ested in food, she jazzed up the standard recipe-instruction format, adding a live audience and sometimes booby-trapping the set.

Unfortunately, there is little to bind the ingredients of this book, which lurches from food show descriptions to interviews with producers, hosts, and cultural critics, to distracting personal anecdotes. Collins can't seem to decide whether she's writing a scholarly work or a personal ode to food culture. For example, in noting the rise of cooking as a leisure activity—a topic that warrants a book of its own—she suggests that, in the post–Betty Friedan world, women came to see their activity in the kitchen as a form of self-expression. Rather than develop this idea, she simply quotes the tag line from a Burger King ad, "Have it your way."

Collins's ultimate goal is to explain why we watch food television even if we don't make the recipes the hosts theatrically whip up. It's a good question, but she never hits upon a satisfactory answer. Her devotion to the form leads her to argue that it's because food television is unique in its ability to keep pace with decades of social trends. But as someone who also whiles away hours watching chefs sous-vide beef and fill ravioli dough, I think the reason may be simpler: We watch food shows because, like all good television, whether house makeovers or sitcoms, they tell a story. In the case of food programs, the drama is in the transformation of raw sundries into edible creations.

Renuka Rayasam has written about celebrity chefs for *U.S. News & World Report* and *Condé Nast Portfolio*, among other publications.

The Camera Speaks

Reviewed by Andrew Starner

PHOTOGRAPHY AND LITERATURE.
By François Brunet. Reaktion. 173 pp. $29.95

Walker Evans's image of Allie Mae Burroughs, a sharecropper's wife whose tautly drawn lips attest to the torments of the Great Depression, is perhaps more famous than the 1941 book in which it appears. A collaboration between Evans and writer James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* documented the lives of Alabama sharecroppers at a critical national moment. But Evans's photographs are not simply textual illustrations; indeed, Agee later admitted that he felt he was providing a book-length commentary on Evans's photographs. As a powerful work of art, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* transcends its subjects and their story to become something more than a strict documentary.

Walker Evans's photograph of Allie Mae Burroughs, a sharecropper's wife, became a powerful icon of the Great Depression.

The photograph of Allie Mae Burroughs is one of the more than 90 beautiful images that appear in *Photography and Literature*, a theoretical study by François Brunet, a professor of American art and literature at Paris Diderot University. From the moment of photography's inception in the 1830s, Brunet argues, the medium's scientific, technological capabilities were in tension with its experiential, artistic potential. As Brunet skillfully negotiates more than 150 years of photographic history, he offers a coherent argument for the emergence of photography as a kind of writing, with possibilities for narrative and fiction that exceed

its promise to capture the world as it is.

As a subject, the relationship of photography and fiction is hardly new. As early as 1840, Frenchman Hippolyte Bayard experimented with artifice in his *Self-Portrait as a Drowned Man*. (Bayard was cheated of recognition by the inventor of the daguerreotype, Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, who publicly announced his method of photographic reproduction after Bayard was persuaded to hold off on unveiling a rival process.) Bayard posed as if dead, and wrote in an inscription on the back of the photograph: "The Government, which has been only too generous to Monsieur Daguerre, has said it can do nothing for Monsieur Bayard, and the poor wretch has drowned himself."

While the 19th-century realist novel, like the photograph, is a product of that period's investment in capturing life as it appears, writers and artists have increasingly used photography to blur the line between fiction and reality. In Brunet's account, artists such as Cindy Sherman use photography not for its documentary fidelity but for its malleability. Her *Untitled Film Stills* (1977–80) is a series of self-portraits in which she depicts herself as an anonymous movie star, a seeming contradiction in terms that suggests the instability of identity. Novelists including the late W. G. Sebald have used photographs to interrupt and complicate their texts, creating a hybrid form. In *Austerlitz* (2001), which is punctuated by melancholic photographs, Sebald attempts to reconstruct a personal past and a larger history of the Holocaust with a blend of fiction and autobiography.

Reproduced on the cover of Brunet's book is a 1978 photo by Bernard Faucon titled *The Banquet*. It's a meticulously crafted scene of a catastrophic fire staged with life-size and lifelike mannequins of children, which appear in postures of terror or delight at the flames that threaten to engulf an elaborately set table, though their faces are inscrutable. The photograph has a startling eloquence, and tells a truth that belies its constructedness. This ghastly photo-fiction might be the only way to speak to the unspeakable events of the most photographed century.

Andrew Starner is a graduate student in theater and performance studies at Brown University.

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