Title: 'Babette's Feast': A Parable of French Politics and Cookery from the Age of Revolution (1789-1871)

Abstract: Despite its popularity as a "food film" and icon of the Slow Food movement, "Babette's Feast" (1986) disappoints. In its saccharine treatment of the relations between Babette and her employers, Alex Gabriel's film fails to honor the spirit of Isak Dinesen's original story (1950). This paper reassesses Babette's story as a parable of specifically French politics and cookery. By replacing Babette in the lineage of the La Communarde of 1871 and her ancestors, the républicaines of 1789 and 1848, we will see how the final feast scene is none other than a republican banquet. "Babette's Feast" allows this genealogy to come into focus because its heroine is not only a radical pétroleuse (one of those women supposed to have set Paris on fire), she is also and primarily a great chef. And even if the politics of her past were muted by the film-maker in 1986, the relationship between food, fire and revolution is too potent a mix to ignore today.