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Who's Afraid of the Kitchen?
Representations of the Kitchen in Three US Films,
The Children's Hour, *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and *Blue Jasmine*

ESTELLA CIOBANU
Ovidius University of Constanța, Romania

Abstract

This article examines the depiction of the female protagonist(s) in relation to the kitchen in three films, William Wyler's *The Children's Hour* (1961), based on Lillian Hellman's play, Blake Edwards's *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), based on Truman Capote's novella, and Woody Allen's *Blue Jasmine* (2013). Although the release year of the first two films might suggest they belong to the heyday of "a woman's place is in the kitchen," neither straightforwardly bows to the patriarchal cliché, even as their respective protagonists are shown in the kitchen at some point. The third film resonates in part with each of the other two, with *The Children's Hour* in its socio-therapeutic approach (in this case relative to women's choice to actively make their lives) and with *Breakfast at Tiffany's* in its glamorous avoidance of kitchen-related domesticity. In *Blue Jasmine*, the kitchen furnishes the protagonist a homely background to express her grief, hopes and social views of women's self-empowerment, whilst partially depending on the 'supporting role' of her sister, the classically 'domestic' woman. I interpret the films against a brief historicisation of the making of women's kitchen-related domesticity in modern times and of contemporary views on the kitchen's 'homeliness' in the West.

Keywords: kitchen, women, "a woman's place is in the kitchen," *The Children's Hour* (Lillian Hellman / William Wyler), *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (Truman Capote / Blake Edwards), *Blue Jasmine* (Woody Allen)

One of the 2013 advertisements for Nestle's Thanks Lean Cuisine campaign depicts a beaming middle-aged woman in – or rather in front of

– the (her?) kitchen. Breathing the air of the successful businesswoman, she smiles cognisantly, backed up by the campaign motto # 1: “Behind every successful woman is her microwave” (see image in Boon n. p.). However successful, though, the 2010s woman is here still relegated to the kitchen, albeit in an upgraded version – both the woman and the kitchen.

Let's go back half a century. In 1962, convenience food (as well as consumerism) takes centre stage in Andy Warhol's 32 *Campbell's Soup Cans*. Who is the target audience of such convenience food? Is it the modern housewife, now seemingly happily relieved of the cooking chores? (If so, what are her social class and income range?) If not, then who is the consumer of convenience food? Warhol's work cannot but recall, to connoisseurs, if through glaring absence, the opulence of the tables hosting lavish half-devoured banquets, in the still lifes¹ and genre paintings of the seventeenth-century Dutch golden age. In 32 *Campbell's Soup Cans*, the traditional agent is obscured through mass production of food and standardisation of aspect. In the Dutch art's case, the female cook is rarely featured in genre paintings² which depict the ‘ingredients’ of the banquet before they became one. Between these two extremes – absent cook through industrialisation and absent cook through socially wrought insignificance – there lies a plethora of cases of representation³ which render the scene and locale of cooking a backstage affair capable, nonetheless, of sometimes providing a thought-provoking (back)ground.

Films cannot ignore the symbolic power of the image of the woman in the kitchen, even if she is not always shown cooking. Genres as different as the *film noir*, e.g. Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960)⁴ and *Frenzy* (1972),⁵ the romantic comedy or romantic drama, e.g. Nancy Meyers's *The Holiday* (2006) and Clint Eastwood's *The Bridges of Madison County* (1995), respectively, historical dramas, e.g. Brian Percival et al.'s *Downton Abbey* TV series, the kitchen-sink drama,⁶ e.g. Robert Hamer's *It Always Rains on Sunday* (1947), and soap operas, e.g. *EastEnders* (1985-), feature the female protagonist (or domestics) in the kitchen, for whatever purposes. At one extreme, Mark Brozel's *Macbeth* (2005) boldly relocates Shakespeare's protagonist from the castle to a Michelin restaurant kitchen and transmutes his military prowess into a

chef's. At the other, Nora Ephron's *Julie & Julia* (2009) necessarily features the kitchen as the stage for its protagonists, for it intertwines the stories of a fictitious woman and of the culinary legend whose recipes she vouches to prepare, Julia Childs, who co-authored, with Simone Beck and Louisette Bertholle, the two-volume *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* (1961, 1970).

This article examines the kitchen-related scenes in three US films so as to identify both the position which the kitchen occupies in the film's economy and the characters' – particularly women's – relation to the kitchen. Starting from the cliché that "a woman's place is in the kitchen," I investigate William Wyler's *The Children's Hour* (1961), Blake Edwards's *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961) and Woody Allen's *Blue Jasmine* (2013) to see how the characters interact with the kitchen and what socio-political, ideological and aesthetic assumptions underpin such interactions. In the case of the two 1961 films, I also study their proximity to or distance from the literary texts which they adapted, respectively Lillian Hellman's play *The Children's Hour* (1934) and Truman Capote's novella *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1958).

What's in a Kitchen?

The kitchen is for cooking and eating (as well as dish-washing), we typically think, without much historicising either activity's location in or away from the kitchen; it may also be a place for informal socialisation. What some may nostalgically picture first is a middle-class kitchen turned into the main eating area and "the social hub of the home" for family and friends (Moran 106), such as during the 1955-1980 gentrification of London, in the "knocked-through" (i.e., open space) house.

But is there more to the kitchen? Despite the general silence with which certain topics, such as sustenance and the kitchen, are treated traditionally in the grand narratives of the West, they have never been eliminated but only mystified in multifarious ways.

Traditionally, the kitchen signals in the West – proverbially, too – the space socially constructed as women's place. Yet, according to Gisela Bock and Barbara Duden, the tradition goes no further back than the

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: with the onset of capitalism, the work that generated the household's income was relocated away from the house and thus separated from housework. The spatial separation of the paid work and living areas, in modernity, triggered a gendered separation of the public and private spheres, with the newly established 'realm' of the housewife naturalised as the destiny of women. Not only did such naturalisation associate with the bourgeois family ideology prevailing in many places after 1800, Bock and Duden argue, but it gave an emotional lustre to (unpaid) housework – disassociated from (paid) work/labour – through its mystifying redefinition as a *loving service* provided by women to their husbands and families. Briefly, modern industrial society became possible through women's unpaid and unacknowledged housework qua care work, which provided sustenance for their families. The only major change in this arrangement became obvious in the 1970s, when, with their entry into the labour market, middle-class women assumed the burden of double-shift work, which to this day is gender-lopsided (Lyonette and Crompton 23-27). Through this turn to the double-shift work, middle-class women 'joined' those women whose social background had always demanded their permanent work outside the home.

Woman is represented as *ruling* over the kitchen, if not always to everyone's delight or to overall commendation (Snodgrass 1046), nor exclusively in modernity. Shakespeare's weird sisters, in *Macbeth*, can do without the kitchen qua enclosed room, but not without its emblems, the fire and cauldron, as well as the 'recipe' style of brewing their foul concoction (4.1.1-38). Goethe's witch, in *Faustus*, Part I, also brews a concoction, this time in an actual kitchen, staffed, moreover, by an ape couple (with their young) that *apes* humans, gender-wise (ll. 2385 s. d., 2385-2475). Not only in Goethe is the kitchen qua room – equipped with the full paraphernalia of black magic, besides the fire and cauldron – demonised as the witch's lair. In medieval visual and dramatic representations of sin, the tavern associates women with debauchery, and therefore tapsters and brewsters – women working in or owning this public-space version of the domestic kitchen – with the devil (Ciobanu 271-277). Other cultural spaces too – from India to Nigeria, Angola and

the Caribbean – demonised the kitchen and its workers from an early date (Snodgrass 1045).

Denied as labour in modernity, nowadays the domestic work of food preparation can be either outsourced or reinvented in middle-class households. The former reinforces the traditional gendered dichotomies, as well as highlighting, intersectionally, its class and ethnic/racial, not only gendered, dimensions.⁷ The latter case refers to the cooking-is-fun ethos which invites men to cook, in cookery shows like Jamie Oliver's in the UK, and thereby reinvent domestic masculinity as chic (Hollows) or perhaps as cooking-skilled but domesticity-disassociated (Packham). To me, such reinvention of domestic masculinity is akin to the postfeminist mystification of the woman cooking for her family as a "domestic goddess" intent on "reclaiming our lost Eden" (Lawson vii).

Interestingly, at the turn of the millennium, the western tradition of the kitchen-bound woman may be either underglossed or taken for granted. An instance of the former is Mary Ellen Snodgrass' *Encyclopedia of Kitchen History* (2004), which *does not* include entries such as "housewife," "mother," "wife" and "woman" (amazing gender tabooisation!), although it has entries on "children in kitchen history," "kitchen murders," "witches' kitchens," and "cannibalism." Here, the homely and the unhomely, or rather *Heimlich* and *Unheimlich*, make good bedfellows, provided that women are rendered invisible – or alienated as uncanny witches –, which renders the long history of cooking by women equally invisible. As regards the default gendering of household contribution, one interesting case is furnished by anthropologists Maryann McCabe and Timothy de Waal Malefyt, who describe US middle-class women as mothers and as agents whose creativity manifests itself (exclusively) in cooking for the family (48-58).

This very brief historicisation of the modern association of women with the kitchen as the default social 'recipe' under patriarchy will provide the background against which I examine the depiction of female characters in relation to the kitchen on the screen. Can the medium make the kitchen an arena for contestation of taken-for-granted gendering, irrespective of the focus placed on activities conducted in it?

The Children's Hour (1961): An Uncanny Homely Kitchen?

Why is the early kitchen scene of Wyler's adaptation of Hellman's play *The Children's Hour* (1934) relatively obscure, despite the protagonists' gender 'affinities' with the kitchen? Its low-profile status becomes apparent when compared with kitchen scenes in other films. Allen's *Annie Hall* (1977), for instance, has a memorable scene (00:18:18-00:19:37), which renders cooking lobsters a hilarious kitchen version of mission impossible. Comedian Alvy Singer (Woody Allen), with his girlfriend Annie Hall (Diane Keaton), chases lobsters – escaped from the torn paper bag – around his kitchen; he grows paranoid when she playfully offers him one of the retrieved lobsters and, later, asks him to pose for her holding a lobster, to his great distaste. Not only are both characters unfamiliar with cooking lobsters, but, in the scene, they are trying out domesticity, to which they will remain strangers throughout their relationship. The kitchen becomes a more 'homely' background to Alvy's distress than is the red background in his opening monologue (which introduces Alvy's existentialist crisis and the film's relish in displaying his erudition). However, both Annie – who is divorced from 'women's' kitchen – and the neurotic Alvy – who intellectualises everything so as to ward off emotions and inadequacy – fail to perform 'domesticity' or even erotic playfulness convincingly.

To revert to *The Children's Hour*, the obscurity of the kitchen scene may arguably owe to the film's shocking focus – (repressed) lesbian attraction, with its epistemology and discursive creation (Erhart 88) – at a time when even the leading ladies failed to realise the script's full homoerotic burden. Shirley MacLaine's interview, in the documentary *The Celluloid Closet* (1995), on sex taboos at the time of the film's release testifies to this partial 'blindness.' The play which Wyler adapts draws on a true story, a lesbian slander; Hellman learnt about it from court reporter William Roughead's "Closed Doors, or The Great Drumsheugh Case," an essay in his *Bad Companions* (1931), the book gifted to Hellman by her lover. School-teachers Jane Pirie and Marianne Woods, the subjects of a sex scandal in Edinburgh in 1810, unsuccessfully filed a libel suit (1811) for rehabilitation, and the juridical controversy persisted for years

(Newsroom n. p.). As in Edinburgh in the early 1800s, so in Hellman's fictional New England town in the 1930s.

As soon as the opening scene – the party where the girls at the Wright-Dobie boarding school receive their parents on a Sunday visit – is over, the film focuses on a conversation in the kitchen (*Children's Hour*, 00:05:01-00:11:00); neither scene is present in Hellman's play. The two protagonists, Karen Wright (Audrey Hepburn) and Martha Dobie (Shirley MacLaine), who run this boarding school for (implicitly upper-middle class) girls, talk in the kitchen with Martha's aunt, the elderly mediocre actress Lily Mortar (Miriam Hopkins), about their lives' routine. Martha (on the right) is washing the dishes, whilst Karen (on the left) is drying and piling them up on the table (in the centre); Lily is eating her cake and talking. Ironically, not the two young teachers, but their aide Lily is complaining about the burden of teaching – when she teaches only music and drama lessons (*Children's Hour*, 00:05:01-00:05:05). On finishing her cake, Lily gives her niece a hand with drying up the glasses, for a short while, then excuses herself (00:05:17-00:05:24). With Lily gone, the two associates can talk about their perennial financial inconveniences; however, when Martha announces the month's unprecedented positive balance, they consider how to spend the profit (00:05:58-00:06:11). Martha encourages Karen to buy herself some clothes, for the latter is the Fifth Avenue type of woman who needs to be "kept up." With this, Martha slips into memories of their college years (00:06:15-00:06:28), when she befriended the stylish "pretty girl." It is against this melancholy reminiscing, if occurring against down-to-earth glass drying, that Karen leaves the kitchen to check if the girls have prepared for sleep.

The women's place is in the kitchen, the scene indicates, even as these women also talk about their lives as professionals. Indeed, the kitchen feels homely to many people, as countless interviews have shown (e.g. Martin and Yurkovich 55; Kendall et al. 261; Poulos 294; Jago; Cotanda; Jefferson and Reyes), including to male interviewees (Kirsi et al.).

However, the kitchen scene is all but finished. Left alone to dry up the pots, Martha is soon joined by Dr Joe Cardin (James Garner), Karen's fiancé, who has come to take Karen out for a ride. Hearing her humming,

he remarks that singing whilst working indicates a happy woman (*Children's Hour*, 00:07:07-00:07:11) – not his own observation, as he proudly claims (00:07:13-00:07:15), but a classic patriarchal cliché.⁸ Subsequently, their conversation (00:07:17-00:07:54), conducted whilst Martha continues to dry up the pots and Joe helps himself to their fridge for a cold snack, switches from medical ethics and his work – he mentions having delivered his one-hundredth baby – to, in this connection, how many children Martha would like to have, another classic patriarchal cliché at the time. She already has twenty (schoolgirls), Martha retorts. On learning that Karen is upstairs, putting the girls to bed, Joe comments approvingly: “That’s good practice” (00:07:58-00:07:59). Joe lives by clichés – here, women’s patriarchally expected gender roles as mothers and overall caregivers. Not once does he enquire about Karen’s and Martha’s professional responsibilities and work or about how many good students the two teachers have delivered to society, or rather how many accomplished female domestics to be married out to middle-class men for patriarchal society to be successfully reproduced. Shall we ascribe Joe’s blindness to the issue to the age when the film was made? Or to Joe’s – perhaps also the male doctor’s – high self-esteem, which must outshine everyone else’s? To his hunger? To Martha’s domestic activity? To the lack-lustre kitchen itself, in whose shiny lids Martha glances at her face like in a mirror when she polishes them? To the patriarchal association of women with non-abstract, non-professional pursuits and commitments – with the “kitchen” as the metonym for domesticity, servility, body, ‘non-intellect’ and ‘social unworthiness’? Perhaps to a combination of these reasons? On Karen’s return to the kitchen, Martha insists that the two lovers go for a ride on their own, for she is tired and has papers to correct (00:10:43), and on their departure she removes her apron (00:10:55-00:11:00). Martha has become the teacher again.

This dialogue between Joe, the successful male doctor, and Martha, the successful female teacher and manager (if we recall the month’s profit), set in the kitchen, shows the two characters behaving in compliance with the 1960s’ expected gender roles and identities. Joe proudly and self-centredly talks about his professional accomplishments – or rather routine – while plundering the two women’s kitchen, very much

like a visitor, or perhaps a husband. Martha has no chance to talk about herself on her own terms but rather answers his hectoring remarks. Her dish-related activity and the setting seem to tie her to the patriarchal cliché. Notwithstanding, Martha's retorts – about the number of her (school)children and about Joe's snack, when she rebukes Joe: "Why don't you pay tuition, then you could eat three meals a day here" (*Children's Hour*, 00:08:03–00:08:06) – indicate a critical mind and an outspoken woman, not patriarchy's desired dummy. Thus, the film's kitchen becomes an arena for debating gender identity and roles both through the characters' interaction – which highlights societal gender expectations, in Joe and Martha's dialogue – and through the very occupational position of the two young women, which indicates their socio-financial independence, however precarious, at a time when women were typically silent and bound to home-making.

By contrast, Hellman sets her play's action, in Acts 1 and 3, in the "Living Room of the Wright-Dobie School," according to the early description, which the first act's opening stage direction describes thus: "A room in the Wright-Dobie School for girls . . . , a comfortable, unpretentious room used as an afternoon study-room and at all other times as the living-room" (Hellman 7). Act 1 opens with a class held by Lily in this living-room qua study-room, rather than with the film's more glamorous Sunday visit and party. Indeed, in the play the kitchen is never to be *seen*. It is barely *evoked* twice: once, in Act 1, when Karen describes to Martha what Lily talked about in the kitchen earlier; and another time, early in Act 3, when the grocery boy – their only food supplier after social-financial bankruptcy – claims he has entered through the main door because "I knocked on the kitchen door but nobody answered" (Hellman 56). Hellman's *The Children's Hour* pays no attention to the kitchen, even as its female protagonists mention cooking various courses.

Why should Wyler's film have introduced the kitchen *visually* as a setting? One reason may be that the kitchen serves as a social and domestic hub. Indeed, unlike the play's one-room setting for both class and private interactions, the film's kitchen introduces the characters in more complex terms than the living-room Sunday party did earlier. In the latter, even the social face of the teachers was partially obscured by the

focus on the girls' accomplishment and entertainment; in the former, they are both teacher-managers and human beings with a past and present. Uppermost, the kitchen sets the social terms for the drama that the film is centred on: the former college mates, now associate teachers and friends, will soon be slandered as a lesbian couple by Mary Tilford (Karen Balkin), a girl scolded for misbehaviour. Not only will the slander affect the teachers publicly – from the school closing down and with it money running short to general social opprobrium; it will also force Karen and Martha to (psycho)analyse their relationship (*Children's Hour*, 01:27:15-01:34:47).⁹ Martha's fresh look at their friendship suggests that there may be truth to the vindictive girl's allegation, although not in her terms. Martha comes out, tearful, to confess her special, possessive (yet passive) love for Karen and also her grudge against Karen's fiancé for their upcoming marriage. The girl's slander has triggered Martha's painful realisation of her erotic love for Karen, which makes Martha feel "sick and dirty" (01:34:13-01:34:15). Her confession takes place by the fireplace in the living room (where Martha comes with her apron on), like in the play, rather than in the kitchen, and is prompted by Karen's tearful admission of having broken off her engagement, given Joe's suspicion that the sexual allegation may be true.

More than any other room in Wyler's film, the kitchen provides the setting for some of the socially most interesting dialogue. As the male doctor's 'glamorous' professional accomplishment outshines the two teachers' socially, so the unseen hospital where Joe works outshines socially the kitchen where Karen and Martha become 'domestics' once again, unlike Joe-the-visitor. Visually/aesthetically, the visible kitchen is but a Cinderella to the evoked hospital, for the two kinds of labour cannot compare socially. Or do they? It is also true that the 'psychoanalytic' probing of the sexual slander, climaxing in Martha's confession, occurs in the living room, as in the original play, possibly in Wyler's bid to match the venue to the quasi-scientific formality of her compelling social and psychological inner drama.

Breakfast at Tiffany's (1961): Who Needs the Kitchen anymore?

Arguably, the kitchen of Edwards's adaptation, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, of Capote's novella (1958), also serves as a social, if not domestic, hub, early in the film, which speaks volumes about its protagonist, Holly Golightly (Audrey Hepburn). Yet, why does Holly's kitchen fail to be as memorable as is her look into the shop window of Tiffany's jewellery? To state it otherwise: Why has the latter image, but not also the former, been systematically disseminated for over sixty years since the film's release? For one thing, the protagonist is a young New York socialite, by definition averse to domesticity; accordingly, focusing on the kitchen would be counterproductive in a film which depicts the early 1940s glamour. Holly's Manhattan flat is a chic hybrid of simplicity (implicit in the run-of-the-mill kitchen) with an avant-garde touch (suggested by the Daliesque bathtub-sofa). I would further argue, tentatively, that the film's haute couture attires for the leading actress for three-quarters of the film and her character's aspirations, more readily than kitchen drudgery, best appeal to those to whom cinema offers an escape from dreary routine.

When Holly throws a party in her tiny flat (*Breakfast at Tiffany's*, 00:26:19-00:39:36), her open-space kitchen (00:07:04) becomes the hub where her numerous guests socialise whilst helping themselves to the drinks (00:27:00-00:28:57). Holly is largely disconnected from the kitchen as the twentieth-century place for eating,¹⁰ let alone for routine cooking: the very title divorces breakfast from the kitchen and associates it with the jewellery shop. Indeed, Holly's kitchen accommodates the basics of a mid-twentieth-century rented flat: a cooker, a toaster, cabinets and a worktop, as well as the fridge where Holly stores shoes (*sic*) alongside the more mundane milk bottle for herself and "Cat" (00:07:47-00:09:00) and extravagant champagne bottles (01:08:08-01:08:20). Holly has resourcefully devised alternative uses for the kitchen and its appliances, albeit not of the kind demonstrated by Martha Rosler, in her *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975), a deadpan parody of Julia Childs's televised cookery shows, with cutlery, bowls and appliances 'advertised' as if for a *film noir*.

When not an extension space for Holly's parties and convenient storage place for her bottles, the kitchen remains nonetheless at a premium. Once, too inebriated to consider convenience, let alone bourgeois decorum, Holly nestles on the brim of her kitchen sink (*Breakfast at Tiffany's*, 01:02:15-01:03:16), as matter-of-factly as she sits, when sober, on her half-bathtub-sofa (00:08:41-00:09:00; 01:07:32-01:08:02) gracing the living room. In Edwards's film, Holly is the master – or rather mistress – of improvised appurtenances in domestic spaces.

Capote's novella also connects Holly with the kitchen sometimes in unexpected ways. Holly avoids unpleasant subjects during the party conversations – “‘But then,’ said Holly, ‘I hear so many of these Southern girls have the same trouble.’ She shuddered delicately” (Capote 192) – by going “to the kitchen for more ice” (192). For Capote's Holly, the kitchen is as much a social haven as a storage place. (In Edwards's adaptation, the very guests at Holly's party reference the kitchen as the storage area for drinks.) Capote's Doc Golightly, the horse doctor living near Tulip, Texas, tells Holly's guests how he met Lulamae Barnes (now self-styled Holly), the 14-year-old girl soon to become his child-wife: “‘Twas Nellie, my oldest girl, ’twas Nellie brought ’em into the house. She come to me one morning, and said: ‘Papa, I got two wild yunguns locked in the kitchen. I caught ’em outside stealing milk and turkey eggs.’ That was Lulamae and Fred [her brother]” (Capote 208). In the film, Doc Golightly appropriates Capote's Nellie's words, sans the kitchen-captivity reference.

I would argue that, in Edwards's *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, the defamiliarisation of the quasi-invisible kitchen – for three-quarters of the film – is aligned with women's de-domestication, i.e., their freeing from any traditional associations with the kitchen and its operations, if unavailable to most women at the time. After all, Doc claims that what his wife Holly did, before fleeing to New York, was just “[l]ooking at show-off pictures” in magazines and “[r]eading dreams” (Capote 209). Nonetheless, the film does not subscribe to feminist agendas when it all but dispenses with eating and the labour of preparing food. Holly is but superficially emancipated, or what Joan Smith (n. p.) names “an experiment in the modernisation of femininity” as the “waifish” woman unburdened by domesticity. Holly aspires to marry a rich man and lead a

life worthy of Tiffany jewels. In preparation for her fancied marriage to a wealthy Brazilian politician, Holly takes up Portuguese language lessons, knitting and cooking,¹¹ and invites her neighbour friend Paul Varjak (George Peppard) to a farewell dinner for two, in her flat, served on a festively laid tiny round table (*Breakfast at Tiffany's*, 01:34:22-01:37:21). Gone are, for now, the carefree times when Holly placed her tumbler atop a large chest, and there was no pressure cooker on the stovetop, nor any salad bowl in sight. Ironically, Holly's marriage dream will soon vanish, just as her chicken with saffron rice vanishes when the pressure cooker explodes.

At this point, the adaptation recalls Capote's description of Holly's radical change when Brazilian diplomat (and short-time fiancé) José Ybarra-Jaegar moves into her flat. Holly abandons high-life pretence for, in the unnamed first-person narrator's words, a "keen sudden un-Holly-like enthusiasm for homemaking," with its "un-Holly-like purchases" (Capote 216):

a Waring mixer and a pressure cooker and a library of cook books. She spent whole hausfrau afternoons slopping about in the sweatbox of her midget kitchen: "José says I'm better than the Colony. Really, who would have dreamed I had such a great natural talent? A month ago I couldn't scramble eggs." And still couldn't, for that matter. Simple dishes, steak, a proper salad, were beyond her. Instead, she fed José, and occasionally myself, *outré* soups (brandied black terrapin poured into avocado shells), Nero-ish novelties (roasted pheasant stuffed with pomegranates and persimmons) and other dubious innovations (chicken and saffron rice served with a chocolate sauce: "An East Indian classic, *my* dear.") Wartime sugar and cream rationing restricted her imagination when it came to sweets; nevertheless, she once managed something called Tobacco Tapioca: best not describe it. (Capote 216-217)

Holly's "enthusiasm for homemaking" (Capote 216) outrages her narrator-friend through its "dubious innovations" (217) outside the purview of an ordinary Manhattan housewife. Holly actually combines seemingly incompatible flavours and textures (e.g. meat and fruits or chocolate sauce) as long as they appear to be exotic ("*outré*"), e.g. the "East Indian classic" dish of "chicken and saffron rice served with a chocolate sauce" (217). The narrator, who cherishes "[s]imple dishes,

steak, a proper salad" (217), must have never heard of the – admittedly, French – Michelin guide to rating restaurants, a system which debuted in 1926 and was expanded in 1931, which praised anything but cooking simplicity. Holly's 'failed' domesticity nevertheless yields a Michelin outcome: the two friends just do not share a common cookery code as an expression of their social condition.

To conclude, in Edwards's *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, Holly consumes dreams more than she does food. A married country-girl turned, within a year, Manhattan socialite (and foreshadowing Hepburn's part as Eliza Doolittle, a social Galatea, in George Cukor's *My Fair Lady*), she dreams of a lifestyle beyond her present financial reach, yet also beyond bourgeois ideals of comfortable (read: fully predictable) domesticity. Her manners blend the sophistication of the socialite with the candour of a waifish girl and the patriarchally driven instinct of a young woman for marriage into a fortune. In effect, Holly "represents both the elegance of the period and a sense of class barriers about to break down" (Smith n. p.). Indeed, New York Holly has successfully transcended her Tulip, Texas, social confinement. Nevertheless, her social 'worth' is problematic, for she depends on men to live; furthermore, enjoying a little glamour is always threatened by loss thereof. Male characters on-screen and viewers off- arguably consume her as a jolly gamine exuding promising sexuality, the chic escort to a make-believe world – definitely not to the world of the kitchen, nor to the world of women's worth proper. As soon as Holly senses her make-believe world needs fortifying, she goes back to the kitchen of her own accord, for "a woman's place is in the kitchen." (Or is it?) With this return, Holly's glamorous – if functionally non-existent – kitchen fades out, and the kitchen soiled by the pressure cooker explosion fades in.

Blue Jasmine (2013): A Fall from the Ivory Tower into the Kitchen

Allen's *Blue Jasmine* is not so much apt to provide a definitive answer, if any such ever existed, to my question about women and the kitchen, as to question the patriarchal stereotype. Like *Tiffany's* Holly, Allen's

protagonist (Cate Blanchett) is a beautiful (middle-aged) woman, Jeanette, turned into a Manhattan socialite, Jasmine. Married to financier Hal Francis (Alec Baldwin), Jasmine is praised for her glamorous parties and attire, as if Holly's dream had come true. That she enjoys partying and does not have to work for a living comes with the (upper-middle class) territory. Unsurprisingly, Jasmine evolves a skewered world-view from her social ivory tower: her notion of life deliberately ignores anything unglamorous, from domestic practicalities to all the asperities which underprivileged women – like her sibling, Ginger (Sally Hawkins) – have to cope with. Her neglected working-class sister soon turns from her social foil to her only support when Jasmine falls from riches to rags (and into a nervous breakdown) and must earn her life.

Not the tribute Allen paid to Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) concerns me here,¹² starting with Allen's sonority of names¹³ and continuing with his protagonist's mental condition. Rather, I focus on Jasmine's relation to the kitchen as indicative of her drama. Jasmine's 'retreat' into the kitchen is precipitated by Hal's repeated infidelities and recent determination to divorce her; devastated, Jasmine calls the FBI to report her husband's defrauding of his clients. His downfall – through arrest and the blocking of bank accounts – engenders hers too, and the former socialite struggles unsuccessfully to repress her haughtiness in relation to those deemed low class. From now on, Jasmine often finds herself in the kitchen, hers – in a flashback concerning her husband's infidelity with her friend (*Blue Jasmine*, 00:23:52-00:24:34) – or her sister's.

Unsurprisingly, Ginger's modest San Francisco flat – which triggers Jasmine's memory of hers on Fifth Avenue – leads, through the living room, straight into the kitchen (*Blue Jasmine*, 00:04:54-00:05:09). Every time Jasmine is depressed, she is shown, if indoors, (mostly) in her sister's kitchen. The series of such scenes starts when newly-arrived Jasmine welcomes her divorced sister back home with a drink. It is only in the kitchen, though, that Jasmine reveals her plans to stay at Ginger's for a while, for she is penniless and has "bad thoughts" when alone (00:10:02-00:10:23). Soon, however, Jasmine turns her sister's kitchen into a makeshift study room, at least whilst Ginger's boyfriend, Chili (Bobby

Cannavale), and his friends watch boxing (00:41:27-00:45:55), in a scene reminiscent of Stanley and his friends playing poker, to Blanche's despair, in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Woody Allen's is not an intellectual appropriation and repurposing of the kitchen, in the early 2000s when the action is set, in a bow to postfeminist makeovers, for Jasmine hates both studying about computers (to enable her to enrol in an online interior design course) and having to do with the kitchen. Rather, the kitchen's repurposing is a weapon which the *blue* – sad and haughty – socialite uses against *blue*-collar men and their low entertainment.

Blue Jasmine connects visually the kitchen with social underprivilege. On being reunited with Ginger, Jasmine sugar-coats her sister's precarious domestic arrangements as "homey" (00:09:52-00:09:53), with "casual charm" (00:09:57-00:09:58) – all this uttered on their way to the kitchen. After having lived at Ginger's for a while, Jasmine can no longer encourage herself with understatements; in her sister's words – and their conversation occurs again in the kitchen – for Jasmine the place is a "hole" (00:45:55-00:45:59) from which, Jasmine argues, Ginger should extricate herself. Feeling tied to a shoestring budget for her computer classes, for which she must struggle against her work-related aversion and men's gender-related prejudices (e.g. the sexual harassment by the married dentist whose receptionist she is for a while) and annoyed by Ginger's two noisy sons and coarse, Stanley-Kowalski-like boyfriend, Jasmine verges on mental collapse. Her nervous breakdown – caused by her social-financial condition – is worsened by drinking, which she denies, like Blanche DuBois, as well as by Blanche-like delusions and flashbacks in which Jasmine 'talks' to the past. Indeed, while attending her first party in San Francisco, Jasmine has a flashback in which she – here and now – rebukes her husband for denying his affair with his new female lawyer (00:53:40-00:53:51). 'Here' happens to be one wall away from the kitchen still in sight, where ladies drink and chat inaudibly, as the party guests also do in Holly's kitchen, in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. A few minutes later and a room away, Jasmine meets a handsome young widower, Dwight (Peter Sarsgaard), whom she will try to seduce by first inventing the story of her parents' alleged choice of her (socialite) first name, before proclaiming that she is an interior decorator

(00:58:00-00:58:02); he immediately proposes to the alluring woman that she help him decorate his newly purchased house (00:58:03-00:58:28). Hopeful about Dwight and her prospects to return to high life, Jasmine despairs when he does not call her – and Ginger despairs about Jasmine’s deceit, or rather “reinvention,” in Jasmine’s words. The sisters’ conversation unfolds in the kitchen, where Ginger is cooking whilst Jasmine takes her Xanax and explains herself (01:00:09-01:01:05), until interrupted by Chili. Ironically, Ginger’s kitchen remains “homey” even during Ginger and Chili’s hot-tempered argument about her infidelity (00:01:08-00:03:36), the only place to talk (or yell), argue or interact in, to be oneself even when deceitful (or “phoney,” in Chili’s words about Jasmine). By contrast, the party hostess’ kitchen – like Holly’s – looks merely decorative for the human decoration which high-class women, like Jasmine formerly, are.

Blue Jasmine suggests that women are easily brought back to their place – i.e., that of social humbleness either through dependence on men as providers or through precarious financial self-support – and dis-figured through paranoiac and alcoholic bouts which undermine both self-confidence and social image. Nonetheless, however deeply humbled and keen to improve her lot with affluent men’s aid, Jasmine will never start cooking or knitting for her prospective husband, as Holly does. She will delude him (01:05:11-01:06:11) – and herself – that she *is* both an interior decorator (for she has adopted Ginger’s tentative suggestion, 00:34:33-00:34:40) and a full-time socialite (ever since her computer-classmate, Sharon, has invited her to the party where she meets Dwight, 00:50:55-00:51:31). Jasmine’s fabricated story seems to work well until an encounter with Ginger’s former husband in the street demystifies it, and Dwight withdraws his marriage proposal. A rejected Jasmine cannot bear to admit the truth to Ginger and Chili, now reconciled – after Ginger’s affair – and determined to move in together; rather, Jasmine continues to spin off her romantic story as the future wife of Dwight, the future congressman, as if to spite Ginger and Chili. There is no room here for the kitchen as the locale of this ‘upbeat’ romantic delusion, yet plenty of room for a hot shower, the modern counterpart of Blanche’s hot baths to calm her nerves, before Jasmine walks out into the street and talks to herself,

hearing – again – the “Blue Moon” tune she has always obsessed about, as Blanche did about the polka.

In *Blue Jasmine*, the kitchen will remain but the lower-class backdrop to Jasmine’s riches-to-rags plummeting. Unlike in *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*, it will never be either upgraded to a hub for sociality or re-domesticated as a “woman’s place” for the ‘fallen’ socialite. Rather, like in *The Children’s Hour*, it will provide the arena for Jasmine to challenge, virtually in psychological terms, the status quo of Ginger and implicitly of all underprivileged women – whilst Ginger does the cooking!

Conclusion

In films as different as *The Children’s Hour*, whose action is possibly set in the original play’s 1930s, *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*, set by Capote’s novella in the autumn of 1943, and *Blue Jasmine*, set in the early 2000s, the kitchen is a marginal setting in the film’s economy; nevertheless, it contributes to the protagonist’s portrayal often in unexpected ways. In *The Children’s Hour*, the kitchen permits Wyler to pit men’s social pride against their relegation of women’s professional pursuits and social contribution to mere domesticity. In *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*, it is ‘returned to’ by a socialite averse to domesticity when she delusionally prepares for a marriage into money: Holly starts honing the skills of a devoted wife eager to provide a loving service to her wealthy husband, to prove herself worth marrying. In *Blue Jasmine*, the kitchen becomes the setting for another socialite averse to domesticity (and low class) to express her despair and to imbibe alcohol and sedatives whilst psychologising her sister’s social and personal failure – and women’s. There are many faces of the kitchen, which the three films highlight, as there are many faces of womanhood in relation to the kitchen.

Notes:

¹ E.g. Clara Peeters’s *Still Life with Flowers, a Silver-gilt Goblet, Dried Fruit, Sweetmeats, Bread sticks, Wine and a Pewter Pitcher* (1611); Pieter Claesz’s *Still Life with Turkey Pie* (1627), *Still Life with Silverware and Lobster* (1641) and *A*

Still Life with a Roemer, a Crab and a Peeled Lemon (1643); and Jan Davidsz. de Heem's *Still Life* (c. 1664-65).

² The representation of the cook is framed narratively quite diversely: from being busily engaged in kitchen activities, if also in youthful flirtation, in Peter Wtewael's *Kitchen Scene* (1620s), to seemingly resting, in Cornelis Jacobsz. Delff's *Kitchen Piece* (c. 1615-25) and to being the object of an old man's lecherous attentions, in Cornelis Jacobsz. Delff's *Kitchen Piece with Loving Couple Surrounded by Food and Kitchen Utensils* (c. 1620).

³ I use *representation* in Gayatri Spivak's sense (275-279), as both depiction/*Darstellung* and standing-in/*Vertretung*.

⁴ Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* invokes, but never shows, the kitchen. On the rainy night when Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) arrives at his motel, Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) invites her to dine with him in the kitchen: "I don't set a fancy table, but the kitchen's awful homie" (*Psycho*, 00:30:45-00:30:48); slightly later he decides to 'relocate' the dinner to the parlour.

⁵ Hitchcock's *Frenzy* features a hilariously pretentious French dinner scene in the house of Chief Inspector Tim Oxford (Alec McCowen), with the kitchen – partially visible in the background – as a domestic Aladdin's cave from which Mrs Oxford (Vivien Merchant) proudly fetches what to him look like unsavoury courses. The scene juxtaposes the wife's serving of dinner (with occasional disclosure of French names) with her enquiries about his progress in the murder case under investigation and close-ups of Tim frowning at his meal before she joins him (*Frenzy*, 01:06:21-01:10:21).

⁶ The term names a British cultural movement – in drama, film and painting – of the late 1950s and early 1960s, whose "realism typical of the British New Wave" features unglamorous "working-class, usually northern, everyday life" (Butler 147) and "the angry young man."

⁷ Two surveys by Van der Lippe et al. ("Outsourcing of Domestic Tasks and Time-saving Effects" and "Outsourcing of Domestic Tasks: A Matter of Preferences?") focus on the Netherlands; Windebank's and Pla-Julián's analyses concern respectively French and Spanish legislation. Moreno et al. study the "double presence" of women in paid and unpaid (i.e., domestic) work in Spain, Gregson and Lowe in the UK, and Milkman et al. in the US.

⁸ The same mystification of domestic chores occurs in Walter Disney's animations *Snow White* (1937) and *Cinderella* (1950): housework provides the setting, if not downright reason, for happy singing (*Snow White*, 00:17:10-00:20:43; *Cinderella*, 00:26:35-00:27:43).

⁹ The confession scene is stopped short by the unexpected arrival of Mary's grandmother and Joe's aunt, Mrs Amelia Tilford (Fay Bainter). Looking contrite, she pledges to make amends for her conniving granddaughter's lie, including a reversal of the court decision, as well as "a public apology and an explanation" (*Children's Hour*, 01:35:05-01:36:26).

¹⁰ Only in the opening frames, with the rolling of the credits, is Holly shown eating. On her way home, she is enjoying her take-away breakfast, not so much at Tiffany's as *before its windows*, swallowing in the jewel displays more eagerly

than she munches her croissant or sips her coffee (*Breakfast at Tiffany's*, 00:00:35-00:02:30). Otherwise, Holly lives on milk (and alcohol), but especially on dreams. For a long while in the film she is virtually insubstantial: her transcending of her modest social class doubles as transcending patriarchally decreed female domesticity qua immanence and also eating.

¹¹ Holly's knitting is puzzling: it may be associated with 'correct' femininity qua domesticity, especially when seen in tandem with cooking, and understood as feminine caring (although Holly is apparently knitting a dress, if extra-large due to the confusing blueprint), but otherwise is completely gratuitous since Holly (dreams she) is marrying into a fortune. I cannot speculate whether, as with the Asian landlord, Mr Yunioshi, the Brazil of her dreams is ultimately substandard: not just a far-flung, but especially an alienating place where money cannot buy comfort. Notwithstanding, knitting – alongside the protagonist's garb at the moment, the East Asian dinner she's cooking or her repurposing of the bathtub-sofa as a pot plant stand – reverses her socialite status; she is one more time the obscure country-girl newly arrived in Manhattan, yet this time proud of herself as domestically accomplished.

¹² Many reviewers have noted the plot and character similarities between *Blue Jasmine* and Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, as well as between Jasmine's husband's dishonest dealings and the real-life Bernie Madoff fraud scandal (Feinberg n. p.).

¹³ The names Blanche and Jasmine are both indicative, in the respective characters' words, of their suavity – indeed, in an insincere self-presentation, considering what Blanche and Jasmine deliberately conceal or ignore. Ginger's name suggests her pungent working-class robustness, as does Chili's. The very *blue* ("sad") of Allen's film title echoes Williams' *blue* in the "Blue Piano" music of New Orleans, which "expresses the spirit of the life" of the place, according to the opening stage direction (Williams 13).

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