

WHAT'S COOKING IN THE ANDROGYNOUS KITCHEN:  
GENDER & PERFORMANCE IN ANNA GAVALDA'S ENSEMBLE C'EST TOUT

by

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## Abstract

According to Feminist Theory, the social construction of gender is carried out through ritualistic or performative acts in everyday life. The idea of “doing” gender, or the “understanding of gender as a routine accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction” has been commonplace in this field for over three decades (West and Zimmerman 125).

Contemporary French author Anna Gavalda toys with typical gender stereotypes in her novel *Ensemble c'est tout* creating characters who “do” gender and culture utilizing a mix of stereotypical and subversive gender traits.

In this thesis I will discuss and analyze how Gavalda's main characters simultaneously accept and reject many gender stereotypes, displaying a variety of masculine and feminine traits in their daily lives, performing their genders in an unconventional fashion, and promoting an ideal of androgynous behavior. In the end, Gavalda manages to create a sort of “spatial justice” in which the characters fulfill more than just the traditional roles society expects from them.

The majority of Gavalda's work integrates French culture, specifically the French meal, in order to set the tone. True to form, she highlights the importance of commensality in French society with considerable amounts of the story's intrigue taking place around meals. The meals themselves become performative acts, ritualized and carried out in much the same way as gender. Gavalda promotes the institution of the French “repas” and the conviviality that accompanies it.

Her representations of food and gender beg a variety of questions relating to the role of the modern French woman's appetite and femininity, hierarchies in (and out) of the kitchen, as well as the notion of class in relation to eating well. By combining typical gender expectations with more subtle subversion of societal roles, is Gavalda in fact cooking up a recipe for an

androgynous kitchen? The integration of these gender behaviors built around the institution of the French “repas” underscores a shift in the current societal standards promoting a new collective ideal for social change.

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## **Dedication**

In the words of the Mamas and the Papas: “This is dedicated to the one I love.” À Bean, sans qui tout cela n'aurait jamais été possible. Merci de m'avoir soutenu tout au long de la route. Je t'aime.

## INTRODUCTION

Anna Gavalda, born in 1970 at Boulogne-Billancourt to typical “soixante-huitard” parents, is the oldest of four children. In an effort to simplify their lives, her parents moved the family from the Parisian suburbs to the country when Anna was nine. This abrupt change of scenery led to many changes in her life, notably her move to Catholic school, which she refers to as a “rude awakening.” She spent a year as an Au Pair in Colorado in 1987 and went on to study at the Sorbonne in Paris in the nineties.

After finishing university she became a French teacher, writing on the side as a hobby, and bursting onto the French literary scene in 1999 with her collection of short stories *Je voudrais que quelqu'un m'attende quelque part*, selling over 200,000 copies, for which she won the RTL-Lire literary grand prize in 2000. She was largely unaware of her own success due to her simultaneous divorce (Crignon, *Le Nouvel Observateur*). She published her first novel *Je l'aimais* in 2003; her first young adult book *35 kilos d'espoir*, came out in 2002, followed by her international bestseller *Ensemble c'est tout* in 2004, *La Consolante* in 2008, and most recently *L'Échappée belle* (2009). Additionally, she has won the *France Inter* award for her short story “La Plus Belle Lettre d'Amour.” She is a columnist for *Elle* magazine and a jury member for the Angoulême International Comics Festival. Gavalda is a single mother of two and she currently resides in Melun, France. The majority of autobiographical information on Gavalda is sparse, and what is available is often vague, something she claims is because, “je suis moi-même assez vague” (Message to Abby Heraud).



Gavalda has been a huge success, topping bestseller lists both in France and abroad due to the approachability of her stories and the sentimentality of her characters. She has been referred to as a Dorothy Parker *à la française* (“Upstairs at the Square”) and she dislikes the fame and celebrity that have come with her success. She was heavily criticized in early 2008 by fans and critics alike for making a public statement directed towards the media world, indicating that she would make herself scarce when it came to interviews and other media coverage. This was a change from what she had done in the past; however, Gavalda reassured the public she would always be “attentive” to her readers. I was able to put this to the test myself, submitting various questions for Ms. Gavalda with regard to her novel *Ensemble c'est tout* as well as her personal life, receiving quick, friendly answers, and striking up a nice correspondence.

Gavalda's work has been translated into over thirty eight languages, and despite the exponential increase in the interest in her work, as well as various “better” offers, she has remained faithful to the small publishing house, Le Dilettante, that gave her the opportunity to publish when no one else would (Crignon, *Le Nouvel Observateur*). Two of her novels, *Je l'aimais* and *Ensemble c'est tout* have recently been adapted to the big screen, and there is talk of making a made-for-TV movie out of *35 kilos d'espoir* which has been played out on stage in France as well (“35 kilos d'espoir”).

Gavalda's novels are a mix of contemporary literary techniques and modern pop culture (from the omission of personal pronouns to a detailed musicology of Marvin Gaye, as well as extensive use of Franglais etc.) interwoven with traditionally “French” elements ranging from tidbits of French history and daily culture to intricate scenes built around the momentous occasion that is the French “repas” or meal.

*Ensemble c'est tout* displays many of these elements and is a contemporary tale set in Paris. It is the story of four very different, rather lonely individuals, whose paths cross rather coincidentally. Camille Fauque, Philibert Marquet de la Durbellière (or Philou as he is affectionately referred to), Franck Lestafier, and Paulette Lestafier are the main characters in the novel, all marginalized in one way or another from the world around them.

Camille is a failing artist who cleans offices at night; she displays all the characteristics of someone suffering from anorexia and lives alone in a tiny, out-dated attic apartment. Philibert is the black sheep of a long-standing aristocratic family that is in the midst of losing its stature and fortune; he shames his father because of his speech impediment, working class job, and lack of desire to fulfill his upper class social obligations. Philibert begins to overcome his difficulties as the novel progresses, thanks to the help of Franck and Camille as well as his quirky fiancée, Suzy, who introduces him to theater. Franck is a chef in a Parisian restaurant, working long hours; he divides what little free time he has between visiting his grandmother Paulette and his constant flow of female companionship. Franck and Philibert share a large apartment belonging to Philibert's recently deceased grandmother. Paulette, Franck's grandmother, has recently been moved into a rest home due to constant falls and other accidents around the house.

These four characters come from very different backgrounds but eventually come together despite their differences forming what Gavalda refers to as the “*Famille Bras Cassés*” (381). Life is not always easy, nor does everything go according to a specific plan, yet as they find out, it is more important to be together, finding common ground in spite of their differences, than to be alone.

Presently, Gavalda's texts have not drawn much attention from scholars. In addition to book reviews, the only literary criticism that has been done is an article by Anne Strasser in the journal *@nalyse*, *Revue de critique et de théorie littéraire*, “Agnès Desarthe et Anna Gavalda : quand la cuisine fait recette en littérature.” The article simply details the concept of identity relating to food from a sociological standpoint; and while it is quite critical of both novels due to their popularity on the French market, it focuses largely on *Mangez-moi* by Desarthe. However, much of Gavalda's work has the makings of a feminist text, and can be analyzed applying critical feminist frameworks.

The fields of gender studies and feminist theory utilize several key concepts, focusing on perceived differences and differing treatment not only with regard to gender, but race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and even religion, in an attempt to understand why certain groups are treated as “Others” in society. Gender studies not only attempt to analyze and deconstruct these societal perceptions, but also emphasize how consciousness-raising and activism can bring about positive, lasting social change in these matters.

The main idea in gender studies is that gender and sex do not go hand in hand. Although a person's biological sex (male or female) is determined at conception, gender (boy/girl, man/woman) is a learned, and often performed, social construct. Simone de Beauvoir stated “one is not born a woman, but rather becomes a woman” (267). The majority of Western society has very distinct notions as to what constitutes “feminine” and “masculine” behavior. Typically, women are expected to be polite and caring, exhibiting a greater concern for others than for themselves, while men are expected to be tough, direct, and able to protect and financially “take care” of others. These gender stereotypes are ingrained beginning at birth with things as simple

as gender-biased colors: blue for boys and pink for girls, and often this separate treatment continues on through childhood into adolescence with gendered toys and gendered speech. Generally speaking, girls learn at a young age that certain candid behaviors are not considered ladylike and boys are often discouraged from showing their emotions. Males and females are repeatedly taught the roles that society expects them to play. Additionally, and more specifically, there are deep-rooted societal beliefs linking specific foods and food behaviors to gender.

Hélène Cixous coined the French term *écriture féminine* in the 1970's and it “entailed the development of forms of writing which were resistant to (patriarchal) binary logic and to the obvious phallogocentrism of the French language, as well as a response to women's bodily experiences” (Jordan 13). This notion has been expanded today in Feminist Studies to include a broader definition of women's writing and as Shirley Ann Jordan asserts in her analysis in *Contemporary French Women's Writing*, “sometimes women writers do not highlight their gender but they frequently do, and when they do it is often in ways which link them interestingly to other women writers and allow us to think collectively” (16). In this way, Gavalda's recent text *Ensemble c'est tout* is representative of contemporary French women's writing and a variety of gender issues. *Ensemble c'est tout* is rich in examples of both stereotypical gender beliefs as well as more subversive and radical notions of these gender related stereotypes. Much of the text revolves around the institution of the French meal and how this relates to the gendered behavior that is performed throughout the novel. Furthermore, there is a notable shift from the outset of the book to its end, integrating diversity and change among the characters in order to create an ideal final setting.

Due to the importance of food in French culture, the meal or “repas” is often seen as a societal institution. This institution goes hand in hand with the recent popularity of the Slow Food Movement, which promotes a return to healthier more traditional ways of eating and enjoying food, a concept that is virtually synonymous with the French “repas.” Therefore, my intent in this thesis is to analyze Gavalda's text *Ensemble c'est tout* from a feminist viewpoint focusing on the gendered performance of the novel's main characters (i.e. women and appetite, caregiver roles, etc.) as well as the way in which food performs throughout the text affecting the interpersonal relationships of commensality, urban, rural, and class relationships to food, and the importance of the kitchen as a place for exchange about and around food. If gender is a social construct that is influenced due to one's surroundings and food is one of the most basic and daily constructs there is, then it only makes sense that the interactions taking place during and around meals are representative of gendered performance.

Additionally, there are those who might argue that Gavalda's work could be considered anti-feminist in much of its discourse, others could also claim that because her body of work is the literature of the masses, it has no business in academia. However, the fact that so many are currently enthralled with Gavalda's work, as well as the fact that the majority of her readership is a feminine audience, seems reason all the more to study her work from a feminist point of view. A female author writing about a variety of women's issues, which is in turn read by millions of women, essentially lends itself to research and analysis based upon current feminist issues that span the borders of age, race, and class.

Chapter One illustrates various ways in which Gavalda subverts gender and the societal expectations surrounding gender through the blurring of boundaries in order to make way for

new classifications of gendered behavior in society. Feminist research is used to support examples from the text as to show that Gavalda undeniably adheres to many of the contemporary feminist ideals that find binary gender distinctions too inhibiting for individuals. The characters in *Ensemble c'est tout* are representative of the ideal that people should (and often do) display more characteristics of gender than simply masculine and feminine and that, instead of marginalizing individuals who do not conform to outdated, restrictive expectations there is indeed a need for a new space for them.

This new space is the creation of “spatial justice,” a term which has gained popularity since 2008, combining social justice with the concept of physical space. In Gavalda's novel this space appears as a utopian “third-space,” albeit not impossible. This notion is taken from the recent emergence of spatial justice as a means for academic discussion as “a response to the need felt to share thoughts about the relations between justice and space, beyond disciplinary, linguistic and cultural boundaries” (“Projet Scientifique Scientific Project”). As of late, the majority of work surrounding spatial justice exists in the physical realm of urban planning and development, however, the themes of space and social justice exist in the imagined realm of *Ensemble c'est tout*, as well.

The discussion in Chapter Two addresses the recent changes in the institution of the French “repas,” emphasizing a promotion of the Slow Food Movement in order to allow everyone access to good, clean food no matter who they are. This shift is evidenced throughout the novel with respect to various aspects of the meal—supporting first a shift in current eating habits to more natural and traditional aspects of consumption, followed by a shift in gendered behavior to food and eating. Gavalda presents a character who is obviously suffering from

disordered eating; however, thanks to her relationships with others throughout the novel and “les mains qui se tendent autour d’elle pour lui enfourner des cuillères dans la bouche” she is able to heal from both physical and emotional afflictions (Message to Abby Heraud). All of the lead characters overcome personal and societal barriers that initially limit them because of who they are. However, once drawn together, Gavalda shows that diversity, tolerance, and tenderness can lead to limitless possibilities.

*Ensemble c'est tout* should be seen as an effort to raise consciousness among readers in order to inspire the individual to act collectively to create long lasting change. It is only when all members of a society have a space of their own in which they can comfortably be themselves that true equality and social justice can exist. Gavalda manages to create such a space in which everyone is included irrespective of their race, class, or gender.

# **CHAPTER 1 - Cooking up a Recipe for Androgyny: Gender Performance, Positive Androgyny, and the Creation of a Third-space**

Anna Gavalda's three lead characters Camille Fauque, Franck Lestafier, and Philibert Marquet de la Durbellière in *Ensemble c'est tout* display both stereotypical and subversive gender traits. From a feminist standpoint, gender is a socially constructed concept, based upon binaries in a white, male-dominant culture. For Gavalda's characters to exhibit both masculine and feminine qualities within such a culture suggests that Gavalda has created a desirably androgynous space in which Camille, Franck, and Philibert navigate. Although their duality has explicit benefits and drawbacks in all aspects of their lives, it is not something that is achieved effortlessly. Nevertheless, their androgynous qualities triumph in the end, purporting a feminist ideal where gender roles have the possibility of being encompassing and society is sympathetic to its members.

In this chapter, I will explore current feminist issues in Anna Gavalda's *Ensemble c'est tout* analyzing the notion of gender as performance, positive androgyny (according to Woodhill and Curtis' 2004 research), and the creation of a “third-space” for marginalized individuals in society, as well as what the implications are of the presence of these concepts in interpersonal relationships and contemporary mainstream literature.

For at least the past thirty years, gender studies has been trying to promote an ideal of an androgynous society, similar to Woodhill and Curtis' affirmation in the journal *Sex Roles*: “the traditional notion of androgyny is an identity that consists of a balance of positive feminine traits



and positive masculine traits. It is a balanced identity that supposedly combines the virtues of both genders” (16). As Woodhill and Curtis argue though, even when someone exhibits gender traits that are both masculine and feminine, those traits are not always positively connoted in our society, therefore their research provides new frameworks for viewing and classifying androgyny and androgynous behavior; Woodhill and Curtis attempt to further the discourse on androgyny, suggesting that there are two types of androgynous behavior: positive and negative. This is due to the likelihood of individuals adopting not simply the positive traits of either gender (16).

In the end, they detail the possibilities of gender identity in today's society, noting that there are at least seven categories available ranging from the simple masculine/feminine binary to terms of positive and negative androgyny based upon how people react in different situations, enumerating various favorable and unfavorable masculine and feminine traits as points of reference for their proposal (Woodhill and Curtis 24). For example, traits such as independence and ambition are typically interpreted as “positive” masculine traits while compassion and tolerance are “positively feminine;” conversely selfishness and aggression are seen as “negative” masculine traits while being temperamental and submissive are “negatively” feminine (Woodhill and Curtis 17). However, in an androcentric or patriarchal society, there are very clear-cut definitions of what masculine and feminine stereotypes are, regardless of their (un)desirability, which men and women are expected to obey accordingly; if or when they do not, there are generally repercussions.

Feminist theorists such as Judith Butler and Judith “Jack” Halberstam have also contributed much to the subject of gender where the notions of performance and performativity, or “doing gender” are concerned. Feminist sociologists West and Zimmerman are credited with

coining the term “doing gender” which they define as: “a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine “natures”” (126). Butler is one of the first feminist theorists to suggest that these so-called natures are merely performative acts that are learned and repeated in daily life (Hey 440). Gavalda's aforementioned characters all deviate in one way or another from their anticipated gender roles, or “natures,” but the ways in which the characters do so are as unique as they are. They each “do” their genders through performative acts, either literally or figuratively.

“Doing gender” in today's society still entails a very different set of expectations between masculine and feminine roles. The dichotomy is constructed in a heterosexual context in which men must be men, women must be women, and men and women are expected to be together in order to procreate. In brief, it is routinely anticipated that men should be bigger and stronger than women in order to better physically protect and care for them; and according to a 1972 study by psychologist Joy Osofsky they are also “encouraged to be verbally and physically aggressive, whereas females have been discouraged and sometimes even prohibited from showing these traits” (414). Thus women are stereotypically viewed as smaller and daintier which is likely why they were referred to as the 'fair sex' for so long; in a society where heterosexuality is the norm, there is also an expectation for women to be attractive or take care in their appearance in order to attain a man. Osofsky's study notes that “there is also evidence to show that children, at least at an early age, have considered books and other things associated with school to be feminine” (414).

Often, when a person demonstrates qualities that do not align with their expected gender roles, they make up for it in other ways; social chastising is typical, but sometimes they are able

to cover up what is perceived as lacking through performative acts, or if a small minority shares subversive traits, they can form a subculture within the larger hegemonic society. On the subject of social chastising is the notion that the worst thing a man or woman can be called is, in fact, a woman (Preston and Stanely 216). This statement may not seem powerful, but in referencing the majority of gender-based slurs, it proves to be true. Men who do not live up to societal expectations of masculinity are called “sissies,” “bitches,” or even “fags,” whereas women who do not fulfill their gender expectations are “bitches,” “sluts,” “cunts,” and even “dykes.” These derogatory insults criticize men and women who do not conform to the binary ideals assigned to them in a patriarchal society, because, as Women's Studies professor and scholar Mary Hawkesworth asserts:

the natural attitude encompasses a series of "unquestionable" axioms about gender, including the beliefs that there are two and only two genders (...) all individuals can (and must) be classified as masculine or feminine - any deviation from such a classification being either a joke or a pathology. (649)

It is understandable then, at least to a certain extent, as to why people's position on gender and sex are so closely linked. We live in a society in which we are taught from a very young age that male equates to man or masculine, and female represents woman or femininity. Linguistically, the terms “masculine” and “feminine” are associated with oppositional lexemes such as “virile,” “superior,” “potent,” and “male” for men while feminine is referred to as someone who is “girlish,” “kittenish,” and “soft” (Rogets 55). This further supports the long held notions that masculine and feminine are not only people, but terms that should be interpreted as polar opposites not to be combined. For the most part, members of

society act their parts accordingly, without questioning the implications of perpetuating such stereotypes.

Thanks to the work of feminists and queer theorists over the past few decades it has been ascertained that these gender stereotypes and the heterosexual “norm” are not in fact the norms for most members of society and that most binary gender roles are seen as restrictive. There has even been historical proof of societies in which a multiplicity of genders existed and were respected, two examples being the Mojave in Native American culture and Hirjas in Indian culture both of which have openly accepted a third gender (Fausto-Sterling 21). Furthermore, despite one's biological sex, people tend to relate to one or more characteristics of gender roles, an idea supported in a sociological study on gender by Evalyn Michaelson et al.: “even when [the individuals polled] define masculine and feminine as polar opposites, they frequently admire androgyny, that is, combinations of agency and communion, in individuals of either sex” (269).

For these reasons, androgyny has become popular in feminist discourse due to the questions that it begs: if masculinity and femininity are fluid and open to people's perceptions and even institutional change, then is there room for more than just the masculine/feminine dichotomy at the table? The answer proposed by Woodhill and Curtis seems to be a resounding yes; however, as they suggest, androgyny is not simply a mono-faceted term—it requires further definitions. Due to creations of subcultures inside of hegemonic societies, spatial justice within third-spaces also seems possible. In other words, the creation of a space in which members of society fulfill and exhibit a variety of traits coming from both gender roles is necessary and desirable in order to surpass what keeps them from otherwise reaching their maximum potential.

In a word, is Woodhill and Curtis' suggestion of “desirable androgyny” combined with spatial justice finally synonymous with a feminist utopia (McLaughlin 193)?

### **“Doing” Gender: Show a little tenderness**

At first glance three of Gavalda's three main characters could easily be described as typically feminine, masculine, or bourgeois, categorizing them by either a gender or class subset. While it may seem as though these characters are not doing anything significant to express their gender, analyzing each character fully from a feminist perspective and integrating Woodhill and Curtis' research on androgyny opens up the floor for a discussion on what Gavalda's intentions are in this novel, as well as turning the spotlight on the performative aspects of each character's genders.

In this way, Camille, Frank, and Philibert's means of “performing the self entails the obligation to 'do' gender not as an act of intentionality, but as performance already set up by a pre-scripted rehearsal” (Hey 444). In other words, they, like most people, are unaware of the fact that they are cast into gendered roles in their daily lives. Habit and normalization of gender binaries contribute to this “pre-scripted rehearsal” as Hey refers to it (444). This does not mean however, that one cannot become aware of the expectations placed upon them by society or that we are in fact bound to static genders. Gavalda's characters each struggle with the expectations placed upon them by society, initially accepting them and feeling inadequate. However, Gavalda demonstrates over the course of the novel that it is possible to become cognizant of these societal pressures and readjust how the gendered self is viewed by the individual and society with characters who constantly “do” and “undo” their gender. Sociologist, feminist, and specialist in masculinity studies, Michael Kimmel describes his view of what it means to be a man in

contemporary Western society: “I view masculinity as a constantly changing collection of meanings that we construct through our relationships with ourselves, with each other, and with our world. Manhood is neither static nor timeless; it is historical. Manhood is not the manifestation of an inner essence; it is socially constructed (...) Manhood means different things at different times to different people” (82).

Philibert's demeanor and manner for “doing” gender could be easily attributed to his aristocratic upbringing: he is polite (using “vous” instead of “tu” with his entire family and even with Camille although she asks him repeatedly not to do so), he knows proper etiquette, has a deep sense of propriety and is well educated, taking a sincere interest in the kings and queens of France, along with other historical facts pertaining to battles, et cetera, and he has a penchant for dressing well, though his tall, lanky physique often skews his efforts. However, within his family, the relations are strained and he is not treated as one of them:

Il venait de passer quinze jours humiliants sous le regard exaspéré de son père qui n'arrivait plus à cacher son désaveu. Un premier-né qui ne s'intéressait ni aux fermages, ni aux bois, ni aux filles, ni à la finance et encore moins à son rang social. Un incapable, un grand bêta qui vendait des cartes postales pour l'État et bégayait quand sa petite sœur lui demandait de passer le sel. Le seul héritier du nom et même pas fichu de garder un peu de prestance quand il s'adressait au garde-chasse. (307)

His father always treats him with this cold, reproachful disdain going so far as to compare his son to a “cancre” for being ironic and his inability to integrate extends from his family to the majority of society (511). He is an outsider, finding solace only in his relationships with Franck

and Camille, and eventually with Suzy, his future spouse. Philibert therefore takes on a hybrid role. He is not viewed as a man by his father due to his seeming lack of interest in his role in the aristocratic hierarchy and his overt kindness and generosity towards his younger sister Blanche, but he fulfills certain other criteria of masculinity, such as saving Camille's life and taking in both her and Franck. Because of this, within his small circle of friends Camille refers to him as “un prince” and a “petit gentilhomme” (188); and despite the kidding he receives from Franck, Franck demonstrates sincere feelings of friendship and loyalty towards “Philou,” as he affectionately refers to Philibert, protecting him like a big brother would (512). The gendered expectations put upon him vary considerably between the two social spaces that he occupies, creating an imbalance between expectations and his performance. It is only when Philibert takes the stage, quite literally, that he is able to reconcile his differences; this is his most performative act, allowing him to “be a man” while making himself completely vulnerable:

Philibert entra pesamment. En armure. Avec la cotte de mailles, l'aigrette au vent, la grande épée, le bouclier et toute la quincaillerie...Philibert commença alors un strip-tease genial(...)Pendant ce temps, Philibert, Jehan, Louis-Marie, Georges Marquet de la Durbellière détaillait, d'une voix monocorde et blasée, les branches de son arbre généalogique en énumérant les faits d'armes de sa prestigieuse lignée...Il se releva. Tout blanc et tout maigrelet, seulement vêtu d'un caleçon imprimé de fleurs de lys.

– C'est moi, vous savez? Celui qui compte ses cartes postales...

– Pourquoi? Les interrogea-t-il. Pourquoi, diantre, le dauphin d'un tel convoi compte et recompte des bouts de papier dans un lieu qu'il abhorre? Eh ben je vais vous le dire...

Et là, le vent tourna. Il raconta sa naissance cafouilleuse parce qu'il se présentait mal, “déjà”(…) et que sa mère refusait d'aller dans un hôpital où l'on pratiquait des avortements...son enfance coupée du monde pendant laquelle il apprenait à garder ses distances d'avec le petit peuple...les innombrables mesquineries dont il fut la victime (...) Il raconta ses TOC (...) Élevé sans télévision, sans journaux, sans sorties, sans humour et surtout sans la moindre bienveillance pour le monde qui l'entourait. (525)

Through his father and the audience, Philibert is subject to the “male gaze” as any woman would be. He is a performer on display in a male-dominant world, and he is viewed as the Other for his anti-masculine behavior, whether it be his sensitivity and caring towards others or his stutter when he is under pressure. However, it is thanks to his stage performances and theatrical experience that he is able to assuage these societal pressures. As Butler indicates, “the acts by which gender is constituted bear similarities to performative acts within theatrical contexts” (Butler 2); it is eventually by way of his on-stage performance that Philibert transcends the societal constraints typifying him as “not man enough,” acquiescing in a certain sense, but asserting his own manhood through this self-empowering act, as if to simply say, as noted above “c'est moi,” take it or leave it.

According to the work done by Woodhill and Curtis, Philibert could be more easily classified as “desirably androgynous” despite exhibiting a fair amount of “negative feminine



traits” such as timidity, modesty, and occasional submissiveness (18). Throughout the novel he also displays a multitude of desirable feminine traits ranging from his compassion, sensitivity, pacifism, and eloquence—despite his speech impediment when he is nervous or agitated—combined with equally desirable masculine traits such as resourcefulness, ambition, and courage when action is necessary. Although he may at times perform “incorrectly” in the moment, generally in situations where his father is concerned, he is “sensitive to feminine *and* masculine cues...engaging in whatever behaviour seems most effective in any given situation,” being equally capable of nurturing Camille when she is ill or rebuking Franck when he is overbearing (Woodhill and Curtis 16). In this sense, his gender identity is flexible, allowing him to navigate in various situations, explaining why his character could be interpreted as effeminate or even questioned as homosexual (Hey 448, Rothenberg 81). This is the case when Franck asks Philibert if Camille is his boyfriend (Gavalda 130). This incident suggests that not only is his behavior outside the heterosexual “norm,” but that Camille's is as well. In the end, Philibert chooses to distance himself from his family, the source of his perceived inadequacies, and begins to live his own life with his wife Suzy, thereby rejecting his inherited social status and the masculine role going along with it. In this way he affirms his gender in his own way, incorporating a variety of positive masculine and feminine gender traits making his character all the more desirably androgynous, noting that as far as he is concerned “mes ancêtres peuvent être fiers de moi” (530). He becomes an exemplary model of positive androgyny adding something to the lives of those around him through his tenderness:

Il avait ce don merveilleux de mettre les gens à l'aise, trouvait toujours un compliment, un sujet de conversation, un mot d'humour, une touche de french

coquetterie (...) Quand c'était lui qui recevait, il se concevait bien, s'énonçait clairement et les mots pour le dire lui venait aisément. Et comme l'avait si platement écrit le journaliste de tout à l'heure, il était "l'âme" de cette petite cantine chic... (573)

By the end of the novel, Philibert has demonstrated that a man who is seen by society as being more feminine can in fact exhibit positive androgyny in his daily life. He has "undone" the gender role traditionally expected of him in order to fulfill a different more contemporary role that allows him to be himself in an androgynous fashion. He is successful in multiple facets of his life, having both a profession and personal life that he finds satisfying, as well having overcome his stuttering problem thanks to the theater and his relationship with Suzy.

Contrarily to Philibert, Franck, performs gender in a stereotypically "manly" way. He has numerous, meaningless sexual relationships, his sole interests appear to be his motorcycle and his job as a chef; he is not particularly good at expressing himself, and he is typically vulgar and temperamental. In brief, he is a man's man; he shows little to no emotion—anger being his primary communication—and he cannot be bothered by trivial details, such as his girlfriends' names as demonstrated in the following scenes:

- Ouais, je crois, j'en sais rien...On s'en fout...Allez, retourne-toi, merde...
- Laisse-moi.
- Hé, Aurélie, tu fais chier à la fin...
- Aurélia, pas Aurélie.
- Aurélia, Aurélie, c'est pareil. (86)

as well as:

La sonnerie de son portable le tira de sa torpeur. C'était une fille. Il fit le coq, elle gloussa. Elle proposait d'aller au cinéma. Il roula à plus de cent soixante-dix pendant tout le trajet en cherchant une astuce pour la sauter sans être obligé de se cogner le film. Il n'aimait pas trop le cinéma. Il s'endormait toujours avant la fin.  
(68)

Gavalda sets Franck up as the über macho character who is so uncomfortable in his own skin that he criticizes others in order to assert his own manhood and feel better about himself. His behavior is often off-putting to others in his daily relationships, especially for Camille:

Elle ne voyait jamais Franck, mais savait quand il était là: portes claquées, chaîne hi-fi, télévision, conversations animées au téléphone, rires gras et jurons secs, *rien de tout cela n'était naturel*...Il s'agitait et laissait sa vie résonner aux quatre coins de l'appartement comme un chien qui pisserait un peu partout pour marquer son territoire. (145, my emphasis)

Franck is loud and physical, acting out his masculinity in the only way he knows how, although as the narrator asserts, it is unnatural; his masculinity is compensation for what he feels he is lacking in comparison to Philibert and Camille—education and eloquence. Franck is not as stoic and macho as he often appears. He has feelings; however, like the majority of western males, he has been trained to suppress them. His inability to balance his feelings, insecurity, and gender is likely due to his lack of a proper masculine influence during his formative years, as well as the overtly hyper-masculine environment in which he works.

Franck is at times negatively masculine and undesirably androgynous when comparing him to Woodhill and Curtis' outline. He is temperamental and fragile, both classified as negative

feminine traits, as well as being crude and aggressive which are negative masculine traits (18). On the surface, he is seen by Camille and Philibert as being undesirably masculine due to his performance around the apartment. Although the manner in which he “does” his gender makes for tensions between them, it is all an effort on his part to cover up his softer “feminine” side. Franck is ragged with fatigue, working long hours as a sauce chef, which places him on the higher end of the kitchen hierarchy (Gavalda 238). He is consumed with guilt for having had to put his grandmother in a rest home; despite his tough guy act, he can express himself, sharing his feelings and concerns when with his grandmother Paulette, albeit with some difficulty:

Il eut du mal, d'abord, à trouver ses mots, lui qui n'avait jamais su parler ni se raconter...il commença par des bricoles, le temps qu'il faisait à Paris, la pollution, la couleur de sa Suzuki, le descriptif des menus et toutes ces bêtises.

Et puis, aidé en cela par le déclin du jour et le visage presque apaisé de sa grand-mère, il trouva des souvenirs plus précis et des confidences moins faciles. Il lui raconta pourquoi il s'était séparé de sa petite amie et comment s'appelait celle qu'il avait dans le collimateur, ses progrès en cuisine, sa fatigue...Il imita son nouveau colocataire et entendit sa grand-mère rire doucement. (44)

Through use of the verb “imiter” Franck might appear to be mocking Philibert, but the positive reaction from Paulette indicates that there is a certain respect for his roommate in his account, and perhaps even admiration due to Franck's fondness of Philibert. His capacity to be affectionate, soft-hearted, courageous, and strong give way to an underlying hope that Franck is capable of change. He aspires to be more like Philibert thus demonstrating a subconscious desire to be more positively androgynous.

This transition is visible in Franck's change of attitude regarding Camille, to whom he refers the first time he meets her, as a “tantouse,” “pédé,” “lascar,” and “petit maigrichon sans cheveux,” mistaking her for what he truly perceives as a gay man due to her ultra short hair and baggy clothes (129). By the end of the novel there is a complete reversal in Franck's feelings towards her when he realizes that he is in love with Camille. Quarreling with himself in the mirror upon this realization, we see the two versions of Franck: the old and the new. The former is more masculine, referring to his love interests as simply “chicks,” concerning himself with the size of a woman's breasts; and the latter, more feminine, admitting that he feels like “shit” next to Camille because he appreciates her brain as much, if not more, than her body and he does not feel like he measures up to her (471). Struggling with his own identity, trying to make sense of his feelings, and finding that he resents his old self, Franck wishes he were able to match Camille's wit and charm, telling her quite blatantly that “je suis trop différent de vous deux...On mélange pas les torchons et les serviettes comme dirait ma mémé” (259). Although Valerie Hey theorizes about desire pertaining to young women, the same frameworks can be applied to Franck here. She states, “we can shape our wishes for being (and not being) seen as certain types of people” (450); Franck is trying very hard to break out of his mold constantly “doing” and “undoing” his masculinity in an effort to understand himself and belong somewhere in society.

Here again, another lead character is restricted by traditional gender roles indicated by Camille's statement to Franck, “en fait, tu donnes des airs comme ça mais t'es un gentil toi,” after Franck has just exposed his entire family history to her, as well as agreeing to help Camille rehabilitate herself, showing yet again his softer side, to which Franck quickly replies “ta gueule” in an effort to remain the dominant masculine figure in the situation (340). However, his

emotions become more overt as the novel progresses with scenes of Franck openly crying in front of Philibert proclaiming “Putain, mon Philou...de grosses larmes coulaient sur ses joues. ça [sic] faisait des mois que j'arrivais plus à me regarder dans une glace (...) tremblait-il” (377). He still retains his “masculine” essence, warning Camille the night of Philibert's theatrical debut, “s'il y en a un seul qui ricane, je te jure, je lui saute dessus et je le bute,” but he has begun “doing” his masculinity in a way that is more positive, wanting to protect Philibert and Camille (523). Eventually, Franck, like Philibert, is able to integrate his best qualities in order to fulfill his masculine role in a way that retains many of his signature behaviors, such as his coarseness and temerity, simultaneously allowing him to show more tenderness to those around him putting on his masculine act all the while.

Camille, the female lead in the novel, is seemingly feminine in her performance: she is artistic and enjoys reading and is thought of by Franck as “conne mais elle était loin d'être bête et c'est ça qui était bien” (221). For the most part she tends to be passive, avoiding conflicts with those around her in her daily life, but standing up for herself when the pressure is too much to bear, generally where her bellicose mother is involved: “Arrête ça tout de suite, menaçait Camille, arrête ça ou je m'en vais...Stop, maman, stop. On ne peut pas continuer comme ça. On ne *peut* pas, tu comprends? Enfin, moi, je ne peux pas” (48). As well as occasionally standing up to her mother, Camille revolts against her at times, taking retaliatory actions upon herself, as is the case when she shaves her head (90). This act, although singular, can be interpreted as refusal of her femininity. She also has a tendency to be self-deprecating and overly critical of herself. Her physical appearance at the outset of the novel is for the most part feminine in that she is extremely thin; it is typically a desirable quality in Western females since the debut of the

Gibson Girl in the early twentieth century, having been heavily analyzed and debated by feminists since the late 1980's. However she also attempts painstakingly to cover herself up, as depicted in a scene where a tourist offers to pay her to go into Louis Vuitton and buy a purse: “Camille écarta les bras: 'Look...Look at me...I am too dirty...!' Elle lui désignait ses croquenots, son jean trop large, son gros pull de camionneur, son écharpe insensée et la capote militaire que Philibert lui avait prêtée” (217). She also strives to be self-reliant, often being too proud to ask others for help and depending on no one to take care of her, even if at times she does not care for herself well. This in turn leads other characters in the novel to look after her. However, she also takes pleasure in giving to others. She gives Paulette two portraits of Franck for Christmas (266); takes Franck and Philibert out to eat upon Philibert's return after the holidays in celebration of them being back together again (309); and finally suggests that Paulette come live with them, offering to care for her (374).

All of these acts are ways in which Camille “does gender” as a woman. Despite the ways in which she demonstrates “positive feminine behavior,” Camille is by no means the perfect representation of femininity. In addition to some of her more positive qualities, she has a serious dependence on alcohol and her most performative act as a woman is her relationship to food, which is notably unhealthy. Her relationship with her estranged mother is often the basis for demonstrating her disdain for food. In a culture where “you are what you eat,” it is evident that Camille's relationship to food is an ongoing battle not only within herself, but within society. During a routine physical examination for work, we learn that she is a mere forty-eight kilos on a five foot eight frame (17). In a recent article in *Appetite* magazine Vartanian et. al. assert:

In addition to stereotypes based on what someone eats, research has also examined the stereotypes that people have of others based on how much someone eats. This body of research initially stemmed from the observation that dieting and eating disorders (i.e., a commitment to eating minimally) were found predominantly among women. Given our society's preoccupation with the thinness ideal for women, being thin and eating lightly as a means of achieving thinness have become a part of the female gender roles. (268)

Findings from their study also confirm that women who eat less in quantity as well as smaller portions are typically viewed as more feminine (Vartanian 268). Throughout the first half of the novel and at any time she is confronted with a problem, Camille consistently struggles with her weight due to her lack of appetite, using her disordered eating habits as a performative act in order to assert some form of control in her chaotic life:

Après c'était trop tard...Elle avait perdu le plaisir...Et de toute façon, à une époque sa mère ne préparait plus rien...Elle avait attrapé son appétit d'oiseau comme d'autres se couvrent d'acné. Tout le monde l'avait emmerdée avec ça, mais elle s'en était toujours bien sortie (...) Bien sur qu'elle mangeait, sinon elle ne serait plus là aujourd'hui! Mais sans eux. Dans sa chambre. Des yaourts, des fruits ou des Granola. (249)

and finally enlisting Franck's help to get her back on track:

- Franck?
- Hé! On a dit qu'on dormait maintenant!
- Tu vas m'aider?
- À quoi? À avoir moins froid et à devenir plus appétissante?



- Oui...
- Pas question. Pour que tu te fasses enlever par le premier blaireau qui passe...Ttttt... Je te préfère racho et avec nous...Et je suis sur que Philou serait bien d'accord là-dessus...
- Silence.
- Un petit peu alors...Dès que je vois tes seins qui poussent trop, j'arrête.
- D'accord. (339)

In comparing Camille's character to the proposal made by Woodhill and Curtis, we see that she embodies many positive and negative feminine qualities. She cares deeply for others, and yet she demonstrates an iron will, ambition, and she is able to be direct in her communication with others most of the time which allow her to “do gender” in a positive masculine manner at times, too. Despite her less desirable tendencies, she fulfills the criteria necessary to be considered “desirably androgynous,” performing her gender in a way that “undoes” typical male/female binaries (18). However, her behavior is similar to Franck's in that her performance is interpreted differently by others than how she actually is.

Despite an abundance of masculine traits in Franck's character and feminine traits in Camille's, all three of Gavalda's characters “do” their gender by incorporating a variety of subversive traits that skew the typical male/female binaries. Feminist theorist Judith Lorber confirms what is evidenced in Gavalda's novel: “although many traditional social groups are quite strict about maintaining gender differences, in other social groups they seem to be blurring” (114). Camille, Franck, and Philibert all manage to rise above the stratification of gendered hierarchies, exhibiting numerous positive and negative behaviors, and voluntarily reject the roles society expects of them and the pressures to conform. They begin the novel by trying to “do” the gender that is anticipated from them by society, finding that they are unable to do so because it is

too limiting. Through their individual struggles and their collective experiences, they are able to integrate a variety of gender traits, “undoing” the societal expectations placed upon them and eventually becoming more positively androgynous characters.

***Girls will be Boys/Boys will be Girls: Gender-bending, Androgyny, Homo-eroticism, and/or Egalitarianism in Love?***

Heterosexual relationships are highly normalized in Western society. However, with an increased interest in feminist and queer theories, there has also been an increase in the variety of sexual representations in mainstream media in the past decade, including something queer theorist Judith Halberstam refers to as the “heterosexual conversion fantasy” in which a major plot line revolves around three main characters: a heterosexual feminist-oriented female, a hyper-masculine straight male, and a sweet, lovable, gay male (347). This scenario is reminiscent of *Ensemble c'est tout*, although Philibert does not turn out to be homosexual and Franck and Camille struggle to make their relationship work on various levels of intimacy. Their involvement is the romantic focal point of Gavalda's novel. While it is “normative” due to the fact that it is yet another example of a heterosexual couple in literature and it exhibits signs of Halbertstam's “heterosexual conversion,” the relationship is fraught with subversiveness. As addressed previously, Franck and Camille largely reject their anticipated gender roles. In many more subtle ways, this leads to an incredible amount of gender-bending that takes place between them.

At the outset of their relationship, Camille and Franck do not get along. Franck labels Camille as a homosexual male and they have difficulty coming to terms with one another even as friends. He explicitly states that he does not find Camille attractive, and complains to his grandmother that he does not like her. However, once they become closer, Franck is much more

cavalier with her which is the reason that early in their friendship Camille asks Franck to relent his “sexual planning,” referring to the innuendos and flirtatious banter between them because she senses early on the direction in which they are headed (284). Whether Franck's response is due to his current relationship, or simply because he feels overwhelmed by Camille's self-assuredness, he responds bitterly, telling her that she is too thin to be desired by any man, himself included (284). What can be inferred, then, when Franck eventually finds himself attracted to this female character who he initially views as a homosexual male? Scratching the surface of this issue appears to give way to Franck's underlying homo-erotic desires; however, the relationship is more complex, exhibiting multiple subversive qualities, role-reversals, and in the end an egalitarian couple.

Upon finding some common ground at the end of the year, Franck and Camille become closer friends, pulling a New Year's Eve shift together at the restaurant where Franck works, and also spending more time together in the apartment. While Camille is doing a portrait of Franck for his grandmother, he questions her singleness, asking “pourquoi t'es toujours toute seule...tu n'aimes pas les hommes?” (267). This suggests a shift from his original impression of Camille as a gay male to now that of a lesbian, to which she astutely replies “nous y voilà...une fille qui n'est pas sensible à ton irrésistible charme est forcément lesbienne, c'est ça...Si, si, j'aime bien les garçons...les filles aussi, note bien, mais je préfère les garçons” (268). Camille leaves the question of her sexuality ambiguously open ended resisting Franck's attempts to label her and he is left pondering it curious and disappointed. He later asks Philibert what kind of girl he has brought into their lives; Philibert responds that Camille is a “fairy,” to which Franck inquires “elles ont une sexualité, les fées” (377).

Through the questioning of Camille's sexuality, Franck not only attempts to reassert himself as a “man,” but also to clarify the power dynamic between Camille and himself, something that he is unable to do due to Camille's frankness. In either scenario (Camille as a gay male or as a lesbian) it undermines Franck's manhood and causes him to question his value and necessity in their relationship and in society as well. This insecurity is two-fold stemming from his perceived lack of purpose in a relationship with either a gay male or a lesbian female partner, as well as raising questions concerning the fixedness of his own sexuality. It seems that no matter what Franck does to “play the game,” Camille is constantly one step ahead of him, causing him to feel at times that having met his match is more of an impediment than a release. We see this during Mardi Gras when Franck tells Camille that he will make her the best crepes of her life and then “jump her,” and she coolly responds “perfect” completely debilitating him as he frets over how it will all play out:

Parfait? Ah, il était mal ce con... Qu'est-ce qu'il allait faire jusqu'à mercredi? Se cogner dans tous les réverbères, rater ses sauces et s'acheter de nouveaux sous-vêtements? Putain mais c'était pas vrai, ça! D'une manière ou d'une autre elle finirait par avoir sa peau, cette saleté! L'angoisse... Pourvu que ce soit la bonne (... ) (393)

She later furthers the blow by forgetting their plans due to a work meeting (443). In this sense, Camille takes on what is typically considered a masculine role in their relationship, by putting herself and her career ahead of her intimate relations, leaving Franck confused about how he is supposed to behave in turn. This can be seen when she comes home following her work meeting looking for more than just the crepes that had been promised:

Elle se posta au bout de son lit et mit ses poings sur ses hanches: (...)

– Ben alors ? ! répéta-t-elle. Tu me sautes pas?

– Ah ! ah! Très drôle...

Elle commença à se déshabiller.

– Dis donc, mon petit père...Tu vas pas t'en tirer comme ça! Chose promise, orgasme dû!

Il s'était redressé pour allumer sa lampe pendant qu'elle jetait ses godasses n'importe où.

– Mais qu'est-ce que tu fous? Où tu vas, là?

– Ben...Je me désape (...)

– Pas comme ça... Attends... Moi ça fait des plombes que j'en rêve de ce moment (... ) Mais Camille, putain! Arrête! Arrête! hurlait-il (... ) Je veux pas que ça se passe comme ça entre nous...

– Tu veux que ça se passe comment? Tu veux m'emmener canoter au Bois?

– Pardon?

– Faire un tour en barque et me dire des poèmes pendant que je laisse trainer ma main dans l'eau... (454)

Here again despite all of his macho behavior, Franck takes on the more feminine role anticipating that their first sexual encounter should be romantic while Camille exhibits more sexual prowess and forceful masculine behavior. Further observation of Franck and Camille's budding romance allows for broader definitions of what each of them is expected to bring to the relationship. Franck displays more tenderness, thoughtfulness, and romantic behaviors, typically

feminine expectations, cooking heart-shaped steaks for Camille (432) and leaving her love notes with flowers: “Du mimosa comme sur la rivi~~é~~é Riviera” (473) whereas Camille regains her appetite, both literally and figuratively: “Franck ferma les yeux. Il venait de toucher le gros lot. Une fille douce, intelligente, et coquine” (477). There is nonetheless a certain amount of insecurity and timidity between them: “Aucun des deux ne voulant se mettre à nu devant l'autre, ils étaient un peu gauches, un peu bêtas et se sentaient obligés de tirer les draps sur leurs pudeurs avant de sombrer dans la débauche” which creates an impression of embarrassment and awkwardness in spite of their mutual satisfaction (485).

However, Camille, despite her straightforwardness, is reluctant to get involved with Franck, thinking that all good things must come to an end, so she passively and prematurely nips their relationship in the bud (540). This shift in their relationship, although gradual, is consistent, leading to this role reversal in which Camille adopts more masculine behaviors avoiding communication and attachment to Franck; in turn, Franck begins letting go dejectedly, feeling that “elle pouvait vivre loin de lui. Elle n'était pas amoureuse et ne le serait jamais” (535) though it is not at all the case. Influenced by outside factors surrounding their relationship such as Philibert's marriage, the death of Franck's grandmother, Paulette, and the need to move from the Parisian apartment, Franck and Camille are unable to cope with these events, let alone the demands of a committed relationship. Nevertheless, both Franck and Camille choose to swallow their pride in the end in order to be together; Camille through words, and Franck through action (566). It is only then that they are able to be together without their previous inhibitions.

From Halberstam's position, Camille and Franck's relationship appears, at least on a superficial level, to fulfill the requirements of the “heterosexual conversion,” especially in

consideration of Franck's final words in the novel: “putain, faut vraiment que je fasse tout, ici, moi” (573) donning yet again the macho act as if he were the only one to be counted on to get things done, when in fact it is only collectively that they are all successful. Moreover, in reading his statement within the context of what he is doing, it ultimately “undoes” his gender yet again - Franck serves others, takes care of a child, picks Camille up and carries her off to bed, all while he is “souriant” (574). The multitude of mixed gender signals that Camille and Franck give throughout the novel are representative of Lorber's description of “doing gender” essentially skewing how others interpret who or what they are, as well as how they see themselves (13).

### ***Creating Spatial Justice in Literature***

It is still not widely socially acceptable to deviate from gender norms, as evidenced at the beginning of this chapter with examples of gender-based insults that are deeply rooted in the minds of the general population, as well as the ingrained linguistic ties that keep masculinity and femininity so separate from each other. There is indeed a lack of space, both physical and intellectual, for these so-called social deviants; therefore it is the task of the androgynous subculture to create their own space for the time being. Within, or rather outside, the binaries of Western society's logic lays the point of inception for “third-spaces” (Moi 6). It is within the creation of these spaces that Gavalda incorporates the same multitude of positive traits that are displayed in each of her endearing characters. The use of this “third-space” to promote the defiance of traditional binary logic allows for a space that moves beyond outdated male/female roles and even out of the domestic/professional realm into a space that upholds the values of “spatial justice” making it a desirable feminist goal to be attained.

This physical aspect of “space” is demonstrated at the outset of *Ensemble c'est tout* by the characters lack of having a space unto themselves. It is represented by Philibert's situation as well as Camille's “chambre de bonne” and Paulette's contempt for being taken out of her home and placed in a rest home. All of the characters have nowhere else to go and are forced to inhabit this temporary “third-space” which they create largely on their own. Philibert has actually been forced by his family to go and live in his grandmother's Parisian apartment to avert the problem of squatters; Camille is offered her attic apartment by her art benefactors when she is out on the street, and Franck finds Philibert through a personal ad so that he can rent a room, having no other attachments in the city (128). The fact that none of these characters have a “place” in society is comprehensible; they have all been marginalized by their respective groups. There is something in the way that each of them “does” and “undoes” their gender that can be explained by feminist theorist Judith Lorber on the social construction and accepting of gender:

Gender is such a familiar part of daily life that it usually takes a deliberate disruption of our expectations of how women and men are supposed to act to pay attention to how it is produced. Gender signs and signals are so ubiquitous that we usually fail to note them - unless they are missing or ambiguous. Then we are uncomfortable until we have successfully placed the other person in a gender status. (1)

Franck, Camille, and Philibert are not only performing their genders; in doing so, they are liminal beings creating a hybrid space or “third-space” for themselves since they do not seem to fit in elsewhere with society. “La famille Bras-Cassés” as Gavalda refers to them, they find and create their own space emotionally and physically, thanks to the grand apartment belonging to



Philibert's family that they share throughout much of the novel. However, it is only at the end, with the gathering of everyone in Franck's restaurant that the lines of space and gender have been blurred to the point of this “third-space” achieving “spatial justice” giving it a utopian quality (381).

Due to Camille, Franck, and Philibert's marginalization because of how they “(un)do” their gender, this further contributes to the notion of a shortage of space for them. They do not conform to society's expectations and are therefore cast aside by their respective group members. Their status as misfits is what brings them together, leading to the eventual creation of a third-space that is suitable for not only themselves but other marginalized characters in the text; however, their initial integration causes them relative malaise, as evidenced in scenes where an immense effort is made to avoid conflict:

Dans l'appartement aussi, chacun commençait à prendre ses marques. Les mouvements du gêne du début, ce ballet incertain et tous leurs gestes embarrassés se transformèrent peu à peu en une chorégraphie discrète et routinière.

Camille se levait en fin de matinée, mais s'arrangeait toujours pour être dans sa chambre vers quinze heures quand Franck rentrait. Ce dernier repartait vers dix-huit heures trente et croisait quelques fois Philibert dans l'escalier. Avec lui, elle prenait le thé ou un diner léger avant d'aller travailler à son tour et ne revenait jamais avant une heure du matin...

Alors fatalement, quelquefois ça pétait. Il poussait une gueulante en ouvrant la porte du réfrigérateur parce que les aliments étaient mal rangés ou mal emballés et

les déposait sur la table en renversant la théière en les traitant de tous les noms.

(155)

It seems only normal that such different individuals have difficulty accepting one another when their collective space is for the most part, coincidental. It is only as the novel progresses that their shared space becomes an object of desire, almost as though it were their own private sanctuary.

Camille and Philibert are similar enough in their dispositions that they are quickly comfortable with one another sharing and creating their space in the apartment. They spend their time together discussing literature, art, and history, as well as their more personal problems which underscore the characters' parallel conditions. This is evidenced through Philibert's description of himself asserting, "Eh bien ma chère, aujourd'hui c'est très simple, vous avez devant les yeux un magnifique exemplaire d'*Homo Dégénéraris*, c'est-à-dire un être totalement inapte à la vie en société, décalé, saugrenu et parfaitement anachronique," as well as Camille's questioning of Philibert's social life which mirrors her own: "– Mais sinon, vous ne sortez jamais? Vous n'avez pas d'amis? Aucune affinité? Pas de...contacts avec le vingt et unième siècle?" to which he replies: "– Non. Pas tellement...Et vous?" (152). Gavalda's choice to end the chapter on this note allows readers to see how incredibly similar Camille and Philibert are in their loneliness, a notion which Anne Strasser suggests is amplified by the novel's Parisian setting (54). The novel's urban location isolates the characters due to its locale because people are more cautious overall, violence being more of a quotidian risk in the city than in rural areas (Herpin 290). Gavalda toys with this urban/rural dichotomy portraying the city as a space where the characters do not belong and the country being a place of (be)longing. While they may not

have a place in society, together they are able to accept one another for who they are, without risking judgment.

Although Camille and Philibert are able to accept one another relatively quickly, Franck, on the other hand, is further isolated; Philibert quickly arrives at this conclusion after Camille moves into the apartment with them, asking Franck if he is jealous:

– Tu es jaloux?

– Putain, non! Manquerait plus que ça! Moi, jaloux d'un tas d'os...

– Pas jaloux de moi, jaloux d'elle. Peut-être que tu te sens un peu à l'étroit ici et que tu n'as pas envie de pousser ton verre à dents de quelques centimètres sur la droite? (136)

Franck, of course, will not acknowledge the point that Philibert is trying to make, but he is right on the mark. Franck has no one, and the fact that Philibert has brought Camille into the situation has only made him feel more excluded:

Alors, voilà, regarde, c'est ça ma vie: c'est rien. Je ne fais rien. Je ne vois rien. Je ne connais rien et le pire, c'est que je comprends rien... Dans ce bordel, y avait qu'un truc de positif, un seul, c'était la piaule que je m'étais dégotée chez cette espèce de type bizarre dont je te parle souvent. Le noble, tu sais? Bon, eh ben même ça, ça merde aujourd'hui... Il nous a ramené une fille qu'est là maintenant, qui vit avec nous et qui me fait cagner à un point que tu peux pas imaginer... C'est même pas sa copine en plus! (167)

Franck's only emotional attachment at the outset of the novel is to his grandmother, Paulette, whom he visits in the rest home every Monday on his day off from work. Franck was twice

abandoned by his mother, once when he was a baby, and then again at the age of nine; he was raised and cared for by Paulette. Despite the strong bond that the two of them share, he often feels alone and vulnerable due to his difficult childhood and his constraining work schedule. He, like Camille and Philibert, has no real space to call his own or a meaningful group with whom he is able to identify. Even among his culinary consorts Franck is isolated: “(...) On est pas très bavards, tu sais...On est trop crevés pour jacter. On se montre des trucs, des tours de mains, on échange des idées, des morceaux de recettes qu'on a piquées ici ou là, mais ça va rarement plus loin” (227). These feelings of isolation extend into all aspects of his life, contributing to his inability to share his new found territory in the apartment.

The creation of a third-space, therefore, is not an easy task, and despite Camille and Philibert's mutual regard, there are times that due to Franck's aggressive behavior, or a passive-aggressive reaction from Camille, the possibility of attaining an all encompassing third space seems unlikely. This is clear at several times in the text regarding Franck and Camille's mutual disdain:

- Oui, c'est moi, puis s'adressant à Franck, baisse le son s'il te plaît...
- Oh! Tu me fais chier...Allez...Va faire couchedouche dans ton panier...
- Baisse le son ou j'appelle les flics.
- Mais ouais, c'est ça, appelle-les et arrête de nous faire chier. Allez! Casse-toi, je te dis!

Pas de chance, Camille venait de passer quelques heures avec sa mère. Mais ça, Franck ne pouvait pas le savoir. Pas de chance, donc.

Elle tourna sur les talons, entra dans sa chambre, piétina son bordel, ouvrit la fenêtre, débrancha sa chaîne hi-fi et la balança du quatrième étage...

Elle s'enferma à clef. Il tambourina, hurla, brailla, la menaça des pires représailles. (176)

Camille and Franck's contempt for one another and struggle to assert dominance within the space that they are sharing leads to the notion of "spatial justice." This concept combines the aspect of space with that of social justice, a major point in feminist discussion. A situation can only be socially just in the absence of oppression and stratification. The creation of a "spatially just" third-space seems impossible due to the ongoing power struggle between Franck and Camille.

In the midst of this turbulent, make-shift household, Philibert, despite his eccentricities, is the glue that seems to hold them all together for the better part of the novel, much like a mother figure. Following the incident with the stereo, Camille is ready to admit defeat and leave the apartment. However, Franck intervenes, suggesting that it would be better for everyone if he left; this in turn leads to their first real civilized conversation and hints at the possibility for change (183). In the end, they both stay out of a deep, mutual affection for Philibert as well as a growing fondness and understanding of one another (259) and in a matter of a few months, their "space" becomes much more tolerable:

A l'appart, pas de problème, ça roulait, charte ou pas charte, Myriam ou pas Myriam, TOC ou pas TOC, chacun menait son petit bonhomme de chemin sans ennuyer le voisin. On se saluait chaque matin et l'on se droguait gentiment en rentrant le soir. Shit, herbe, pinard, incunables, Marie-Antoinette ou Heineken, c'était chacun son trip et Marvin pour tous. (311)

The finishing touch on this temporary space is Camille's proposal to bring Paulette to live with them so that both she and Franck can be near (360). This not only emphasizes the accord that has been reached amongst the characters, but also underscores the growing affinity between Camille and Franck hinting at a migration towards “spatial justice” within their third-space.

Gradually, life in the apartment shifts from individualized routines to more inclusive habits in their daily lives. The character's creation of a third-space is not resolved, however, and continues to experience turmoil, further complicated by Camille and Franck's growing involvement with one another, the death of Paulette, and Philibert's marriage and growing physical absence from their lives (532). What seems to finally be a stable environment for these marginalized individuals is turned upside down by Philibert's marriage and the eventual sale of the apartment and the need for Camille and Franck to find a place of their own yet again, summed up by Camille who concludes “c'était trop beau pour durer” (540).

In the end, a “spatially just” third-space is finally achieved when Franck opens his own restaurant, a space in which Camille, Franck, and Philibert are no longer marginalized; they are the figures in charge of the space that they have created together. Everyone is welcome there, as suggested by Franck's exclamation: “Nan, c'est fermé! cria-t-il aux gens qui soulevaient le rideau. Oh et puis si, venez, tiens...Venez...Y en aura bien assez pour tout le monde” (571). Franck, Camille, and Philibert have utilized their friendship and individual idiosyncrasies to create a space in which they are no longer outcasts, but their entourages are welcome as well. Other minor characters who were also marginalized are there as well, evidencing in this final scene of the novel that change, equity and inclusiveness are in fact possible. Overall, everyone is happy to be together despite their differences, an idea summed up by Camille who says, “et puis,

qu'est-ce que ça veut dire, différents?...Ce qui empêche les gens de vivre ensemble, c'est leur connerie, pas leurs différences” (259). This scene achieves “spatial justice” within the third-space that Camille, Franck, and Philibert have created. It is all thanks to their departure from traditional binary gender roles and their acceptance of one another that this space is actualized, promoting a space that is tolerant of differences and more inclusive than previously established ways of thinking.

## II. Setting the Stage by Setting the Table: Performance on and around the Table

In much the same way that gender is a socially constructed concept, so is food. As proposed in my first chapter, gender is performed ritually and this notion of performance extends beyond gender roles and third-spaces in Gavalda's work onto the table. Scholar Margaret Visser asserts that “we turn the consumption of food, a biological necessity, into a carefully cultured phenomenon. We use eating as a medium for social relationships: satisfaction of the most individual of needs becomes a means of creating community” (iv). According to scholar Jean-Jacques Boutaud, “le repas est aussi un *évènement*, dans la mesure où il faut, rappelons-le, *performer* la table, c'est-à-dire donner la vie à la forme du repas, l'animer. Une dramaturgie souvent complexe par le jeu des relations sociales et symboliques qui se nouent dans le huis clos de la table (...) (109). Due to the fact that gender is a performance that is carried out on a daily basis, it is only normal then, for all other aspects of our lives to fall into this gendered performance as well. This is repeatedly manifested in Gavalda's work, the performance of the meal and the scenes constructed around food act as independent and often, gendered agents.

In this chapter I will address the importance of the French “repas” in *Ensemble c'est tout*, discussing first the institutionalization of the French meal, its recent decline, and the current push to return healthier and more social eating habits. This discussion will be followed by the the aspect of hierarchies of class, and race with regard to food and its preparation, as well as the notion of gendered habits in relation to food, appetite, and eating.



The institution of the French “repas” has been shifting over the past twenty years due to an increase in double income households and work schedules that no longer allow for lengthy mealtime breaks (Herpin 505). Food, and the “repas” in particular, are a means of bringing people together. Gavalda emphasizes the importance of this act as patrimony and togetherness by comparing and contrasting scenes of solitude and togetherness around meals. The promotion of this traditional aspect appears as an effort to raise consciousness among readers. In this way, food and meals are the decor that set the tone of the novel, stressing the consequences of “good” and “bad” eating habits, and proposing a way of life that vindicates healthy relationships to food. From the beginning of the novel until its close, there is a shift in *Ensemble c'est tout* which Strasser refers to initially as:

une cuisine rapide et pratique, centrée sur un individu-consommateur qui n'est plus socialisé par la véritable institution que constituait le repas familial et qui se trouve ainsi libéré des contraintes sociales. Ce modèle provoque la déstructuration des liens familiaux — cet individu-consommateur picore selon ses goûts — et encourage des dérives nutritionnelles. (53)

The “repas” in the novel evolves from Camille's packs of yogurt and mineral water and Philibert's Liebig brand boxed soups at the outset to the final scene where everyone has come together in an act of perfect commensality, sharing a meal that is homemade. In an interview with the author, Gavalda expressed to me that the end of her novel was, “une fin un peu cliché, comme un grand banquet de fête. Je voulais que tous les personnages (y compris la vieille dame qui est morte mais dont le portrait est visible par le lecteur) viennent saluer les lecteurs à la fin de l'histoire. *Comme une troupe de théâtre*. Je voulais les quitter sur une note joyeuse” (my

emphasis, *Message to Abby Heraud*). During this meal Franck places “une grosse cocotte au milieu de la table et repartit chercher une louche” (573). Although we are unaware of the contents of the pot on the table, the culinary build-up throughout the novel leads us to believe that it is something delicious to be shared by everyone, especially because Franck “était en cuisine depuis l'aube” (573). This description supports the ideals of the Slow Food Movement showing the audience how change has come about since the novel's opening bringing people together around a good meal.

The recent migration back to food as a sit-down meal to be consumed with others is neither unique to the fictional world nor to France. Strasser continues her analysis highlighting points in the novel that further purport the current popularity of the Slow Food Movement worldwide affirming that “Côté cuisine, le roman livre un discours sous-jacent et continu du 'bien-manger' (...) Qu'est-ce que le 'bien-manger'? C'est une cuisine simple, authentique, communautaire et 'participative' ” (54). The Slow Food Movement ties into the idea promoted in Gavalda's novel. It began in response to the growing number of fast food chains and it is now a worldwide not-for-profit organization striving to promote “good, clean, and fair food” for all under the assumption “that everyone has a fundamental right to pleasure and consequently the responsibility to protect the heritage of food, tradition and culture that make this pleasure possible” (Slow Food). The Slow Food Movement, due to its desire for equality, also aligns itself with feminist ideals in that everyone should be entitled to certain privileges no matter who they are or where they were born. In view of the French relationship to food, it is only normal then, to see a contemporary French novel bolstering these current ideals.

The French are typically recognized for their pleasurable relationship with food, enjoying it as opposed to obsessing over health. Due to this, they have a higher overall fat intake than many other cultures, notably Americans, but nonetheless suffer from fewer health related problems such as heart disease; this is referred to as the “French Paradox” (Rozin 164). Food, and more importantly, good food, is the nucleus of almost all important events in *Ensemble c'est tout*, spanning a variety of contexts, demonstrating the importance of self and group identity with respect to relationships towards food. Gavalda sets the stage repeatedly allowing food to speak to the readers underscoring the significance of the moment and essentially promoting the principles of the Slow Food Movement, a pleasurable relationship to food, and a shift in gendered behavior around the structure of the French “repas.”

### **The backdrop: The French “repas”**

In his 1988 essay “Le Repas comme institution,” Nicolas Herpin delineates several criteria that constitute the “traditional” French “repas” such as the schedule of mealtimes, a multitude of courses, the (re)unification of members of a group, the location of the meal (traditionally in the kitchen or dining room), as well as the purpose of the meal (ordinary daily meals compared to celebratory feasts) (504). He also discusses how this institution appears to be on the decline noting a variety of ways that it is being de-structured (Herpin 504). In keeping with these traditional aspects, pivotal moments in *Ensemble c'est tout* revolve around many of these elements. Furthermore, the portrayal of each character is closely tied to his or her relationship to food and to others. Professor Jean-Jacques Boutaud from the University of Bourgogne highlights the importance of eating as an “évènement social qui se noie, aussi bien souvent, il faut le reconnaître, dans le bavardage mondain, superficiel et artificiel, ou se fige dans

l'habitude, la lassitude, la froidure ou le glacial d'une relation mal vécue à table” (109). Boutaud and Herpin's research coupled with psychology professor Paul Rozin's, uphold Rozin's claim that:

In the evolution of culture, by the evolutionary process of preadaptation, food comes to serve functions other than nutrition, which puts its nutritional aspects in a broader and more complex context. Food becomes a social vehicle, allowing people to make social distinctions and to establish social linkages, for example, by sharing food. Food assumes symbolic functions and takes on moral significance (...) And food becomes a medium for aesthetic expression, giving rise to elaborate food preparations and cuisines that cannot be justified solely in terms of nutritional factors. (108)

Their collective research gives greater insight into the character's relationships with others around the French “repas” in both the structured and (de)structured contexts featured throughout the novel.

Acts of everyday commensality in the text represent the previously mentioned shift from individualized unhealthy eating habits to more social and conscientious eating practices. In the beginning neither Camille nor Philibert eat much, and what they do eat is not particularly “good” food. Their first rendezvous takes place around a meal, although Camille “ne savait pas cuisiner” so she provides her guest with an assortment of fish and vodka that she has ordered out from a restaurant, neither of them eating much (79):

Comme d'habitude, Camille but plus qu'elle ne mangea...Philibert ne mangeait pas beaucoup lui non plus...Ils n'étaient pas bavards. Ils n'avaient plus l'habitude de

partager leurs repas. Le protocole ne fut donc pas très au point et tous deux eurent du mal à se dépêtrer de leur solitude...Mais c'était des gens bien élevés et ils firent un effort pour se porter beau. (81)

Their first gathering is rather awkward due in part to the fact that they are neither one accustomed to spending much time with others, especially during mealtimes, and eating alone is socially stigmatized. This idea is supported by social psychology professor Esthelle Masson, who inquires “qui mange seul si ce n'est celui qui n'a personne avec qui manger?” (116). Masson also suggests that those who eat alone regularly are typically those cast aside by society (hermits, savages, and banished vagabonds top her list of solitary eaters), their marginalization being a key factor in their solitude (118). As discussed in Chapter One, Camille, Philibert, and Franck are all marginalized characters; however, the steps they take are corrective ones, because as quoted in Boutaud, Masson states “ce que révèlent ces figures de mangeurs solitaires c'est que, pour ne pas manger seul, il ne suffit pas d'avoir quelqu'un d'autre avec qui manger ; encore faut-il que ce dernier soit reconnu digne d'être commensal” (Boutaud 119). Camille, despite her disinterest in food, perceives Philibert as worthy of sharing her table no matter how meager it is. Having established this connection, a lasting bond is created and maintained between them throughout the novel. Although solitary mealtimes continue throughout the novel, they are due mainly in part to divergent schedules, and this representation of isolation is not unusual according to Herpin who states:

Le repas « traditionnel » réunit les membres du ménage ou les membres du groupe de travail. Dans les « nouvelles formes » d'alimentation, les emplois du temps sont de moins en moins coordonnés de façon à faire du repas une activité

commune. Le repas n'est plus l'occasion privilégiée de communiquer entre membres du ménage, entre collègues ou amis. (505)

The lack of conviviality during these ordinary meals is understandable then, with all of the characters having different schedules, occupying positions which Herpin refers to as working class (518). There is however, a noticeable change in the quality of what is being consumed, beginning with Franck's broths when Camille is ill:

L'odeur, le fumet plutôt, de ce bouillon, l'empêcha de gamberger plus longtemps.

Mmm, c'était merveilleux et elle eut presque envie de mettre sa serviette sur sa tête pour s'en faire une inhalation. Mais qu'est-ce qu'il y avait là-dedans? La couleur était particulière. Chaude, grasse, mordorée comme du jaune de cadmium...Avec les perles translucides et les pointes émeraude de l'herbe ciselée (...) L'enfance en moins, elle se trouva dans le même état que Marcel Proust : « attentive à ce qui se passait d'extraordinaire en elle » et termina son assiette religieusement, en fermant les yeux entre chaque cuillerée.

Peut-être était-ce simplement parce qu'elle mourait de faim sans le savoir, ou peut-être était-ce parce qu'elle se forçait à ingurgiter les soupes en carton de Philibert depuis trois jours en grimaçant, ou peut-être encore était-ce parce qu'elle avait moins fumé mais en tout cas, une chose était sûre: jamais de sa vie, elle n'avait pris autant de plaisir à manger seule. (143)

This scene underscores not only the shift in solitary eating from one of necessity to one of pleasure, while also emphasizing the change in the quality of food being eaten. Camille has never really enjoyed food, let alone eating all alone. However, Franck's bouillon, simple as it

may be, gives her great pleasure due to its quality. Quality meals such as these continue and progress throughout the novel, with Franck preparing meals for both Camille and Philibert; the daily menus include filet mignon with prune sauce accompanied by fresh fettuccine among other delectable and often simple meals (359). As noted in the previous scene with Camille, there is also a tendency for this “good” food to be related to a rustic, country atmosphere, in which Gavalda alludes to Proust's *Combray*.

The Slow Food Movement promotes similar ideals encouraging people to buy fresh and local, supporting farmer's markets and the like because fresher products lead to better meals. An idea that is further supported by Strasser who states:

Ce roman s'inscrit dans les préoccupations nutritionnelles [sic] contemporaines dans la mesure où il développe un discours que l'on pourrait qualifier de «moral» sur le bien-manger, les bons produits et l'élimination du grignotage. Mais il va aussi à contre-courant d'un discours nutritionnel qui serait trop dirigiste, trop contraignant : il défend le plaisir de manger des choses simples, familiales, authentiques. Une cuisine qui n'est ni chère ni recherchée, mais qui est synonyme de bien-vivre et de savoir-vivre... ensemble. (56)

Strasser's analysis not only coincides with the goals of the Slow Food Movement, but also with the research that has been done with regard to the “French Paradox.” Eating well French-style is less a question of counting calories and following strict dietary guidelines than it is eating a variety of foods and enjoying them with others. While the shift in *Ensemble c'est tout* may not address all of the issues that have contributed to the decline of the French “repas,” Gavalda sets a

good example of what it means to eat well while portraying this current movement away from the meal as an institution and emphasizing the importance of commensality even on a daily basis.

In addition to these daily meals which are slightly more mundane, are the exceptional meals shared sporadically throughout the novel, including several dinners shared in restaurants and other grand occasions. There are four momentous occasions that demonstrate a variety of circumstances for “feasts” of celebration: New Year's Eve, the hog roast, Easter, and Philibert's wedding.

The New Year's Eve feast is an outside perspective on what “bien-manger” and sharing in commensality means to different people. It is at this point in the novel that Camille helps Franck as an extra worker in the kitchen for the evening. The scene is not only exceptional because of the manner in which it is orchestrated, giving the audience a glimpse into the strenuous and grueling behind the scenes effort that goes into a large-scale feast; we also see Camille's aversion to acts such as these by her judgment of the situation: “Quel bordel...Mais comment faisaient-ils pour avaler tout ça? A quoi ça rimait de se remplir la panse à ce point? Ils allaient exploser! 220 euros, ça faisait combien? Presque 1 500 francs... Pff... Tout ce qu'on pouvait s'offrir pour ce prix-là (...) Dans quelques heures, tout serait terminé, consigné, digéré et évacuée..” (248). In this way, the feast is viewed as wasteful, unnecessary even, due to the cost in comparison to the amount of time that it will last. However, the fact that there is a dining hall full of people who are there to consume the meal proves that there are those who are willing and able to pay such a price simply for a meal. Despite her reasoning, Camille realizes this fact and claims that she is illogical in her thought process due to her own aversion to food (249). Nonetheless, Camille appears to have the stronger argument of what constitutes a good meal when Franck's daily



culinary abilities on a much smaller budget are taken into consideration; as Visser concurs, “no matter how much money you have, there is only so much you can eat” (3).

The following example of the hog roast is a perfect contrast to the New Year's Eve dinner. Franck brings Camille to the farm of some family friends for an annual hog roast, persuading her with the argument that “il faut voir ça une fois dans sa vie...un jour ça n'existera plus,” alluding yet again to the recent decline of traditional French meals such as this (323). Gavalda sets the stage here around what she refers to as “Club Med à la ferme” with a variety of activities that allow everyone to participate in the day and a notion of conviviality occurring around this singular event; the process takes the entire day, starting at dawn, with the men outside to kill and clean the pigs, and the women inside preparing sausages, pâtés, andouilles, and rillettes (345). Finally that evening, everyone comes together to enjoy the fruits of their labor:

Le soir, banquet. Vingt-deux autour de la table et du cochon à tous les étages. Les queues et les oreilles grillaient dans la cheminée et l'on tira au sort dans quelles assiettes elles allaient tomber. Franck s'était défoncé, il commença par poser sur la table une espèce de soupe gélatineuse et très parfumée. Camille y trempa son pain, mais n'alla guère plus profond, puis ce fut le boudin, le pieds, la langue (...)  
Après ce fut le tour des desserts, chacune ayant apporté une tarte ou un gâteau et enfin, la goutte... (346)

This depiction is clearly more enjoyable for Camille than the New Year's feast due to the simplicity and conviviality of it, though she again does not eat much. Whether her appreciation stems from the fact that she does not partake in the New Year's meal but works to prepare it,

while not having to work to prepare the banquet for the hog roast (she spends the day recording the events by drawing), and enjoying it all the same is debatable. However, there is a very clear cut distinction in the ambiance of both festivities, and the author's partiality appears to lie yet again in the more traditional, rustic, convivial act of commensality rather than in the expensive and elegant restaurant meals that take place in the city. This is further evidenced when Franck takes Paulette and her friend Madame Carminot out to dinner at the restaurant where he completed his apprenticeship, a quaint place on the Loire river, and his former boss tells Franck “les Parigots y savent pas manger (...) Là-haut tu cuisines pour ta feuille de paye...Reviens donc par ici (...)” (275).

In keeping with this notion of simplicity, Philibert and Suzy's wedding is an act of commensality at its most discrete. Typically, exceptional occasions such as weddings and other ceremonious events are accompanied by a feast. However, the “feast” that takes place following the wedding is only a small picnic shared amongst friends (534). Despite the humbleness of the meal, there is still much to be shared due to the gathering of friends to mark this momentous occasion in the newlyweds' lives. This scene supports Strasser's claim that the book “défend le plaisir de manger des choses simples, familiales (...)” (56).

In a much more elaborate feast, Franck prepares a delicious meal at Philibert's parents to show them a thing or two about hospitality. Following a disastrous meal the night before, the next morning by eight o'clock, “Franck était déjà revenu du marché et orchestrait son invisible valetaille” (513). With the help of Paulette, “on leur sert des asperges avec une sauce mousseline à tomber par terre puis vint le pâté de Pâques AOC Paulette Lestafier, puis un carré d'agneau rôti accompagné de tians de tomates et courgettes à la fleur de thym, puis une tarte aux

fraises et fraises des bois avec sa chantilly maison” (514). This example proves yet again that an exceptional meal need not cost an exorbitant amount nor be comprised of luxury items in order to be enjoyed. In this case, the splendor of the meal has little to do with caring about those with whom the table is being shared; all the same, a fine meal is shared around traditional elements of the French “repas.”

In contrast to the everyday and exceptional acts of commensality are the instances that as Boutaud notes as “la lassitude, la froidure ou le glacial d'une relation mal vécue à table” (109). The scenes with Camille and her mother are precisely those of a strained mother-daughter relationship which is acted out around food. This suggested coldness is obvious during a lunch date between Camille and her mother. Camille arrives to the typical onslaught of bitter remarks pertaining to her appetite, her mother criticizing “(...) c'est affreux. Mais je n'ai pas les moyens de t'inviter à la Tour d'Argent, figure-toi. D'ailleurs, même si je les avais, je ne t'y emmènerais pas...Avec ce que tu manges, ce serait de l'argent jeté par les fenêtres...” (48). Later on in the same scene, her mother chastises her saying “Regarde-toi...On dirait un squelette...Si tu crois que tu donnes envie aux garçons...” (50).

The meal, instead of being a moment of sharing and satisfaction, takes on a dreadful tone causing both women to feel the strain upon their already difficult relationship, eventually ending in a quarrel. According to Boutaud this situation is considered “symbolic contamination,” or the “risque de devenir comme cet autre personne avec qui je mange ; risque de lui ressembler, de m'identifier ou de me confondre avec lui, à force de le reconnaître à ma table, d'être à sa table et de partager ce qui nourrit notre relation” (111). This hypothesis is yet another reason Camille does not enjoy seeing her mother, getting together with her only every few months when

possible. Not only do their gatherings repulse her do to her mother's criticisms, there is likely a very real underlying fear for Camille that she will someday become like her mother if too much time is spent with her.

The current societal disregard for the institution of the “repas” and representation of tensions in relationships are ironically demonstrated in the case of Paulette, Franck's grandmother. The lack of the “repas” as an institution is visible within the institution of the rest home. While visiting her one evening, a staff member brings her dinner. Franck is not only astonished that the meal is brought to her room instead of taking place in the dining hall, but he is also disturbed by the fact that they serve dinner at five-thirty, both circumstances that go against the traditional aspects of the meal (169). Because of his vocation as a chef, as well having grown up with Paulette's “bonne cuisine,” Franck examines this “repas” with disdain and disbelief asking:

– C'est quoi là? Du poisson?

– Non, on dirait plutôt un gratin de pommes de terre, tu ne crois pas?

– Arrête, ça sent le poisson...Et ça, c'est quoi, ce truc marron, là?

– Une compote...

– Non?

(...) Ils en étaient là de leur enquête quand la jeune femme réapparut:

– Ça y est? C'est bon? Vous avez fini?

– Attendez, coupa Franck, mais vous venez juste de l'apporter y a deux minutes...Laissez-lui le temps de manger tranquillement quand même!

(170)

Through this somewhat comical exchange depicting “mysterious” rest home food, we see in fact that Franck is outraged by the lack of tradition with regard to the manner in which food is served to the residents. Also, it is disheartening for him to see his grandmother's care (or lack there of) in the hands of staff who would rather force the residents to eat quickly, poorly, and alone in order to leave work early than to take the time to prepare a decent sit-down meal for them (170).

Following this incident, food becomes a means of revolt for Paulette, who, resenting the fact that she is unable to return home, refuses to eat in the hope that Franck will take her out of the rest home and back to her home (350). It becomes a point of contention between them, worsening a situation over which they neither has any control and placing additional strain on their relationship.

Furthermore, as Gavalda states, “the characters in the novel are like members of a theater troupe”—food is therefore also used as an element of decor, staging, and foreshadowing at various intervals in the novel. Because we are gendered due to social constructions, and food is one of the most prominent constructions surrounding us, it is not only plausible, but extremely likely for our relationships with and around foodstuffs to contribute to our gendering.

When Philibert brings Camille to live with them, Franck approaches him soon after in the kitchen one morning asking “T'as deux minutes, là? Faut qu'on se parle...(135). The scene that follows sets the stage for the following chapters in the novel:

Philibert prenait toujours du chocolat au petit déjeuner et son plaisir, c'était d'éteindre le gaz juste avant que le lait *déborde*. Plus qu'un rite ou une manie, c'était sa petite victoire quotidienne. Son exploit, son invisible triomphe. Le lait retombait et la journée pouvait commencer: *il maîtrisait la situation*.

Mais ce matin-la, *déconcentré, agressé même*, par le ton de son colocataire, il tourna le mauvais bruleur. Le lait se carapata et une odeur déplaisante envahit soudain la pièce. (135, my emphasis)

The use of the term “déborder” here along with the mention of Philibert controlling the situation only to be interrupted by Franck, gives the impression that things are about to go awry. The foul smelling odor that occurs evokes thoughts of sourness, and the milk being prepared becomes personified, occupying a very real place in the kitchen during their discussion. Franck questions Philibert about Camille out of concern for their dynamic as well as out of fear of what the verb “envahir” suggests: he is afraid that Camille, much like the milk in the saucepan, will take over and force him out of the niche he has created for himself in the apartment.

In a similar scene, Camille and Philibert discuss Franck's aggressive behavior although their discussion is a more civil exchange than the one between Franck and Philibert. Nevertheless, the setting in the kitchen alludes to more than what is cooking in the current conversation between the two characters. As the conversation comes to a close Camille “se leva pour aller éteindre la bouilloire” (159). While this scene lacks many of the more descriptive verbs present between Franck and Philibert, the symbolism of the tea kettle allows readers to interpret underlying tensions that are “boiling,” leaving us to think that Camille is perhaps in “hot water,” that things are about to get “steamy,” and that if she or Franck are unable take the heat then they need to get out of the kitchen. However, Camille demonstrates more control in the situation because she is able to intervene before things get too messy.

Later on when Franck has begun to have feelings for Camille, the atmosphere between them changes and this is evident in a variety of scenes with food as the backdrop. Initially this

begins by his leaving leftover broths and other morsels for Camille at the apartment and eventually it is much more overt, such is the case with the heart shaped steak that he prepares for her (432). Additionally, during the evening Franck prepares his crêpe batter for Mardi Gras his true feelings are evidenced through his confection because late that night in the kitchen, “comble de la dévotion, il battait au fouet pour ne pas les déranger, murmura quelques incantations secrètes et la laissa reposer en paix. Il la couvrit d'un torchon propre et quitta la cuisine en se frottant les mains. Demain, il lui offrait des crêpes Suzette pour la retenir à tout jamais” (436). In this situation the food takes on a magical aspect, portrayed as a spell to be cast not only in order to keep Camille around indefinitely, but to make her fall in love with him. Furthermore, these illustrations exemplify George Bernard Shaw's declaration that “il n'y a pas d'amour plus sincère que celui de la table” (Boutaud 61).

Finally, the time surrounding Paulette's death also builds upon Boutaud's suggestion of “une relation mal vécue,” which emphasizes the apparent tensions between people as acted out around their consumption (or lack of) food. This is due in large part to the loss of Franck's grandmother, but it is also due to the difficulties between Franck and Camille at the time. In opposition to moments of celebration where food is essentially the backdrop to a festive scene and is indulged in by the characters, Paulette's death is, with cause, a moment during which both Camille and Franck refuse to eat or drink when invited to “prendre un petit remontant” following the interment (550). Interestingly, while it is typical for the bereaved to refuse food during mourning, eating is a necessary part of life in order for those who grieve, like anyone else, to remain alive. This leads to consumption solely for subsistence as opposed to eating for pleasure, something that is evident after Paulette's services: “Elle leur prépara un thé et sortit un quatre-

quarts du four. Elle se présenta. Elle était la fille de Jeanne Louvel (...) Elle les laissa boire et manger tranquillement” (551). Franck and Camille eat a small snack with a complete stranger, something atypical since as humans we tend to pick and choose very carefully with whom we share our mealtimes (Boutaud 110).

Every act of commensality discussed above displays some or all of the traditional aspects of the French “repas,” demonstrating how Gavalda sets the stage with food not only as a means of decor, but also in a way that promotes a return to many of the former values of the institution of the French meal.

### ***Cooks and Chefs: Hierarchies in the Kitchen and at the Table***

In addition to promoting a restoration of many traditional aspects of the French meal in today's society, Gavalda also demonstrates a shift in hierarchical values typically associated with meals and their preparation. Race, class, and gender are all closely linked to the institution of the “repas,” with long-standing demarcations between the domesticity of cooking and the profession of cooking. The distinction between domestic food preparation and professional cooking dates back to as early as the eighteenth century when “French professional chefs were at pains to differentiate their work from mere domestic cookery. Domestic cookery was (...) seen as primarily the preserve of females, whether paid women cooks or housewives cooking for their own families” (Mennell 200).

In a similar vein to her subversion of gender roles, Gavalda upsets hierarchical boundaries typically associated with domestic and professional cookery, doing so rather discretely. The structure of the novel maintains some of these long held notions regarding male chefs and female cooks which feminist historian Lois Banner explains stating that



(...) women have not been great chefs, just as they have not been great artists, or professionals, or whatever else the popular mythology would add, for a variety of complex historical, psychological, and sociological reasons. Women have written cookbooks and have created new dishes and new cuisines. They have served as cooks in well-to-do homes and in restaurants when men are not available. But throughout the ages, a status-conscious public has when possible preferred to be served by men (...) In general women have not been great chefs because the role has not been available to them. (201)

In addition to Banner's analysis, professor Michael Owen Jones affirms, “who prepares the food, serves it, and cleans it up; where people take their meals; the shape of a table; and who sits where and talks about what—all these convey roles, values, and ideas about gender, hierarchy, and power” (130). Every instance of commensality in *Ensemble c'est tout* displays either a hierarchical power struggle which Gavalda attempts to invalidate, or exemplifies equality and sharing.

These arguments appear to be upheld and challenged in the text. Franck's occupation would seem to reinforce the idea that only men can be great chefs in the professional arena. However, his love of cooking stems from his appreciation of Paulette's homemade country meals during his youth. This is something that Paulette acknowledges herself but refuses to take full credit for, telling Camille, “Je lui ai donné le goût, j'imagine...Mais les grandes choses, ce n'est pas moi...Je lui ai appris la cuisine de ménage...Des plats simples, rustiques et bon marché...” (399). Paulette frequently devalues her own ability although Franck praises it, suggesting that she come to Paris to meet Philibert. He emphasizes, “tu lui feras ton gâteau de pommes de terre,”

a proposition which Paulette refuses claiming, “Oh, non pas ça...c'est trop rustique” (44). Her opinion is influenced due to the fact she worked for years as a domestic cook not only in her own home, but later in a “maison bourgeoise,” where she often brought Franck having no one else to look after him (400). This division of labor and the way in which it is (de)valued by members of society is evidenced through Franck's reminiscence of Paulette's cooking, likely due to the time that they spent together in the kitchen and the meals that she prepared for him; however, Paulette diminishes the significance of her “savoir-faire” due to its connection to her social status.

Both Franck and Paulette prepare meals for others as a means of making a living. What separates the work that they do is the prestige that goes along with Franck's job as a chef and the lack of consideration that Paulette was given (and gives herself) as a domestic cook in a bourgeois home. Ironically, despite the social distinction of their work, they both do very similar jobs. Paulette, as a wife and grandmother, worked outside the home in order to help support the family but still needed to prepare meals for her family after work. Mennell suggests, “for the working wife who in practice still has to carry the main responsibility for feeding the family, cooking is certainly not simply part of 'free time'. It is necessary, unavoidable activity. Yet eating is generally a pleasurable activity, and cooking in anticipation of that pleasure *can* itself be pleasurable” (263). Paulette's relationship to her own cooking then is paradoxical, in that she takes great pleasure in preparing things for Franck, but she takes no part in the credit given to her.

Franck enjoys slightly more appreciation than Paulette for his work. He occupies a high ranking position in the kitchen and having important diners come into the kitchen to praise his culinary skills. However, at the end of the day, much like a housewife, he leaves work only to

go home and prepare meals for Camille and Philibert (44). In a sense, despite the social setting or the value attached to the work done, Gavalda highlights the fact that when all is said and done, a job is just a job. Paulette may have been just a “cook,” but it is thanks to much of her know-how that Franck is in the privileged position where he finds himself. This situation, although parallel in many respects, creates a hierarchical distinction of labor provided. Paulette is simply referred to as a “cook,” while Franck is a “chef,” occupying the third highest position in the restaurant where he works (238). While it could be argued that it is anti-feminist to have a man acclaim the skills of a woman in order for them to be appreciated, it is necessary to take into consideration the generational differences between Franck and Paulette which largely contribute to this scenario as well as the “woman's work” that Franck takes on willingly in his personal life.

In addition to this, class distinction is also a subject that is discussed outside the realm of paid cookery when Camille, Philibert, Franck, and Paulette are invited to Philibert's parents' house for Easter. During the meal, the atmosphere among Philibert's elite family is very tense. Everyone is quite uncomfortable, especially Paulette, who “n'ouvrit pas la bouche de la soirée. Pendant plus de quinze ans, elle avait servi à table chez des gens de cet acabit et elle était trop mal à l'aise pour mettre son grain de sel sur leur nappe brodée” (510). Her discomfort stems from the hierarchical traditions to which she is accustomed, feeling that she is not good enough to share a meal with the same class of people who employed her for so many years, yet again devaluing herself because of her social status. However, as evidenced in this chapter, it is not a question of social standing that designates how guests are received or served. Philibert's family, despite their aristocratic heritage, serves a meal that Franck describes as “dégueulasse” remarking that:

(...) Bouffer de la merde avec des couverts en argent massif et servir une infâme piquette dans une carafe en cristal, je dois être con mais y a un truc qui m'échappe (...)  
c'était même pas bon en plus! J'ai vu la boîte vide dans la poubelle...C'était du Leader Price! T'y crois, toi? Habiter dans un château pareil avec des douves, des lustres, des milliers d'hectares et tout le bordel pour bouffer du Leader Price! Je comprends pas là...Se faire appeler *monsieur le marquis* par le garde et te foutre de la mayo en tube sur de la macédoine de pauvre (...) (511)

Franck's diatribe expresses quite clearly the anticipation that the family's class should have some effect on their culinary know-how. Obviously he has certain notions of what constitutes a decent meal, and regardless of one's social status, it should be easy to provide guests with an affordable, good quality meal, as he does for them the next day. Here again Gavalda is advocating eating well despite hierarchies such as class.

The notion of class and eating well is further evidenced by one of the novel's side characters, Mamadou, a Senegalese immigrant and colleague of Camille's. The two frequently work together cleaning offices and while Camille bears the brunt of the labor, she does so because Mamadou is so corpulent that she is unable to easily maneuver around the tiny cubicles (313). The irony of the situation is not only due to the physical comparison between Camille and Mamadou, but also the fact that Mamadou occupies a lower social status than many of the other characters in the novel and is much more generous although she has less materially and financially. She lives with her extended family, thirteen of them total, living together in what can only be considered an "HLM" or "habitation à loyer modéré" (23). Nonetheless, Mamadou remains optimistic, cheerful, and spirited about life responding to Camille's comments about the

need for her to lose weight systematically with the retort “C'est ça...Et toi? Quand est-ce que tu viens manger le mafé poulet à la maison?” (314). This offer to host Camille despite a lack of space for her own family, as well as the financial means to feed her shows an incredible amount of sharing on the part of Mamadou as well as the underlying implication that if Mamadou is in need of losing weight, Camille needs to gain it. This again proves that race and class, while longtime factors in defining “good” cuisine, are no longer such strong indicators of what it takes to be considered a good host or serve a fine meal.

### ***Gender in the Kitchen: Men as Caregivers, Women and Appetite***

There is a long held belief in Western society that a woman's place is in the kitchen, and women have been preparing meals and acting as caregivers in and out of the home for centuries. Women have even been prepped to catch a man, most of them growing up learning the adage that “the way to a man's heart is through his stomach.” Often tied to this idea of woman's place in society is the link between femininity and appetite. *Grosso modo*: men can (and are expected to) have one, women should not. This can be seen when examining societal standards of beauty, which ebb and flow, recent years conveying a Western feminine ideal that is extremely slender. All one has to do is turn on the television or flip through a magazine—there are images everywhere of what constitutes “beauty.”

According to feminist scholar Carole Counihan “the problematic relationship between women and food is invariably linked to women's difficulty in being women—to their feelings of powerlessness and sexual ambivalence” (76). Gavalda is quoted in an interview on “Upstairs at the Square” stating that Camille is not anorexic because “it’s a real disease, or suffering, I think she has just lost her appetite” (*Upstairs at the Square*). While the subject of anorexia has become

trendy in contemporary literature, Gavalda refutes this assumption concerning Camille's character. Nonetheless, it is hard to believe the underlying psychological reasons for Camille's "lack of appetite" cannot be interpreted as an eating disorder.

There are typically four main reasons given in case studies to typify eating disorders such as "confusion over sexual identity and sexuality; struggle with issues of power, control, and release; solitude and deceit; and family strife" (Counihan 79). In addition to this, there are a variety of other gendered habits relating to food and food habits that are exhibited throughout *Ensemble c'est tout*. Food and its symbolic links to identity are addressed by Jones who asserts that "the first point about food in relation to identity is that, according to widespread provisioning mythology, many foodstuffs bear the mark of gender, which in turn greatly influences the behavior of people" (139).

Feminist scholar Lenny Vartanian claims, "The notion that 'you are what you eat,' which may have been taken literally in centuries past, still permeates modern Western society" (267); in consideration of this adage and its implications, Camille eats nothing, or very little. If we interpret her eating through this adage, then Camille is in fact, nothing, and Gavalda attests to this giving readers the impression that she is a ghost, somehow flawed in her existence: "Vivante', c'est ça? C'était ridicule, Camille Fauque n'était pas vivante. Camille Fauque était un fantôme qui travaillait la nuit et entassait des cailloux le jour" (27).

Due to her aversion to food, Camille is the character who provides the basis for this feminist analysis regarding gender and relationships to food. She is herself cognizant of the fact that her weight is a problem, noting that, "(...) j'ai un problème de voltage...Je ne sais pas comment dire...J'ai souvent l'impression qu'il me manque un bouton (...) Je vais toujours trop

loin dans un sens ou dans un autre...J'arrive jamais à trouver la bonne balance et ça finit toujours mal mes penchants” (207); she is simply overwhelmed by the loss of her father, her dysfunctional relationship with her mother, several disastrous love affairs, and her failing art career to cope otherwise. Much like real life stories of women suffering from anorexia, Camille is lacking something more in her daily life. Kim Chernin, who suffered from anorexia, addresses a similar issue in her autobiography, writing: “what I wanted from food was companionship, comfort, reassurance, a sense of warmth and well-being that was hard for me to find in my own life, even in my own home (...) I was hungering, it was true; but food apparently was not what I was hungering for” (151). Camille tries to sustain herself, but it is clear that it is not an easy task, illustrated by her trips to the supermarket: “Elle entra dans le Franprix en bas de chez elle et se fit une violence pour acheter des choses a manger...Elle tourna plusieurs fois au tour des rayons avant de se décider, acheta des bananes, quatre yaourts et deux bouteilles d'eau” (28). Furthermore, Camille is described throughout the first half of the novel as non-existent and alone, an idea that resonates in a scene of the novel around Christmas: “Elle crevait de solitude. Je crève de solitude, se répétait-elle tout bas, je crève de solitude...” (213). This scene mirrors Camille's feelings to those of Chernin's further supporting the notion that she suffers from more than just a “lack of appetite.”

Applying Counihan's feminist frameworks to the information on Camille Fauque leaves little room to dispute the fact that she is afflicted, and that her character could easily be considered anorexic. Calculating Camille's Body Mass Index (BMI) according to the description given regarding her height and weight also supports this argument. She is so extremely underweight that she is suffering from both amenorrhea and anemia (17, 121). The World Health

Organization's data suggests that a healthy BMI falls between the range of 18.5 and 25 ("Global Body Mass Index"). Camille's BMI is 16 which is severely underweight according to both the WHO and Thibaut de Saint Pol's recent study for France's Institut National d'Études Démographiques (4). In keeping with de Saint Pol's findings, he notes that, "although obesity has increased rapidly in France since the 1990s, being slender seems to be very desirable among women, so norms for body fatness are low and there is strong pressure to remain thin" and the desired BMI of French women falls somewhere around 19.5 (1). These findings are not singular. Psychologist Paul Rozin also notes, "in all four countries [USA, Japan, Flemish Belgium, and France], females, unlike males, felt that their current body appearance was fatter than the ideal" (176). These findings are not surprising considering that women in Western society are, for the most part, held to strict standards of beauty which are projected through an array of popular media, proving yet again that real-world feminist issues such as body image and health still permeate the world around us and merit examination and discussion.

Despite Gavalda's refusal to classify Camille as anorexic, there are numerous examples in the text that lead readers to infer that this is nonetheless the case; however, Gavalda provides a gradual and healthy solution, allowing Camille to regain her appetite and slowly attain a healthier weight thanks to the help of Franck. In much the same way that Camille and Franck's relationship displays characteristics of androgyny and egalitarianism in Chapter One, it also provides further gender analysis with respect to the character's relationship to food and one another. In a situation inverse to societal expectations, it is Franck who tries finding the way to Camille's heart through her stomach. This contributes yet again to subverted gender roles, with Franck assuming a typically feminine role, and Camille, despite her ultra-feminine attitudes



toward food in the beginning of the novel, acquiring more masculine qualities where food and love are concerned.

In in order to reaffirm his masculinity, Franck often behaves just as Jones' research suggests: “sometimes men who assume the role of cooking (...) masculinize their assumption of 'women's' work by using profanity profusely during food preparation” (141). This behavior is visible in his everyday speech as well as in the kitchen. Because he is the only one to do the cooking in the apartment, he often reprimands Camille and Philibert for their “bad” behavior in the kitchen yelling:

(...) en ouvrant la porte de la réfrigérateur parce que les aliments étaient mal rangés (...) renversant la théière et en les traitant de tous les noms – *Putain!* Mais combien de fois il faut que je vous le dise? Le beurre, ça va dans un beurrier, sinon ça prend toutes les odeurs! Et le fromage aussi! Le film alimentaire c'est pas fait pour les chiens, *merde!* Et ça, c'est quoi? de la salade? Pourquoi vous la laissez dans son sac plastique? Le plastique, ça abime tout! Je te l'ai déjà dit Philibert ! Elles sont où toutes les boîtes que je vous ai ramenées l'autre jour? Bon, et ça? le citron, là...Qu'est-ce qu'il *fout* dans le compartiment à œufs (...)  
(156, my emphasis)

This scenario exemplifies gendered behavior in the kitchen. Franck, already conscientious of his manhood, enumerates a considerable amount of kitchen knowledge that could cause others to see him as less of a man; he therefore attempts to balance this out through more “masculine” behavior tossing things on the table, yelling, and cursing. Despite his role as a caregiver Franck

is constantly reasserting himself as a man through his speech acts which remain “tough” while his physical acts and sentiments are in fact much “softer.”

In addition to gendered behavior in the kitchen and around food, individual foodstuffs demonstrate gendered symbolism and meaning in our society. Jones supports this idea as well noting, “for centuries red meat has been associated with strength, power, aggression, and sexuality” (139). In a similar vein, he also states that “blood carries aspects of violence, arousal of the passions, and bestiality itself” and that due to this symbolism in relation to identity “one literally *becomes* what one eats” (140). When Philibert initially takes Camille in, the doctor who examines her prescribes run of the mill acetaminophen and vitamin C, but tells Philibert “tout cela ne remplacera jamais une entrecôte saignante, un bon plat de pâtes, des légumes et des fruits frais” (121). Camille's weakened health is the primary reason behind the doctor's recommendation, however, in consideration of Chernin's remarks and Jones' analysis, the underlying factor appears to be Camille's need for more worldly pleasures. Camille begins to eat more and more as the novel advances. She regains her physical and emotional health and it is largely thanks to Franck's meals and affection that she is able to do so. In this sense, as suggested by Jones, she is becoming what she eats—eating meals prepared for her out of love, and finally returning that love to Franck in a cathartic scene towards the end of the novel:

Ouvrait les vannes, se mouchait dans sa chemise, pleurait encore, évacuait vingt-sept années de solitude, de chagrin, de méchants coups sur la tête, pleurait les câlins qu'elle n'avait jamais reçus, la folie de sa mère (...) la distraction de son papa (...) le plaisir de la faim (...) Et les doutes, et son corps qui se dérobaît toujours et le goût de l'éther et la peur de n'être jamais à la hauteur. (566)

By the novel's close, despite battling with her weight throughout, Camille has virtually recovered thanks to her relationships with Philibert, Paulette, and especially Franck. Her relationship to food has ameliorated due to her relationships with those around her. She has become so comfortable in her own skin that she even expresses a desire in the final scene to have a child, saying to Franck while playing with her nephew, “Oh, Franck...Je voudrais le même,” denoting not only the wish to have a child, but the willingness to consume food in order to nourish it (573).

Franck maintains his role as caregiver in his relationship with Camille, reassuring her when he makes the choice to stay with her as opposed to taking a high paying career in England, “(...) on va y arriver... On fera pas mieux que les autres mais on fera pas pire non plus... On va y arriver, je te dis (...)” (567).

Both characters begin the novel in rather fixed categories due to their gendered behavior. However, by the novel's close, Gavalda has freed them from their gendered shackles, allowing them to inhabit various spaces and roles. The shift in the characters' behavior is evidenced not only through their relationships to one another, but also in how those relationships are influenced by the role of the French “repas.” In much the same way that Gavalda eliminates binary logic through characters who “undo” gender, she “undoes” notions that have long since been associated with food. While food acts as a gendered agent due to the social constructs surrounding it, it is only logical that food can be “undone” in a similar fashion to gender. Although Gavalda purports ideals associated with the Slow Food Movement as well as the institutionalization of the French “repas,” a statement she made during our correspondence

strikes a chord when considering the “undoing” of food: “On peut vivre de n'importe quoi! (...) C'est l'amour qui donne du goût à tout cela” (Message to Abby Héraud).

## CONCLUSION

Anna Gavalda's writing is exemplary of contemporary feminist writing, addressing a variety of prominent women's issues such as health and body image, interpersonal relationships, and aging. At the same time, she challenges other feminist issues in a more subversive manner, creating characters that are representative of more than just the normalized masculine/feminine depictions that have long been presented in Western society.

Like many contemporary female authors, Gavalda does not consider herself to be a feminist author. In fact, she says: "Il ne faut jamais rien regarder avec un œil 'féministe' ou 'antiféministe', il faut regarder le monde qui nous entoure et les œuvres des artistes avec un œil d'être humain curieux, c'est bien suffisant" (Message to Abby Heraud). However, simply because the author does not openly acknowledge the feminist aspects of her own work does not mean that it cannot in fact be considered feminist literature. Shirley Ann Jordan addresses this same issue in her recent work noting that often authors who purport feminist ideals do not consider their work to be feminist literature (Jordan 18).

Due to the lack of scholarly work surrounding Gavalda, there is much that is currently open to interpretation. In this thesis, I have pursued my research and analysis from an interdisciplinary feminist standpoint focusing on only a few of the more prominent feminist issues displayed in the novel. Further research on issues such as gender and aging as well as female solidarity would be interesting topics relating to this novel. Furthermore, comparative studies with other works from Gavalda could supplement the field of research on her works, as well as bolstering the argument that Gavalda is in fact a contemporary feminist writer.

*Ensemble c'est tout* confronts issues still present in feminism such as the need to move beyond the limits of binary gender, as well as creating a just space in society that is inclusive of its members. The third-space that Gavalda has created strives to not only incorporate a plurality of genders, promoting the benefits of androgynous individuals, but also to create a space that is centered on equality and collectivity, promoting “spatial justice.” Because of the importance of the French “repas” where all of these gender issues are concerned, Gavalda has emphasized the necessity for an “androgynous kitchen,” a meeting place where good people and good food merge to encourage acceptance and change.

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## Appendix - E-mail Interview with Anna Gavalda

In September of 2009 I contacted Anna Gavalda's publishing house, Le Dilettante, with my intent to complete my Master's thesis on the novel *Ensemble c'est tout*. Much to my surprise, I received a response with Gavalda's personal e-mail address enclosed. I then contacted Anna Gavalda with the questions I had concerning *Ensemble c'est tout* as well as the lack of biographical information available about her; a series of delightfully nonchalant and friendly e-mails ensued. Below are my questions from the initial e-mail, indicated by "AH" (Abby Héraud) followed by Gavalda's responses, or "AG" (Anna Gavalda).

**AH:** Je vous ai entendu dire pendant une interview avec RTL (dimanche 8 mars, 2009) que vous vous trouviez « machiste » (après avoir terminé *La Consolante*). Que pensez-vous de ces termes « machiste » et « féministe »? Est-il (in)utile de regarder votre travail sous un œil féministe?

**AG:** Il ne faut jamais rien regarder avec un œil « féministe » ou « antiféministe », il faut regarder le monde qui nous entoure et les œuvres des artistes avec un œil d'être humain curieux, c'est bien suffisant.

**AH:** Concernant les « messages » dans les livres, vous dites que c'est inélégant d'essayer de les faire passer et que vous préférez « montrer l'exemple ». Cela semble laisser l'interprétation ouverte à vos lecteurs. Qu'en direz-vous à un(e) lecteur(ice) qui « erre » dans leur interprétation de vos œuvres?

**AG:** Je lui dirais que s'il « erre », c'est la preuve que nous ne nous sommes pas compris et qu'il perd son temps avec moi et que –heureusement pour lui/elle- il y a plein d'autres livres à

lire, et bien meilleurs que les mieux ! Je lui conseillerai de lire « Guerre et paix » de Tolstoï par exemple. Là, si on erre, c'est que l'on n'aime pas lire...

**AH:** Dans *Ensemble c'est tout* Camille n'est pas, selon vous, anorexique mais simplement une femme qui a perdu l'appétit/le goût de la vie. Vous dites même que cela est très difficile pour une femme française (connaissant la nourriture française, je comprends). Par contre, Camille fait un maigre 48 kilos pour 1m73, cela n'est pas une femme très saine selon beaucoup de critères. Commentez s'il vous plaît.

**AG:** Elle grossit petit à petit tout le long du livre. A la fin, elle exprime même l'envie d'avoir un bébé (soit encore 10 kilos de plus !). Ce n'est pas sa maigreur, le sujet de mon livre, mais les mains qui se tendent autour d'elle pour lui enfourner des cuillères dans la bouche. Et ces cuillères, ce n'est pas uniquement de la nourriture, c'est de la gentillesse, de la douceur, de l'humour...

**AH:** D'ailleurs, qu'est-ce que ça veut dire pour vous le fait d'être française et ne pas avoir faim?

**AG:** La dépression est une maladie qui ne connaît pas les frontières, j'imagine... Quand on n'a plus l'appétit de vivre, que l'on soit Française ou habitant du Pôle Nord, cela ne change rien au problème.

**AH:** C'est seulement en craquant pour Franck que Camille retrouve le goût de la vie (et l'amour). A votre avis est-ce que cela montre qu'au fait : *On ne peut pas vivre d'amour et d'eau fraîche* ? Ou que justement vivre d'amour et d'eau fraîche est faisable?

**AG:** On peut vivre de n'importe quoi (whatever !) de pain, de fruits, de morues séchées, de sauterelles grillées, de sachets lyophilisés, de cuisses de grenouilles, de hamburgers, de chili con carne, de curry, de mint jelly ET d'amour. C'est l'amour qui donne du goût à tout cela.

**AH:** Qu'est-ce que vous essayez de démontrer vis-à-vis les rangs sociaux? C'est souvent ceux qui ont le moins (Franck, Camille, Paulette, et même Mamadou) qui sont les plus heureux (comparé à la famille de Philibert par exemple).

**AG:** Non. Je n'essaye pas de démontrer quoi que ce soit. Je raconte juste une histoire et la seule chose que j'essaye de faire, c'est que le lecteur ait envie de tourner la page...

**AH:** A la fin du roman vous avez créé un espace (le restaurant de Franck) où tout le monde peut se retrouver – Que pensez-vous de le rassemblement de ces personnages si différents et le fait de s'unir tous autour de la nourriture?

**AG:** C'est une fin un peu cliché, comme un grand banquet de fête. Je voulais que tous les personnages (y compris la vieille dame qui est morte mais dont le portrait est visible par le lecteur) viennent saluer les lecteurs à la fin de l'histoire. Comme une troupe de théâtre. Je voulais les quitter sur une note joyeuse...

**AH:** A propos de votre vie personnelle, quand êtes-vous venue aux États-Unis comme Au Pair? Et quand avez-vous étudié à la Sorbonne? Nous pouvons trouver des informations biographiques assez facilement, mais elles sont un peu vagues. Vous êtes une de quatre enfants. Êtes-vous la cadette, l'aînée, ou tombez-vous quelque part au milieu de vos frères et sœurs?

**AG:** Je suis venue en 1987 et 88 (God, such a long time ago...) et j'ai étudié à la Sorbonne dans les années 90. Les informations sont vagues parce que je suis moi-même assez

vague. Je suis l'aînée, mais je trouve que mes deux frères et ma sœur sont plus sages (wise) que moi et j'écoute toujours respectfully leur good word.