons

(Simon and Schuster, 2004)

Kaplan's very funny cartoons, which appear regularly in *The New Yorker*, perfectly capture various states of anxiety, anger, depression, loneliness, and helplessness experienced by flummoxed adults and children, animals, insects, and even heavenly beings. In his introduction to this new collection, Kaplan writes that "these drawings are really my journals. I use them to explore whatever I find interesting,



that emphasizes lesbian and gay history from pre-Colonial days through the 20th century, covering individuals and events that have had significant impact on the lives of lesbians and gay men. The work addresses legal, ethical, and medical issues as well as the arts, clothing, and other aspects of popular culture.

For additional book reviews and listings, please see www.wesleyan.edu/magazine/wesmag_books.html.

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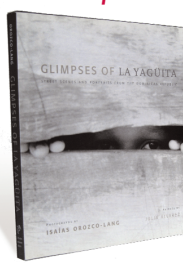
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confusing, or upsetting on any given day. But here's the beauty part—these private thoughts are filtered through the prism of moody children and blasé pets, disillusioned middle-aged men and weary matrons, among others." By sharing his personal observations through the art of the cartoon, Kaplan helps us laugh at painful emotions and difficult situations that all of us have lived through.—DL

ISAÍAS OROZCO-LANG '98 (PHOTOGRAPHY),
JULIA ÁLVAREZ (PREFACE)
Glimpses of Yagüita: Street Scenes and Portraits from the Dominican Republic

(El León Literary Arts, 2003)

This exquisite book of black-and-white photographs takes us into the world of La Yagüita del Pastor, the final outpost of Santiago in the Dominican Republic, where Orozco-Lang spent several weeks becoming acquainted with the local inhabitants. His remarkable portraits and street scenes capture the dignity and hopeful spirit of the neighborhood's citizens, who are forced to exist in poverty under difficult living conditions. As the photographer

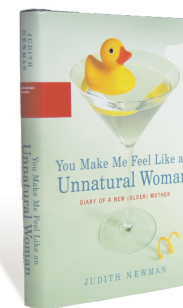


notes, these people "have retained a beauty long since lost in developed countries. The beauty of unbridled emotion, life in the moment, resilience, openness, solidarity—all of which Yagüiteros themselves would exchange for the conveniences of the First World."—DL

JUDITH NEWMAN '81
You Make Me Feel Like an Unnatural Woman: Diary of a New (Older) Mother

(Miramax Books, 2004)

At age 40, after seven years and \$70,000 worth of infertility treatments, Newman, a columnist for *Ladies Home Journal*, found out she was expecting twins. In this warm and refreshingly honest memoir told in diary form, she covers the first 20 months of her sons' lives and shares what it is like to have children later in life and how her marriage, relationships, and sense of self inevitably change. Newman doesn't flinch from confronting both the joys and difficulties of late motherhood, and much of her book is hilarious and inspiring, without the least trace of sentimentality.—DL



DAVID RAINS WALLACE '67
Beasts of Eden: Walking Whales, Dawn Horses, and Other Enigmas of Mammal Evolution

(University of California Press, 2004)

This engaging history of paleontology, inspired by Rudolph Zallinger's *The Age of Mammals* mural at Yale's Peabody Museum, brings together a myriad of fascinating stories relating to fossil discoveries and what they have revealed about the evolution of early mammals. Wallace's lucid, well-researched narrative introduces the reader to numerous exotic extinct creatures, such as giant-clawed ground sloths, whales with legs, uintatheres, and zhelestids. At the same time, the book investigates the work of several notable "bone hunters" and scientists, including George Cuvier, Richard Owen, Edward D. Cope, George Gaylord Simpson, and Stephen Jay Gould, and their intellectual disputes regarding mammalian evolution.—DL

