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Tip text: *General*

It won't be surprising if cultural historians look back on the first two decades of this century as The Era of Crazy Oral Gratification. I'm speaking of the fetishization of food, of cooking and eating, of watching other people cooking and eating, that has become omnipresent across all platforms, all media, all screens and all palates in our great nation.

"Top Chef," "MasterChef," "Cake Boss," the entire Food Network. Travel shows that are mainly about watching foreign people eat foreign food. Barbecue madness. Raw and locavore. The taco truck as the new gourmet temple, Artisanal Whole Foodism, fonio as the next quinoa (don't tell me you didn't know about fonio!).

Along with all of this has been the transformation in the status of the chef from behind-the-scenes pot-stirrer to culinary rock star. And in this particular cultural revolution the original rock star, the Elvis of bad boy chefs, is Anthony Bourdain. He achieved his breakthrough with a sensational book called *Kitchen Confidential*, a surprise worldwide best seller about the frenzied, obscenity-laced, sex-and-drug-fueled back-burner ballet of tattooed pirates who brandish spatulas like swords. He went on to be a fixture on the Food Network, on "Top Chef," paired with domestic goddess Nigella Lawson on "The Taste," while somehow maintaining a globe-trotting food and travel show on CNN called "Parts Unknown." [...]

His post-Vassar career included a stint at the CIA—not the one in Langley but the prestigious Culinary Institute of America—and then some wild summers at Cape Cod lobster trap restaurants, a dive into the downtown depravity of SoHo kitchens, addiction, recovery and the launch of the restaurant he's most associated with, Les Halles, an old-fashioned French workingman's place that grew to be a worldwide chain and still serves a great cassoulet in its original location on Park Avenue in New York City.

And then the book. This is the other side of Bourdain: the serious writer. And the other side of his signature gonzo literary style is something that has been less recognized: *Kitchen Confidential* is one of the few books in recent American literature to capture the communal ecstasy of Work. American writers rarely write about work anymore. Not tech work, quant work, digital work, but real work, manual work, crew work, often skilled but sweaty. Bourdain's depiction of the kitchen crews he worked on, their mad camaraderie and the kind of inspired improvisational feats of high-heat athleticism they performed are tours de force. They reminded me of the early sequence of Theodore Dreiser's great novel *An American Tragedy*, where a naive kid gets his first job as a hotel bellboy and Dreiser captures the adrenaline-fueled world of the backstairs hotel hierarchy.

He has a theory about this I hadn't considered. That the whole seismic food culture shift isn't American superficiality but the New World learning what the Old World has known for

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centuries. “We’re just catching on,” he says. [...] “I think we’re reaching our human potential, food-wise.”

Ron Rosenbaum, „Anthony Bourdain’s Theory on the Foodie Revolution”, *Smithsonian Magazine*, July 2014