

# Bread, the Staff of Advertising (I)

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When one purchases a pair of pants, a chair, a bed, a loaf of bread, a car or a tube of toothpaste, one is not just buying clothing, furniture, food or useful objects, one is acquiring to a great degree their inherent symbolic significance (Röhrich, 1978: 114-115)

«A loaf of bread», the Walrus said, «is what we chiefly need» (Lewis Carroll, «The Walrus and the Carpenter», *Alice Through the Looking Glass*).

## INTRODUCTION

In an earlier article, «Proverbs, the *Pater Noster* and Public Image. Advertising Rhetoric in Portugal Today» (Odber de Baubeta, 1995a), I noted some of the wide range of meanings generated both by the word, and the visual image of bread. Here I propose to consider advertisements in which the «inherent symbolic significance» of bread, and proverbs, are used to sell anything but bread. To this end, I have assembled a corpus of advertisements grouped together with two main criteria in mind: thematic relevance and linguistic interest. The advertisements have been taken from magazines, newspapers, colour supplements, professional journals and promotional calendars published in the United Kingdom, Portugal, France, Spain, Italy and Uruguay over the last decade.

What is the «inherent symbolic significance» of bread? Most commonly it suggests care-giving, nurturing, and affection, while for others it may connote community as well as communion. As we might expect, adverts for bread, bakery goods, bakeries and baking equipment inevitably rely on images of loaves or slices of bread. More surprising, however, are the numerous instances where bread appears in advertisements for apparently unrelated products and services. In addition, as other commentators have observed, copywriters frequently depend on proverbial sayings, set phrases and wordplays. To facilitate this analysis, I have devised a series of categories in which we may group advertisements that in one way or another depend on the representation(s) or connotations of bread:

1. Advertisements for bread, flour and baked goods.
2. Advertisements for bakeries and bakery equipment.
3. Advertisements for food products that are spread on bread or eaten with bread.
4. Advertisements for healthy eating; educational materials for primary school teachers, nutritionists, etc.
5. Advertisements for products or services related to bread.
6. Advertisements for products or services unrelated to bread.

A close scrutiny of selected adverts from each category will reveal the often astonishing creativity of the copy writers who make use of an extremely broad range of possible approaches and techniques. These are often interrelated, and include:

1. the use of biblical allusions;
2. the use of proverbial discourse, closely related to category (a);
3. recourse to nostalgia, or the recreation of a supposed social Golden Age, which is achieved through sepia-coloured images and old-fashioned vocabulary;
4. history and tradition as selling point;
5. modernity as selling point;
6. associating the product or service with some highly valued object or person, myth or tradition – cultural iconicity;
7. fairy tale or nursery rhyme associations;
8. humour;
9. rhetorical devices such as synecdoche, where the part represents the whole;
10. capitalising on the most commonly accepted connotations of bread, which cross national, political and cultural frontiers: warmth, caring, nurturing.

## ANALYSIS OF THE CORPUS

### 1. Bread, flour and baked goods

This first category is the most straightforward. Of course we are going to find images and descriptions of bread in advertisements for loaves, rolls, croissants, pastries, etc. The main problem that faces manufacturers and advertisers is how to make their product stand out from all the others. What differentiates one brand of bread from another? How do you get consumers to notice, then choose your product in preference to someone else's?

#### Hovis

The first group of advertisements to be singled out for mention are adverts for Hovis Bread, worthy of a dissertation in their own right. Rank Hovis (the flour manufacturers) are renowned for their campaigns, a constant in British advertising for the last hundred or so years.

In 1973, Ridley Scott's television ads for Hovis bread won numerous awards, and also brought the quintessentially nostalgic *largo* from Dvorak's New World Symphony to the attention of the general public. The emphasis was on tradition, family values, the recreation of a lost way of life.

Twenty years later, in 1993, a series of Hovis print adverts purveyed nostalgia through sepia-coloured images and old-fashioned, colloquial language. The tone is familiar, conversational; the 'story' is always narrated from the point of view of an old(er) person, looking back to his or her youth. In the series of advertisements, the text is printed in 'handwriting', to the right hand side of the picture, like an entry in a diary, or the jottings that accompany photographs in an old family album. Each advertisement takes as its title or heading a set phrase which is open to more than one interpretation.

#### *Sunday Best*

I've a theory. The older we get, the more we relive childhood.  
 Myself, I love to recall those old memories...  
 Walking back from church, with the smell of fresh baked bread to guide us home.  
 Father switching on ITMA on the wireless, mother fussing out her best teapot.  
 Toasting bread over the coals on a long fork – that was my job.  
 There was a real art to getting it evenly brown.  
 Old memories, stirred up by the taste of a country white loaf from Hovis.  
 A sturdy white slice that tastes like real bread used to.  
 Anyway, that's why I'm here with my old toasting fork crouched over a fire in a grate  
 that hasn't been lit for twenty years.

**As good today as it's always been.**

In general, in English, «Sunday best» refers to the best clothes traditionally worn for attending church on a Sunday. In this specific context, the phrase may refer to clothing, but it can also refer to the lace tablecloth and the china used for Sunday tea – the «best teapot», and, by extension, the best bread, Hovis. ITMA, *It's That Man Again*, was an immensely popular radio programme. Starring the much-loved comedian Tommy Handley, it ran from the 1930s until the mid-1940s. In terms of its reception, this programme was a forerunner of the contemporary television soap opera – everyone stopped to listen – and it undoubtedly went a long way towards raising public morale during the War.

The details of the photograph – the radio on the shelf, the clock on the mantelpiece, the magazine on the chair – are perfectly authentic. In the days before ecological awareness and smokeless fuels, when houses were heated by coal fires, people used to toast bread in front of an open fire, with a long fork designed especially for this purpose. Advertisements like this will naturally appeal to those people who remember these scenes of English life, and will perhaps spark curiosity in those who were born afterwards. The clue to the gender of the speaker is found in the photograph, where Mother is pouring the tea, Father is buttering the toast, the daughter is already eating hers, and the son of the household is putting freshly toasted bread on the table.

Finally, the phrase or slogan «As good today as it's always been», though not a traditional saying, somehow acquires the weight and status of one.

*An Honest Crust*

It's the poppies I remember, from those harvests before the war.  
 Red poppies in the corn.  
 We'd to weed them out, every one. Hard work it was, you'd get bits of wheat in your hair, down your neck, stuck to you all over.  
 What a blessed relief when it came time for dinner. Freda, the farmer's daughter, 'd bring tea round in a pail.  
 She'd just dip in a mug and pass it to us and we'd give her bunches of poppies in return.  
 Dinner was cheese and maybe a pickled onion, with doorsteps of fresh farmhouse bread. I'll always love the taste of crusty wholemeal.  
 Speaking of which, have you tried Hovis' Wholemeal with kibbled malted wheat?  
 There's no mistaking that glorious taste of harvest, washed down with Freda's thick, hot, sweet tea.  
 Freda's tea? Well yes. You see, I married her.

**As good today as it's always been.**

This advertisement follows the same pattern as the previous one, with an old man looking back to his youth. This text is also something of a love-story, since the speaker married the farmer's daughter who brought him tea while he was labouring in the field. Although there is no explicit mention of the Bible, one is conscious of a biblical sub-text, where labourers are worthy of their hire, where Jacob served seven years in the field in order to marry Rachel (Genesis 29). The «honest crust» of the title refers to the bread he eats for dinner and the wages he is paid for working in the field, earned by the sweat of his brow, so to speak and to Hovis Bread in general. We are also reminded of certain passages of the New Testament: «And it came to pass, that he went through the corn fields on the sabbath day; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn» (St Mark 3:23).

*Best in Show*

Mum'd bake her heart out, before the village Summer Show.  
 'I'm using a malted brown flour', she told us, 'from a recipe discovered by monks in the days when people knew what was good for them'.

'It's got a lovely nutty taste, and I'm adding flaked malted wheat, grains, to give you lot something to nibble on'.

On that day, 'twas no surprise that the loaf went up for 'Best in Show' against Tina Dade's chrysanthemums, old Maurice Mallyon's marrow and Farmer Diplock's gander.

Most sporting, they were. Tina and Farmer Diplock both asked for the recipe. Maurice said he'd never tasted bread like it.

No more did I for years afterwards, until one day I picked up a loaf of Granary from Hovis, baked with special flour same as my mum's.

Just one wonderful malty bite and once again I heard the uncontrollable excitement in the judge's voice.

«Aye», he said, «this'll do».

**As good today as it's always been.**

The heading refers to the title given to those who have competed successfully in village shows or fêtes, entering their homegrown vegetables, baking, or prize animals. This still happens in the present day – even in industrial Birmingham, there is the annual Bournville Festival, held every June, with traditional Maypole dancing and prizes awarded for the best plants, flower displays and home baking. The narrator's mother's loaf has triumphed in competition not only against other loaves, but has been judged superior to assorted flowers, vegetables and livestock. And by extension, Hovis bread is also the «best in show». There is also more than a touch of humour in this advert, deriving from the discrepancy between 'uncontrollable excitement' and the very plain words «Ay, this'll do».

#### *A Fair Exchange*

Famous for her bread, my gran was.

And when the smell of baking crept out along the lane, folk used to bring all kinds of things to swap for a nice warm loaf.

Gran's pride was a loaf she baked with all kinds of different grains and seeds.

I can remember clear as anything the taste of millet and rye and poppyseed. To tell true, I thought I'd never enjoy bread like that again.

But I've tasted a loaf that Hovis make, called Country Grain.

It's made with wholemeal, same as Gran's. And sprinkled inside and on top and all over with seven kinds of seeds and grains just like she used to.

In fact, it tastes so like hers they must've got hold of her recipe. I just wonder if anyone ever brings them salmon.

**As good today as it's always been.**

The title of this ad is part of a popular saying, «Fair exchange is no robbery». We should observe that it is often enough to state only the first half of a maxim, taking for granted that readers or listeners will supply the remainder themselves. Making this cognitive effort may help the customer remember the brand more easily. This is certainly the basis for a Portuguese advertisement for SICAL coffee: «Grão a grão. Literalmente».

The exchange alluded to in the heading is between a housewife and a man who looks more like a poacher than a gamekeeper. She stands in the door of her cottage, wearing her apron and holding a loaf of bread, while a man in a coat and hat proffers a large fish. Beside him sits a terrier or hunting dog, and beside her, a small child. In the background, a boy pushing a bicycle looks back over his shoulder, so that it is not clear whether the «I» of the text is the grandson or the granddaughter. As in the previous advertisement, there is a clear biblical subtext, created in this instance by the foregrounded juxtapositioning of a loaf and a fish.

The Hovis advertisements try to recreate a mythical golden age, in an England that survived the First World War, when life was less complicated, cottages had thatched roofs and roses around the

door, housewives baked their own bread and family values prevailed. Although none of the four advertisements makes an explicit mention of religion or religiosity, each of them contains an implicit reference to Christian beliefs and practices. Thus *Sunday Best* reminds us of the Sabbath with its quiet domestic rituals, *An Honest Crust* has Old and New Testament resonances as well as the intensifying adjective «blessed». *Best in Show* refers to a recipe discovered by monks, and *A Fair Exchange* uses image rather than text to suggest the miracle of the loaves and fishes. The overall effect of these ‘hidden’ allusions is to confer authority and respectability on a product which is the result of mechanised mass-production in factories.

In the late 1990s Hovis continue to advertise on television and in the print media. The suggestion made in the current batch of adverts through the current slogan with its built-in pun, «Raised the Hovis way», is that this product is as valid as ever, to growing children, teenagers and adults. Moreover, Rank Hovis has kept pace with modern trends and technologies, maintaining an internet site where one can download clips of vintage adverts and read up on the history of the company and its products. Hovis representatives even supply T-shirts with the Hovis logo to bakers and confectioners.

#### **Sharwood’s Naan bread – bread as «other»**

This advertisement for Naan bread reflects the recent increase in demand among non-Asian Briton for ethnic food, not just in Indian restaurants, but in the home. The picture shows a pair of (female) hands tearing open a piece of Naan bread; the text seems to be an incitement to violence:

Sharwood’s stir up some passion.  
Bread shouldn’t be sliced.

If should be ripped, torn, even fought over. Liberate your senses. Free your inhibitions. Rip into a Sharwood’s Naan bread, hot and steaming fresh from the oven. In plain, Peshwari, Garlic and Coriander and Tandoori flavours, they’ll stir up some passion.

This advertisement relies on the ‘otherness’ of Asian food. The implication is that if we eat it, we will somehow become less tame and sedate.

#### **Sainsbury’s**

Some time ago, the British supermarket chain Sainsbury’s published in the press a full page advertisement for some of the different loaves they bake and sell in-store. The advertisement uses the by now clichéd biblical allusion to daily bread in what has become almost obligatory wordplay:

Your daily bread is fresher when it’s baked three times daily  
At Sainsbury’s, we know that nothing sells like hot bread. (Not even hot cakes.)  
Go on, be a devil. Man cannot live by bread alone.

The advertisement begins with words from the *Pater Noster*, and ends with a quotation from Deuteronomy 8:3: «Man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live», and yet there is an exhortation to «be a devil», a set phrase meaning «to be bold or daring». The text also alludes obliquely to a popular simile, «to sell like hot cakes», meaning that something is extremely popular or in much demand.

It should be pointed out that here Sainsbury’s is not just advertising bread, but, by extension, the total range of products sold in the supermarket, and the entire chain. Very few people are capable of entering a large store – which they have to traverse in its entirety in order to reach the in-store bakery, merely to leave with just one or two purchases. The bread may account for a significant



proportion of sales, but it is also a means of attracting customers into the premises, where they will no doubt succumb to a series of temptations.

### Danerolles

During the 1990s Danone ran a campaign in France, using bill boards, to display a series of advertisements for ready-to-bake croissants. The adverts showed cartoon croissants, relied heavily on wordplays and puns, and incorporated useful baking hints:

Danerolles bien roulé  
 Pour avoir un croissant léger, roulez la pâte sans la serrer.  
 Danerolles bronzé à point.  
 Pour une cuisson uniforme, placez-le sur la grille.  
 Du four recouverte en partie d'une feuille d'aluminium.  
 Danerolles épanoui.  
 Pour qu'il soit moelleux et croustillant, n'oubliez pas  
 De le mettre à four très chaud.

Danerolles et Seducteur.  
 Doré, moelleux et croustillant, il est irrésistible. Mais si  
 Par hasard vous êtes déçu, Danone vous remboursera.

Here we encounter the temptation motif, a commonplace of contemporary (European) advertising (Odber de Baubeta, 1995b), but on this occasion the protagonist, the seducer, is a frozen croissant.

### Vandemoortele

Vandemoortele's Gold Cup Express pastry products also rely on puns to attract customers:

Danish Whirls with built-in turnaround.  
 Apple Turnovers that do just that  
 Our Croissants have caught on – have you?

In the first two, «turnaround» and «turnover» refer to rapid sales: the goods will not remain in stock, but be purchased straightaway. To «catch on» is to become popular, fashionable, but it also means to understand, to realise. These ads, published in *The British Baker*, are short but effective.

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Best in Show



A Fair Exchange

