

TTAA Episode 99 - White Soup

Zan: [00:00:00] Welcome to The Thing About Austen, a podcast about Jane Austen's world. I'm Zan.

Diane: And I'm Diane. And this episode, we're talking about White soup.

So before we get into this episode, we just want to briefly take a moment to thank everyone for being patient with us. You may have noticed a slower release schedule for new episodes of Late. And that is just because we both have had a lot going on personally. Um, yeah, it's been a lot. A lot, definitely.

So we love doing the podcast, but it is extremely time intensive and between life and jobs. We just haven't been able to maintain the same pace. I also just moved and legit did not have my microphone for like three weeks. Did not know where it was. So [00:01:00]

Zan: that does put a damper on things.

Diane: It causes some issues. And on that same note, we love, love, like truly, we love getting email from listeners and typically we do our best to reply to everyone, but we did get so behind that it kind of became overwhelming. And so we sort of just needed to be like, uh,

Zan: Clean the slate.

Diane: Clean the clean slate. Yes. So if you didn't get a reply, please know that we definitely read your email. We do always read all the emails that come in and certainly appreciated hearing from you. And if you sent in an episode request, it definitely got added to our spreadsheet. But it's possible we just weren't able to get around to replying, so.

Zan: Right, right. But we love you all. Thank you for listening.

Diane: Exactly. We love you all. Thank you so much. We, we do always love hearing from everyone. Thank you all for your understanding and, um, now we proceed to the episode. So this week we are taking a look at Pride and Prejudice. Elizabeth is at Netherfield [00:02:00] Park, tending to Jane. And, one evening, while everyone is gathered after dinner, Miss Bingley advises her brother to not go forward with his plans for the ball. Because obviously, obviously, no one could possibly wish to participate in such an event.

Zan: Oh, yeah. She has opinions. She wants, she wants her brother to know about, for sure. So this is from the text.

If you mean Darcy, cried her brother, he may go to bed if he chooses before it begins. But. As for the ball, it is quite a settled thing. And as soon as Nichols has made white soup enough, I shall send round my cards.

Done deal. I do love, I do love that he's like salty about that too. Just like, Darcy can go to bed.

Diane: Yeah. Yeah. Bingley was like, whatever. I mean, that's the great thing about their friendship is that Bingley obviously admires and respects Darcy in a lot of ways, but he's not overly intimidated by him.

Zan: Yes. Yeah, it does show that there's a genuine rapport. It's not [00:03:00] like, my world revolves around Darcy. He's like, no, no, no. The man can go to bed if he doesn't want to be there.

Diane: Possibly listens to him too much in regards to romantic advice, but we'll leave that aside for this particular moment.

Zan: Sure. In this moment, there's a healthy rapport.

Diane: According to the OED, So, white soup is, quote, soup having a white appearance or made with white stock. So mystery solved, the episode is over. We're done.

Thanks for coming.

Zan: Okay, so white soup actually goes by a lot of names. including soupe à la reine, potage à la reine, almond soup, and blancmange. According to Jane Grigson in English Food, it is, quote, a masterpiece of delicacy, which goes back to the cookery of the Middle Ages, at the courtly cookery of England and France.

Diane: White soup's basic components are described by Maggie Lane in her book, Jane Austen [00:04:00] and Sude. Lane writes, Obviously, over such a long period of time and place, there were variations in recipe. But the soup was based on veal stock, cream, and, the essential ingredient, almonds. Sometimes, rice or white breadcrumbs were added as a thickener. Sometimes, the soup was enriched with egg yolk or given texture by the white part of leeks. So this is basically cream of chicken soup with almonds as the star of the show.

Zan: Delish, right?

Diane: Yeah, Campbell's get on board.

Zan: Campbell's white soup. I mean, it sells itself.

Pen Vogler gives us a bit more detail in her book, *Dinner with Mr. Darcy*, explaining that, quote, it was found on the most aristocratic tables from medieval times onward, and earlier versions were decorated with pomegranate seeds and lemon slices.

Diane: Fancy.

Zan: Yes, gotta get the garnish going.

Diane: Yeah. There are lots of variations on this recipe we could share. But we'll [00:05:00] provide one from Katherine Brooks's 1770 book, *The Complete English Cook*. I mean, from the title alone, that's everything you need to know. So, this is from her book.

To make a fine white soup, take a leg of beef and a knuckle of veal and let them boil at least four hours, then beat a pound of sweet almonds very fine and mix them with some of the broth. Then serve with the almonds in it and sip it's a fried bread.

Zan: One of the other 18th century recipes we read also recommended serving this soup with, quote, a French roll stuck with almonds and stewed in a little of the soup in the middle. Dorothy Cashman in her study, *Stir It and Well*, it will give a high French taste. The relationship with French culinary influence in 18th and 19th century Ireland points out that recipes like this often lean into serving these dishes with a nod to that French cuisine in mind and quote, the social cachet that French cuisine [00:06:00] carried again, we want to be fancy. Yeah.

Diane: So while Cashman's article particularly points out the Irish perception of French cuisine in her study, which perhaps differs from the English perception. There's just something undeniably fancy about French cuisine during this period, and we see that even in Austen's novel.

Zan: Yeah. For instance, we see Mrs. Bennett speculating that Mr. Darcy has two or three French cooks at least just because he's so wealthy. And it also makes sense that when Mr. Bingley proposes to have white soup at the Netherfield Ball that we're supposed to be making that French connection.

Diane: According to Poe U. Rick Way's article. "'It's all the same what I eat': Jane Austen's Dietary Philosophy.' Mr. Bingley talks about the white soup, a French dish that manifests his wealth and rising social status that he plans to serve at the Netherfield Ball. White soup and ragu are [00:07:00] fashionable and fancy dishes that usually appear at the privileged class's table.

Zan: Lane takes this even further, pointing out that, " the kind of soup taken at balls is not specified elsewhere in Jane Austen, either in her letters or novels. The joke here, and Mr. Bingley is speaking humorously, of course, is that only the most elegant concoctions would suit the notions of his house guests, Mr. Hurst, who favors French cookery, and Mr. Darcy, who can, ostensibly, afford to keep a French cook. Plain, homely Nichols must therefore put forth her best, and the best soup of all was white."

Diane: We also have Mr. Bingley commenting that he will send round his cards as soon as Nichols has made enough white soup. So this is one of those scenes that gets a little bit difficult to parse because Bingley is being cheeky here, right? You know, so it's, it's not like he's really,

Zan: He's just basically sent Darcy to bed. So of course he's being, [00:08:00] he is being cheeky.

Diane: Yeah. So it's, I think there had been like some speculation about like, okay, so how long does it take to make white soup? And like, how long does it keep for? And certainly, you know, you would need a large quantity to serve at a ball and a cook would want to prepare.

You know, like enough, like enough stock in advance, but it seems pretty unlikely that Bingley is actually saying that Nichols would fully prepare that of this creamy soup in advance before Bingley even sets a date and sends around his cards. And like we often say, anything is possible, but it doesn't seem terribly plausible based off of what we know of the soup in terms of ingredients and preparation.

And how you would want to serve it. So it seems like it's probably a joke, right? Like Bingley, again, he's being a bit cheeky, but that's certainly an argument that one could make. Um, but we're just taking more of a. That Bingley is making a joke and, you know, like calling out white soup as something [00:09:00] that, that he would definitely serve at his ball as sort of an example of like, as long as we have white soup, we're having a ball.

You know what I mean? It, the rest of it doesn't matter. I don't care what Darcy thinks. Bingley could have just said that about anything, you know, he could have easily been like, As soon as all the shoe roses have been acquired, I'll send around my cards, you know? Yes. It's just, it's sort of like a thing to say about when he's basically just saying, No, the ball's gonna happen.

Like, everyone chill out.

Zan: Done deal. Yeah. Darcy's going to go to bed. We'll eat white soup.

Diane: Yeah. That's fine.

Zan: So let's talk a little bit more about where this shows up in Austen's other works. How, you know, where's, where's soup showing up elsewhere, right? So white soup does not feature specifically in any other Austen novels, but Vogler posits that quote, white soup does seem to be a highlight at ball suppers.

She goes on to point out that quote, we know that there is soup at the ball supper at the Crown Inn in Emma. Because Miss Bates gasps at the range of [00:10:00] dishes. Quote, Dear Jane, How shall we ever recollect half the dishes for Grandmama? Soup too, bless me. Vogler continues, Fanny Price goes to bed after the Mansfield ball, feverish with hope and fears, soup and negus.

So Vogler is kind of positing that there are soups available at a ball, but she kind of is implying that likely they would be white soup. We just don't, she doesn't mention it specifically, Austen doesn't. We also know that in the Watsons, Emma Watson has some soup after the assembly. So like, soups and going to balls.

They are a thing that go together, for sure.

Diane: We also know that Martha Lloyd, who was part of the Austen household, had a recipe for white soup in her cookbook. Here is her recipe. Make your gravy of any kind of meat, Add to it the yolks of four eggs boiled hard and pounded very fine. Two ounce of sweet almond pounded. As much cream as will make it of a [00:11:00] good color.

You've got your meat, you've got your eggs, your almonds. Mash that up and then just dump in that cream.

Zan: Make it look good.

Julianne Gehrler, in her annotations on Martha Lloyd's cookbook, writes, Although Jane could have sipped any version of the velvety, cream based soup at the balls mentioned in her letters, Martha's recipe is a likely candidate for the author's favorite.

Diane: And she continues, But there was another white soup recipe within the Austen family.

Zan: Ooh. Intrigue.

Diane: The Knight Family Cookbook, compiled by Mr. Austen's Kinfolk, includes a variation of white soup with vermicelli added. Readers will have to decide if they want to picture the spirited Lydia Bennett slurping up a few noodles in the presence of Bingley's aloof friend, Mr. Darcy.

Can you imagine, like, how horrified he would be if I just

Zan: Yeah. That would send Darcy to bed. He's like, I'm out. [00:12:00] I cannot.

Diane: Well, with that delightful image in mind We will leave off for this episode, but if you have ever made or tried white soup, or are planning to make one now, you know, you're inspired by this episode.

Zan: We've given you some recipes to try, right?

Diane: We definitely want to hear all about it.

Zan: Yes.

Diane: You can find us on Instagram at the thing about Austen and on Twitter at Austen Things. You can also check out our website, the thing about Austen.com, and email us at thethingaboutausten@gmail.com and you can also check out our merch for the podcast on Redbubble.

Go to AboutAusten.redbubble.com

Zan: stay tuned for next episode, episode 100, by the way, and we will be talking about Jane Austen's house in Chawton with guest Lizzie Dunford.

Diane: Thanks for listening.

[00:13:00] Bye!