

Independent scholar

Cath Davies

Milk glass (in conversation with Brooke Zeligman's *Feast*)

Biographical note:

Cath Davies is currently completing her PhD dissertation, 'Curdle: notes on a practice and performance of induced lactation', in Sydney University's Media and Communications department. When not engaging in academic acts, she can be found playing across a variety of stages, magazines, short films and gallery spaces.



Fig. 1. Brooke Zeligman, *Milk (Mothers)*, *pate de verre*, detail from *Feast*, at the Moore's Building Gallery, photography by Michael Schwarz.

high tea

set the scene for the feast. *filigree plates and saucers and bowls and platters and jugs and serving utensils, all piled up and spread across and spilling over every available surface.* I am small and sit underneath the table, peeping out and catching glimpses of ornate doilies and austere linen napkins draped carefully over the edges; crystalline teaspoons linger, partially dissolved against fine bone cups, chipped with pursed lip prints and conversational tooth marks. *human breastmilk has twice the sucrose content of that from a cow, our sweet teeth are equal parts calcium and saccharine.* mother takes her tea with two sugars and milk. if the temperature's not quite right then a little sugar lingers at the bottom of the cup undissolved, and the very last sip tastes like ambrosia and tannin. *just milk for me thanks, I'm sweet enough already.*

milk glass

the feast looks like milk ice and milkshakes and milk teeth, but doesn't contain a drop of milk (*milk glass contains no milk at all, it is an opaque or translucent milky white or coloured glass. the white colouring may be made by the addition of bone ash*). *the feast is carefully cast pate de verre, glass delicately pasted over moulds and cautiously removed like bandages over freshly healed wounds, always leaving a little trace of adhesive or taking a sliver of skin.* I remember more than once painting my

young hands with craft glue, the pleasure of peeling it away. when it dried it came off broken always, but taking the form of my epidermis all its creases pores and knuckles – a perfect white death mask likeness of my lifelines. *fabric might be stained yellow-brown by rusty pins or perspiration or piss or spilled tea or light exposure or being washed in iron-rich water.* later I would use beeswax hot and dripping, savouring the sting but the imprint was rarely as precise, and the yellow made me think of old anatomical models and jaundice and decay. *everything at the feast echoes afterbirth lochia's placental palette, lochia rubra bright red with blood cells, lochia serosa brownish or pink with serous exudate and erythrocyte and leukocytes and cervical mucus, lochia alba white-ish or yellowy white and made of epithelial cells and cholesterol and fat.*

the laws of liquids

I could eat you all up, suck at your marrow and slurp at your gelatinous soup. molten glass acts like toffee, stringing and stranding, like saliva thick as honey licked straight from the comb, viscous, the seductive stickiness clogging my oesophagus, amniotic fluid filling my lungs, I am drowning in molasses and spit. *glass is generally not described as a liquid, but rather an amorphous solid, (although some argue its liquidity as it lacks a first-order phase transition). despite the fact that the atomic structure of glass shares attributes with a supercooled liquid, glass is inclined to act more as a solid below its glass transition temperature.*

pick your poison

if I knew you were coming I'd have baked a cake, an airy sponge its molecular structure on show, stuffed with a thick layer of cream and strawberry jam. served up in the sunroom with a scalding hot cuppa, poured from a tarnished silver pot by sun-spotted hands. *champagne glass was modelled on the bosom of some French Louis's lover or another. (Liebfraumilch, literally 'beloved lady's milk', is a semi-sweet white wine produced from the vineyards of Church of Our Lady.)* letdown feels like small shards of glass drawn through the intricate framework of milk ducts – as if your mirror-image had been smashed inside your breasts and was now being slowly drawn out. *in old detective novels and crime shows ground glass is added to the victim's food, slowly scraping away at the gut's lining until internal bleeding finishes him off.* the way to a man's heart is through his stomach. poisoning is always women's work *(the manmade chemical bisphenol A, or BPA, is used in polycarbonate plastic, the material used to make many plastic food containers including baby feeding bottles and concerns over BPA's safety – it is reported by some sources to have hormone-like effects on the reproductive system – has increased the sale of glass bottles in recent years).*

feast

warp and weft I weave you, spin you a feast from my curds and whey. (*reusable glass milk bottles are commonly used for the home delivery of fresh milk by milkmen; milkmen are often credited with the paternity of children who do not show obvious visual similarities to their presumed fathers.*) I stitch you up my glory box, replete with tatting and embroidering and lacemaking and other forms of fancywork. the parish ladies taught me to sugar starch my homespun wares (*3 parts granulated sugar to 1 part water; saturate pre-moistened piece in the mixture then smooth with a hot iron, always careful not to let them dry out too quickly lest they flake, crust or scab*). my fingerbones feel arthritic, clumsily I manipulate the intricate threads and filaments. cast on, knit one, purl one. *knitting bones and christening gowns, by hook or by crook.*

dessert

what a tangled web. trapped, stuck to your flypaper. *strangers always have the best candy.* sickly sweet, sticky sweet, my sweat glistens studded with diamond dewdrops. engorged, my mouth blows ruby-raspberries, bubbles bleed from one corner. split lip, spilt milk, tongue twisted. *suck every last morsel of your feast, the crumbs caught in my throat make my glass eye water.*