For centuries, human beings have used food as a way to communicate concern for others, cultural values, and feelings about relationships. In Karen Ackland’s short story, “Root of Constancy,” and in Guy de Maupassant’s classic piece, “Waiter A Glass Of Beer!,” the reader is treated to a culinary exploration of human relationships. The authors utilize repetition, symbolism, and descriptive language to demonstrate how food illustrates the connections between people through difficult times.

Both Ackland and de Maupassant employ food in their literary works to accentuate the themes pertaining to difficulties and complexities that arise in relationships. In Ackland’s “Root of Constancy,” beets appear 22 times as an extended metaphor to display the dissatisfaction that the protagonist, Cheryl, feels regarding their relationship. Cheryl enjoys cooking beets, and desperately wishes to “make them for her husband,” however, “he doesn’t like them,” and she is aware of that. Alternately, she plans dinner parties and serves her variety of beets to other men who do enjoy them. Cheryl continuously prepares beets and is extremely stubborn. She is passionate about beets, and does not recognize her husband’s animosity towards them. Ackland demonstrates Cheryl’s compulsion to go to others for her own pleasure. Cheryl’s husband “won’t change,” and intends to “avoid vegetables,” as much as he can. He is unwilling to even try beets. Cheryl attempts to persuade him, and “his stubbornness rankles her.” Despite this, he still does not eat her beets. Cheryl cannot fathom why her husband will not eat the beets, and she ignores his distaste towards beets as she cooks beets and tries to convince him to eat beets. Beets show how both characters are ungraciously stubborn, and they are not open-minded towards each other’s preferences. This creates both tension and misunderstanding in their relationship, and compels Cheryl to seek attention elsewhere.

Descriptive language is expertly embedded in the works of Maupassant and Ackland. Guy De Maupassant skillfully exhibits colorful language to emphasize the deteriorated condition of Count Jean des Barrets in his short story, “Waiter, A Glass Of Beer!” The narrator meets a man in a beer-place who “was untidy, and bald on the top of his head, a shock of long, greasy, pepper-and-salt hair falling upon his coat collar.” The man appeared exceedingly disgusting and was not well taken care of. The narrator notes, “The bare thought of his boots, and what they might contain, made me shudder. His frayed cuffs were a deep black all round the edges—just like his nails.” Later, the narrator learns that this man is Count Jean des Barrets, a close friend from college. As a count, he should be neatly dressed and well groomed. The grotesque image that the author describes implies that des Barrets is broken down and has become apathetic to his surroundings and current style of life. He feels resignation and does not care that he simply drinks beer and smokes all day, every day. The descriptive diction also highlights the fact that his drinking and smoking habits, and his lack of activity leads to premature aging. The narrator sees that, “His wrinkled face, which was none too clean, might indeed almost have belonged to an old man. From the top of his skull fluttered a wisp or two of hair above some skin of a doubtful color.” This accentuates the fact that his lifestyle is harmful to his health. In fact, when asked his age, des Barrets replies, “Thirty-three; but I look at least forty-five.” The Count acknowledges the fact that life in cafés is dreadful, but shows no sign of changing. He has a relatively negative view of most things, and is living a miserable and uneventful life. He avoids dwelling on potentially significant topics, and this gets him nowhere. As the Count continues to evade meaningful subjects within the conversation, he is preventing himself from progressing out of this stage in his life.

Ackland and Maupassant artfully utilize symbolism to further convey theme. As the short story, “Root of Constancy,” progresses, it becomes more and more apparent that beets do not just represent beets. They refer to sexual organs and affairs. A deeper interpretation would suggest that the conflict regarding beets symbolize struggles, misunderstanding, and closed-mindedness in the married couple’s relationship. This is to say, Cheryl’s husband’s refusal to eat beets and Cheryl’s heedless and insensitive preparation of beets underscores the boorishness that sometimes arises in relationships. For example, when trying to persuade her husband to eat beets, “Cheryl tells him beets are rich in potassium but, although he is a man who likes facts, he isn’t swayed by hers.” Cheryl says beets can be good for people, yet her husband still does not eat beets. This indicates that their relationship is not in optimum shape. Normally, a person in a relationship would sacrifice something for their partner and possibly try something new and potentially unpleasant for their sake. However, one should not have to endure constant inconsideration and badgering to do something they do not want to do. In Maupassant’s “Waiter A Glass Of Beer!,” beer symbolizes Count Jean de Barrets avoiding change in his routinely monotonous life. When talking about school, de Barrets says “The students are too noisy. I shall never move again, now: Waiter, a glass of beer!” Every time their conversation approaches a potentially sensitive subject, the count changes it by getting a glass of beer. In this way, he does not resolve any past conflicts, but simply forgets reality and drowns out his problems with beer. Despite his degraded health and sad life, he does not want anything to change. The old college friend tries to help, but does not get far.

In conclusion, through reading these two short stories, “Waiter A Glass Of Beer!*”* and “Root of Constancy,” one can see that food can play a major role in defining themes of stories and creating further understanding of the story itself. He avoids heavy subjects and does not deal with his life. Descriptive language and symbolism has been used by Maupassant to show that de Barrets has had a tough time and has truly let himself go after quitting school. Through use of an extended metaphor, symbolism, and repetition involving food, Ackland reveals the disappointment and misunderstanding caused by miscommunication. As a universal subject, food becomes a versatile tool for authors to communicate theme in stories such as these.