BOOK REVIEWS

Adam Federman: *Fasting and Feasting. The Life of Visionary Food Writer Patience Gray*: Chelsea Green Publishing, White River Junction, Vermont, 2017: 400 pp., hardback, £20.00.

Reading the obituary of a successful public servant, one is sometimes struck by how long columns devoted to honest achievement are completed by the shortest of paragraphs: 'He married xx in 19... and they had three children, who survive him.' The conventions of the form have left out half the life, perhaps more than half, compressed into a dozen words. Not so this welcome biography of Patience Gray, Prospect Books' most celebrated author – whose *Honey from a Weed* has sold more copies than any other PB (except perhaps, *sotto voce*, *Building a Wood-Fired Oven for Bread and Pizza*) – by the American writer Adam Federman. It is to be published in Britain in the first week of July. Anyone who reads the often allusive *HFAW* – where her lover, and later husband, Norman Mommens is always referred to as 'the Sculptor' – and the definitely disturbing *Ringdoves and Snakes*, a much more autobiographical account of their stay on the Greek island of Naxos, would want to know more of her life (and damn those who refuse to connect the life and the work). Curiosity might be somewhat assuaged by *Work Adventures Childhood Dreams*, but the reader has to go slowly, excavating by brush and trowel not shovel, to winkle out the facts to supply an answer here and there. So all praise to the assiduity of Mr Federman, whose list of acknowledgements in search of the truth is long, and whose success in discovering the most unlikely connection is often demonstrated by a knock-out quotation or memory. This is not the place to rehearse the course of Patience's life save to observe certain features that make it of great interest to anyone who values her works, and which in some way anticipate our own entanglements with the realities of the early twenty-first century. She might stand as an exemplar of the independent woman (although the tenor of some of her relationships might speak otherwise); she successfully combined bringing up children with a career in journalism, design and authorship (although these parallel paths sometimes threw up their own anomalies); she followed her heart; she was a part of a wider European republic of letters (I often think this is the most impressive part of her life-story); she lived with the consequences of her conclusions (although there may be some who would question the inevitability of her arrangements for life: whether it was actually necessary to punish the flesh in pursuit of her goals). Adam Federman's account of all these aspects is long and detailed – occasionally, for a non-botanically inclined reader, almost too detailed – and he deals frankly with some of the difficulties that people will have in their encounter with Patience today. Her answers to various personal dilemmas were not always what our own

might have been, but he allows us to attempt a measured judgement without displaying prejudice on his own part. There are but a few occasions when I lost the narrative thread: I was not entirely clear about the commencement of the relationship with Norman Mommens, for example, but in general the details are laid out for all to follow, laying to rest any questions we might have had about the identity of Mr Gray, the father of her children; her relationship with her own family, her mother in particular; her role on the *Observer* newspaper; and how she and Norman finally settled on making their home in Puglia. He is excellent on the composition, acceptance and editing of *HFAW*: how a much longer and inchoate draft was finally taken on by Alan Davidson at Prospect Books and how he and she eventually produced the object we read today. The book is universally agreed to be a good one although Mr Federman does not touch more than fleetingly on the banalities of success in publishing terms. In other words, he has little on actual sales figures. My contention would be that sales of HFAW have been minuscule in comparison to any even moderately successful cookery book of the modern era. Does this mean it is less influential than they are? Or do we assess its value by quite different criteria? What view should we take that it has never been translated into any modern European language? It is not as though its sensibility is so utterly English as to be incomprehensible beyond these shores: look at its acclaim in America. Indeed, most of Mr Federman's witnesses for the defence of its virtues are American (and East Coast at that), perhaps because that is his own country of origin. I recommend you read this book. The life is fascinating; the style is easy; you will debate for hours the rights and wrongs of some of the situations; and you will turn to *HFAW* (or *Plats du Jour*) with redoubled enthusiasm. I did want to know more about Fiona MacCarthy's review of Patience's book in the *Sunday Times* where she called her a snob and dished out plenty of sideswipes even as she recognized its potential as a classic, particularly as the book was launched in David Mellor and Fiona MacCarthy's Sloane Street shop. I was also interested in its references to Elizabeth David and her part in Patience's writing life. ED seemed to have been entirely constructive and honourable in her dealings with Patience, so I was surprised to find a comment in Jonathan Meades's own memoir when he tells of the accessions to his mother's cookery library in the 1950s: 'Her copy of Elizabeth David's *A Book of Mediterranean Food* was the first reprint of the first Penguin edition, 1956. That author's *French Country Cooking*, a 1959 edition. *Plats du Jour* by Patience Gray (a woman whom Mrs David detested even more than she detested Peter Mayle) and Primrose Boyd of 1957. The latter looks as though it was rarely used.' One might imagine they would not have got on too swimmingly: both were strong spirits, and Patience always appeared to take a very dim view of David's *Italian Food*. My nights have occasionally been disturbed by dreams of the postman arriving in the morn with a yellow envelope inscribed in Patience's unmistakable hand.

I always feared a misdemeanour discovered, a promise unfulfilled. In fact, her letters were more often a joy, replete with opinion, assertion and lines of new thought. She had the capacity to inspire – charmingly captured in Adam Federman's account of the close group of young local admirers that gathered round Patience and Norman at Spigolizzi. I feel sure, however, that Patience would have been irritated by the publisher's decision to quote her words with American spelling.

Peter Brears: *Traditional Food in Cumbria*: Bookcase, Carlisle, 2017: 412 pp., hardback, £20.00.
Just Lancashire to go and Peter Brears will have filled his quiver of studies of the cookery of our northern counties. He has already waggled his toe southwards in his work on Shropshire, and who is to say that he will not start reeling off the repertoires of foreign shires (foreign to his present abode at least, although his professional career in museums did begin in Hampshire). This *Cumbria* is arranged along the same lines as *Yorkshire* and *Northumbria*. There is, therefore, a liberal allowance of architectural and material culture to balance the recipes, the folklore and the social history, all of course illustrated by Brears' own fair hand. Legion are the dishes explained: porridge, crowdy, spiced beef, oatcakes and bannocks, charr – potted or otherwise, a portfolio of puddings, and all manner of celebration foods. The folkloric chapters on groanings (confinement), weddings, funerals, calendar customs and Christmas to name but a few are especially rewarding. The importance of Peter Brears' work cannot be overestimated: this is the first time that English cookery has been subjected to such close inspection. My dream, when doing Prospect Books, had always been to mastermind a county by county account of the entire realm, as Pevsner and his buildings. It was not to be, but still might be achieved. Give thanks in the meantime for Peter Brears.

Jonathan Meades: *The Plagiarist in the Kitchen. A Lifetime's Culinary Thefts*: Unbound, 2017: 176 pp., hardback, £20.
A high point of last year's holiday reading was this author's *An Encyclopaedia of Myself* (Fourth Estate, 2014, £18.99). We readers sat open mouthed (but dictionary to hand) before the spate of words: clever words, sometimes ugly sounding, often needing third-party confirmation. A Meades sentence can be recognized a long way off. We enjoyed the eloquent loathing of God, faiths and their advocates, Tony Blair, Sir Stafford Cripps and Edward Heath, the astounding and apparently inevitable mortality of his childhood acquaintances, and his near-perfect recall of surroundings and personalities way back to a summer holiday in Dartmouth when five years old. Bracing and invigorating, and full of informed opinion. His new cookery book is put out by Unbound, the crowd-funding enterprise mentioned in the last

issue. If the project raises sufficient dosh, the advance to the author should happily exceed a publisher's sober advance. Subscribers, or funders, get to see their names in the last pages of the work. Meades has not enjoyed the best of health in recent months, culminating in heart surgery. Yet when, by way of promotion, he cooked a lunch at his home in Le Corbusier's *Unité d'habitation* in Marseilles, it consisted of brandade of salt cod, a parmentier of duck confit and Agen prunes and a *rebarbe* – a mixture of Roquefort, cream, butter and brandy. Perhaps, like his old friends and connections, he has a death wish. Or a mordant sense of humour. The book certainly has the latter. And great, and simple (but still requiring a level of preparational devotion), recipes: strong flavours, their character not much adrift from that projected by Meades himself. Not one to mince words, there's an instruction or command on every page, and a wide-ranging sensibility that takes in more than just food. On the principle that there's nothing new in cooking, Meades enjoys taking from all and sundry (including his father) for his favoured way of doing things. The borrower's scaffolding is clipped together with plenty of quotations in support of, or musing on the rights and wrongs of plagiarism. The spice of prejudice and strong opinion, as with all of Meades's writings, is liberally scattered over everything. Whether the experience is deepened by the author's own photography is another matter. Deeply enjoyable.

Sarah Moss: *Spilling the Beans. Eating, Cooking, Reading and Writing in British Women's Fiction, 1770–1830*: Manchester University Press, 2011; 202 pp., paperback; £15.99.
This review has been some years in the delivery. So long, indeed, that the easiest way to buy the book is on the resale market. The hardback, first published in 2009, comes in at £50. Those of you who have enjoyed Moss's fiction and other works will know she writes with grace and intelligence. This, her first book, is product of her parallel life as an academic. I only came to it because I had been reading with riotous pleasure Susan Ferrier's novel *Marriage* (1818). One chapter of Sarah Moss's study is devoted to the food described in *Marriage*, with its knockabout satire on Scottish cooking and gross ridicule of fat gourmandizing male English parasites and their love of *haute cuisine* (among many other interesting features). Moss makes sensible commentary on this and other Ferrier novels (which, regrettably, are much more difficult to obtain in a modern edition) and devotes other chapters, equally clear and enlightening, to Mary Wollstonecraft and Fanny Burney. When critics approach food in a literary context, their jargon and conclusions are often impenetrable. This is not.

Jakob A. Klein and James L. Watson, eds.: *The Handbook of Food and Anthropology*: Bloomsbury, 2016: 480 pp., hardback, £115.00.
The anthropology of food involves research into food security, nutrition,

the self, the other, ritual, kinship and gifting. It's an academic pursuit that remains ambiguous to many, yet its foundations are clear. On the one hand, anthropology is, at its most basic, interested in people and the everyday activities and occurrences that make up our days. On the other, food is an important part of our lives regardless of the amount of money, time, energy or interest one has – after all we all have to eat. For this reason, food has been part of the anthropological inquiry from the start, and continues to be an important matter of study within this discipline.

Klein and Watson, the two editors of *The Handbook of Food and Anthropology*, understand that anthropologists use food as a lens to investigate just about everything. They have anthologized significant earlier texts and articles into a giant portmanteau that may give the neophyte the necessary clothing and equipment to navigate the broader topic. The book is organized in three chapters: food, self and other. Each chapter is filled with articles that complement each other by means of a series of points of juncture – overlapping areas that make the transition from one article to the other seamless and show the range of topics that fit into this broad academic field: Food security, nutrition and food safety and finally, food as craft, industry and ethics.

Like many academic books, however, some of the articles contained in this collection read as if they were written with other academics in mind – an audience skilled at deciphering jargon-laced sentences. The best articles remain those grounded in the classic research methods of the discipline; richly detailed accounts of a specific group, in a specific place at a specific point of time. Those by Andrea Wiley, James L. Watson, David Sutton and Melissa L. Caldwell are true to the field and represent, perhaps, some of the canon of the anthropology of food.

Books like *The Handbook of Food and Anthropology* exist to prove that anthropologists continue to be intrigued by daily activities of humans around the world, and most importantly, around food. Overall, the book is well worth the space on your shelf. It makes for a good reference or foundational text, and it can easily become the new go-to textbook for courses in anthropology and other areas of social science.

Jesse Dart, University of Sydney

Carolyn A. Nadeau: *Food Matters: Alonso Quijano's Diet and the Discourse of Food in Early Modern Spain*: University of Toronto Press, 2016: 336 pp., hardback, $65.00.
Monika Linton: *Brindisa: The True Food of Spain*: Fourth Estate, 2016: 544 pp., hardback, £29.95.

In 1979 Elizabeth David made a tantalizing observation in a personal letter written to Anne Willan. Commenting on French and English recipes published in the seventeenth century, in particular those of Robert May, author of *The*

Accomplisht Cook (1660), she commented, 'I do think much more came from Spain than is usually believed.' She went on to say that she would need to study the matter at some length before offering further thoughts, then closed with the reflection, 'heavens knows of recipe books there are millions too many, but so very few serious studies of the historical aspects of our cooking.' (*Petit Propos Culinaires*, 82, January 2007).

Today, historical writing about food flourishes, but relatively little work is yet published about Spanish food culture in past centuries. This means Carolyn Nadeau's look at early modern cookery in Spain, as viewed through a literary prism, is very welcome. Readers can approach her book in one of two ways, treating it either as a compendium of extracts from kitchen manuals, fiction, drama and poetry – the Spanish originals and English translations sit together as parallel texts – or as a text that argues for a closer look at food in literature since it can be interpreted as authors' discourse on social relations.

To this end Nadeau has shaped her material around well-known debates in food history. Her opening topic is the consumption of meat, sometimes conspicuous, as exemplified by Robert May's recipe for 'Olla Podrida' (not included in this book), but more often meagre, as revealed by writers who used dietary details to pen-sketch their characters' social level and income. She goes on to examine the contrasting ways in which Spaniards took New World foods, like chocolate or the tomato, into their kitchens; next, she looks at the legacy of Spain's overlapping Muslim and Jewish culinary cultures in Christian kitchens (often, but not always, oppositional); then she summarizes early modern ideas about nutrition or medicinal eating, as the subject was framed at the time; and, finally, she explores the parallel elements of spectacle in theatre and banqueting. This gives five central chapters, sequenced around a famous sentence at the opening of *Don Quixote*. They are bookended by an opening overview of early modern cookery manuals and a final appendix of recipes drawn from them.

The book's strongest sections are those in which literary evidence is best suited to the subject matter: for example, Nadeau gives a good resumé of Spanish humoral theory, digresses with style about lettuce as an anti-aphrodisiac and is fascinating on banqueting. However, when her themes lead her into popular cookery and eating, she runs up against a mass of historical, agricultural and economic evidence that suggest some of her conclusions need qualifying. For example, she argues that lentils and pulses were not 'valued in and of themselves, but rather in function with long-established Christian dietary proscriptions'. Yet throughout the modern period most of the Spanish population, and not only its Christian communities, have valued lentils and pulses for down-to-earth reasons: they are easily resown dryland crops, they give essential protein throughout the year, they are cheap and simple to cook, and, most basic of all, they fill the stomach. Nadeau's analysis of kitchen

manuals could be similarly fine-tuned by adding in other perspectives: for example, one might query how far Diego Granado's 1614 cookbook introduced Bartolomeo Scappi's ideas from Italy to Spain, as she suggests, given that the Italian original was already held by influential cookery libraries, like that of Madrid's Royal Palace. This may help explain why Granado dropped out of favour so quickly. Nadeau's literary translation is good although the culinary vocabulary gives a few problems given the shifting regional names for foods of that time. Among those for salt-cod, for example, *bacalao* and *abadejo* survive; literature reveals these names could sometimes indicate distinct salting methods, but not different fish.

Nonetheless, all these and other details still leave a book that offers an excellent synthesis of sources. They include Cervantes, Quevedo and Lope de Vega, three of the greatest figures of Spain's Golden Age. The insistent focus on literary rather than contextualized historical analysis is polemical, running up against what we know from other cultures – for example, Shakespeare's reliability as a historical source – but it enlivens old debates.

There were few Spanish cookbooks at the time Elizabeth David wrote to Anne Willan. It was another three years before Penelope Casas, the American food writer, published *The Foods and Wines of Spain*, which became a benchmark for authors trying to pack the diversity of Spanish cookery into one book. Today the emphasis has shifted from home to restaurant cooking. *Brindisa*, a book by Monika Linton, is a hybrid offering an English interpretation of Spanish cooking by a professional food importer who is also a home cook. Linton built up her thriving business, the eponymous Brindisa, around the idea of a personal search for authentic and often artisanal Spanish foods, which she imported to London and sold to chefs and foodies able to pay top-whack price. More recently she has extended the business into a successful small chain of bars and restaurants. Her book reflects her product-led approach. Each section is opened by a chunk of general text on one ingredient or another, often imported by Brindisa – *pimentón*, *chorizo* and so on – although these are interleaved with fresh produce like lemons, chicken and garlic. The general texts vary in length; two pages are given to *pimentón*, seven to *jamón*, none to fish or seafood. Then, in each case, there follows a themed cluster of recipes.

This is a book you may enjoy for its London take on Spanish cooking and Brindisa's chefs' knack for tossing delicatessen products into modern cooking: they have contributed over a quarter of the 200 or so recipes. We do not meet them, nor, indeed, do we visit many of the food producers on home ground, which is perhaps a reflection of the way the company is developing now towards an emphasis on own-brand foods.

What the book does not offer, as claimed by its subtitle, is *The True Food of Spain*. Here are two examples. The first: San Lúcar's famous *tortillitas*, or southern chickpea-flour and shrimp street-fritters fried to wafer-thin crispness

in very hot olive oil, are ousted by a northern Cantabrian hotel recipe, *tortilletas*, in which the original liquid batter, baby shrimp in shell and frying in very hot olive oil just disappear. A second example falls a few pages earlier: *menestra*, the Navarrese market-garden dish of spring or winter vegetables, sublime at its best when cooked in olive oil, with a little liquid added if needed – simple and highly nutritional – becomes a Madrid panaché of individually blanched vegetables in a lightly flour-thickened sauce of vegetable stock decoratively finished with roasted red peppers and mint. The originals of both dishes, built around techniques for cooking in olive oil, simply go unmentioned. Cultural snippets covering the origin of tapas and the ingredients of Spanish sauces are often similarly anecdotal.

Does such rewriting of a food culture matter? Last year's Spanish twitter storm set off by Jamie Oliver's version of paella with chorizo – worth a browse for its wit, culinary points, strength of feeling and variety of voices – suggests it can do when viewed from the food culture in which a transplanted dish was born and is still alive and well. London restaurant critics may argue that such ideas about authenticity are overly protective, bogus, even nationalist and they may be right when talking about an ephemeral menu, even a tweet, but it is unnerving if not downright misinformation when rewritten versions of dishes are put in print without any reference to the original and sold as 'The True Food of Spain', especially so soon after Claudia Roden's book *The Food of Spain* showed that traditional, modern and avant-garde versions of Spanish dishes can all be held together and enjoyed with respect and understanding.

Ironically, the narrowing of knowledge that accompanies this whittling down of a repertoire to what suits tastes elsewhere is at least as unhelpful to avant-garde as more old-fashioned cooks. For if food matters, so, too, does food memory and its extraordinary potential for enriching tomorrow's dishes and menus.

Vicky Hayward

Wendy Wall: *Recipes for Thought: Knowledge and Taste in the Early Modern English Kitchen*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016: xii–312pp., hardback, £60.00.

This book uses early modern recipe books, printed and manuscript, in order to examine how the texts engaged with the intellectual and cultural preoccupations of the time. The sub-title is misleading: there is not much about the kitchen, unless we take the widest possible meaning of the term, to include the stillroom. This is not an examination of culinary history: as Wall says, her interest is not in the history of 'diet *[sic]*', but in the nature of the recipes themselves. She suggests that the interface of reading, writing and cooking produced a form of domestic activity which was not confined to practical work, but extended to an engagement with such questions as the construction

of knowledge and the scientific method, and more metaphysical speculations about permanency and mortality, abstraction and matter. This places Wall's book in line with the current wave of works about cooks' involvement in the philosophical debates of the day, such as Sean Takats' *The Expert Cook in Enlightenment France* (2011). It must be said at once, however, that Wall's book is rather better: her analyses demonstrate the interest of these household texts when subjected to close scrutiny.

Wall begins with the historical framework. The early sections (preface, introduction, and the first chapter on 'Taste Acts') offer a slightly new angle on already well-rehearsed histories of the printed works, charting recipe books' shift from the closet to the kitchen, and redefining their readership from the well-to-do in the earliest period to the servant in the later eighteenth century. There are interesting, albeit brief, developments about the dynamic nature of early modern reading practices (30–31), and about the ethos of the recipe books, such as their representations of cookery as art or household management (35–44), although these debates were perhaps not quite as 'heated' as Wall suggests. It is regrettable that these sections of the book are riddled with mistakes which demonstrate her ignorance of the basic bibliography. Her claim that 'England got in the game of recipe publication early and with great intensity' (xii) is nonsense. In Germany and Italy, recipe books were published earlier and in far greater numbers than in England – in the period up to 1599, the figures for all editions are 58 for Germany, 65 for Italy, and 24 for England. France is dismissed with the mention of a non-existent '1560 Grand Cuisiniere *[sic]*' (6). Nor were English books the first to be aimed explicitly at all levels of society and at women, as Wall asserts (6): that happened first in Germany. Wall claims repeatedly that in England, recipe books 'flooded the market' (7, 24, 67) between 1573 and 1630. For this period, *ESTC* lists a total of 16,617 publications, with 210 editions of medical and 46 of culinary works. Even if one corrects *ESTC*'s omissions in the culinary list, the total is still only 57. Well under half a percent is not 'flooding the market'. Wall failed to consult Henry Notaker's authoritative bibliography, *Printed Cookbooks in Europe, 1470–1700* (2010), absent from her bibliography. Nor has she used *ESTC*. Hannah Glasse's bestseller is said to have gone through 'over 20' editions between 1747 and 1847 (48). Over 40 would be nearer the mark, nor was Glasse 'eventually […] outed' as the author, since she inserted her own trade card and signature into the 1751 edition.

Historical accuracy sometimes goes by the board. Periods are collapsed when convenient: Charles *[sic]* Lamb and Charles Carter, whose books are dated 1710 and 1730 respectively, are enlisted into the ranks of the Restoration cooks whose texts display nostalgia for 'pre-civil war noble hospitality' (38). Such inaccuracies continue in following chapters: the *Forme of Cury* is certainly not the 'earliest extant manuscript recipe book in England' (79); the promotion

of frugality in recipe books does not really begin 'after midcentury [1650]' (68), but rather later. Seventeenth-century French classicism is said to have rejected not only the baroque, but also, with remarkable prescience, rococo (98). There are other examples of carelessness, in dates and edition numbers (51, 54), and in descriptions of contents: Robert May's recipes go much further than the 'standard puddings and boiled meats' (75) Wall attributes to him. It is odd that a book based on close readings of the texts should so often lapse into these errors. For a literary scholar, Wall can be curiously inaccurate in her use of language. Original texts are sometimes mistreated: a frontispiece caption is misquoted and misinterpreted (49); Voltaire is quoted in a poor translation from 1901 – and the translation is not by Smollett, as Wall states in her bibliography – which distorts what he wrote: Voltaire says nothing about 'high seasoning and curious dishes' (58). Later, lines from *All's Well* are given differently on facing pages (242–243). In her own prose, Wall has occasional bizarre lapses: stillrooms were never the 'provenance' of women (248); 'a phenomena' (257) suggests haste in compiling the notes, an impression which is confirmed when one finds that some notes do little to illuminate the point being made (198, n. 73, 226 n. 41). These inaccuracies are sufficiently numerous to be a source of annoyance for the reader.

The next chapters are more substantial. 'Pleasure' takes the term 'conceit', applied in poetry and the arts as well as in recipe books (to designate both the recipe and the dish) as a starting-point to argue for the intellectual as well as the practical content of recipes. The comments on food and the transformation of ingredients concentrate almost exclusively on the foods of the banquet course, with their interplay between nature and artifice, show and substance. Wall makes much of May's 'Triumphs and Trophies in Cookery' to underline the transformational nature of cookery, seeing the food-as-spectacle as itself becoming a form of narrative as the spectators discuss and relive the spectacle. She presents the more modest culinary artifice of marchpane and sugar-work imitations of nature as authorizing women to take on the attributes of the professional cook, and by reference to Jonson's Poet and Cook in his *Neptune's Triumph*, the housewife thus becomes 'a home philosopher and poet' (82). This is a sign of the author's tendency to inflate the significance of interesting parallels. Each individual observation is well-made, but one feels a little uneasy about the scope of the conclusions. Similarly, the anachronistic use of the term 'void' to refer to the early-Stuart banquet, in order to emphasize the insubstantiality of sugar-work which would be broken and eaten, seems to take word-association too far. But Wall raises numerous questions about the social, moral and even political implications of the domestic practice of confectionery. She also very rightly points out the pleasure of the edible conceits, not only at the table, but also on the pages of the cookbooks, where the reader might be alone in fully appreciating the wit of the transformation, and she emphasizes

the intimate connection between reading and cooking in the early modern period.

Chapter 3, on 'Literacies', examines the connections between learning to write recipes, and making the recipes to produce food, although again, that food is almost entirely banqueting stuff. Wall is critical of restrictive definitions of literacy – and in its standard definition, research since David Cressy's early work has shown that literacy is a spectrum with innumerable variables. Here, Wall makes a forceful case for the involvement of women owners, rather than scribes, as the writers of manuscript recipe collections, and for the function of the text as instruction for educated penmanship as well as cookery. She also emphasizes the shared tools and hand-skills involved in writing, making fanciful shapes in confectionery, and carving, and from here goes on to discuss at length the interplay between letters in confectionery (as shapes and inscriptions on marchpane) and letters in the more conventional form of printed text. She extends the notion of literacy to include women's needlework, following Susan Frye's *Pens and Needles* (2010), as well as confectionery. Whether all 'tactile handiwork' (117) in the home should be included as a form of literacy is more debatable; equally, literacy was certainly amongst the desirable attributes of the ideal housewife, but did that make literacy a form of housework? Wall's conclusion that domestic recipe writing and making subverted the regulatory nature of prescriptive manuals, is rather contradicted by her earlier demonstration of the playful nature of many of the confectionery recipes in printed books, which hardly offer an image of dull subservience to the text.

The chapter on 'Temporalities' is perhaps the least convincing. One reason is the inflated language which characterizes this chapter more than others. Hyperbole is all too evident: ideas or things "saturate" discourse or mentalities or even the world (172, 174, 179, 191, 198). Early seventeenth-century preserving did indeed seek to overcome the perishability of fruit, but this is expressed as 'preserves attenuated […] the problem of existing as beings in time' (170). Housewives did indeed need to know when to pick their herbs for remedies, in order to extract the maximum benefit from the plants, but this becomes 'humans were compelled to identify substances within their appropriate temporal location as the basis for a transformative knowledge' (171–2). Cooks were certainly expected to help keep their households healthy, with food as well as remedies, but were they 'conceptualized as preservers combating a cosmic time bomb' (189)? Where Wall deploys literary texts, her technique of extending the meaning of terms such as 'seasoning' becomes strained at times, as she strives to connect literary and domestic texts. The most convincing link is the vocabulary of alchemy, deployed as metaphor in poetry, and more directly in recipe books. But while playgoers, for instance, must have appreciated the food-based metaphors which are so frequently found in the theatre, how far did

they carry over this experience into their apprehension of domestic acts? When Wall turns to recipe writing as a form of memorialization, she deploys an array of manuscripts containing inscriptions which record the owner of a recipe collection and her family, but such inscriptions are far from universal; a point that Wall does not consider sufficiently is that manuscript recipe collections tended to change their character as they passed from one hand to another. What may have started as an organized *aide-mémoire* for making dishes and remedies may then be abandoned as such, ending up as a commonplace book containing scraps of poetry, sermons, prayers, reminiscences and doodles as well as the original recipes. Not all recipe books had a commemorative function. How far preserving food and preserving family memories are linked is a moot point.

The fifth chapter, on 'Knowledge', is more substantial. Annotations in manuscript recipe collections provide considerable evidence of women's involvement in the practice as well as the theory of cooking and remedy making, although the frequently used phrase *probatum est* does not 'saturate' manuscript recipe writing (218). And just as literacy was a continuum, so the practical knowledge derived from making shaded into the more experimental knowledge which sought to establish systemic theories from observation. Domestic recipe testing and improving also tended towards creating an ideally reliable formula. Wall draws very convincing parallels between the empirical science of the Royal Society and the textual codes imposed on the scientific community, and the activities of creating and recording knowledge in the recipes. In doing this, she challenges established narratives of the separation of scientific and domestic experiment and indeed of the spaces, laboratory and kitchen, where these experiments took place; this argument suggests a far more important engagement of women in the construction of knowledge than has been allowed by modern commentators. The chapter concludes with a rebuttal of potential criticism by historians of science, as they apply modern divisions of household spaces to the early modern world.

The book's 'Coda' I find applies anachronistic modern views of recipe functions to the past. She takes comments by Adam Gopnik about recipes as vectors of desire and disillusion (253) to develop her final claims about recipes' cultural and social importance, beyond the realm of practical instruction, and into the area of fantasy. Interestingly, this section seems to me to be peculiarly American in its underlying premiss: with the unspoken aspirations implicit in the very nature of cookbooks, we have another example of the American dream of self-improvement expressed in the culinary sphere, a point cogently made by Claude Fischler in his study of attitudes towards food, *Manger* (2007). This is a book which is full of interesting nuggets, at its best when it brings out parallels between writing and making, and when it makes the case for examining recipe books as artefacts as well as for their contents. It is less good when it develops

its examples at tedious length (the confectionery conceits of the banquet course, for instance), and when it tries too hard to make connections which are at best tenuous.

Gilly Lehmann

Colman Andrews: *The British Table: A New Look at the Traditional Cooking of England, Scotland and Wales*: Abrams, 2016: 328 pp., hardback, £ 30.00.
Anyone who knows much of anything about British food does not need this book for the recipes. For that reason alone it deserves a wide readership, especially in the United States. Andrews covers most of the iconic dishes of British tradition and covers them well, while also throwing in a few surprises. 'Parmo,' 'the culinary pride of Middlesborough,' apparently has been prepared since 1958 when an American chef fried a thin chicken cutlet dusted with breadcrumbs, gave it a smear of béchamel ('known locally as 'besh'), topped it with Cheddar and toasted the assembly in an oven. It is made in Britain and so, barely, qualifies as British, but Andrews' claiming Spaghetti Bolognese even in bastard form for the national canon constitutes more than a stretch.

More traditional dishes that may surprise readers of *The British Table* include saucermeat, which goes back centuries but has not gained much purchase outside the northern isles. Shetland cooks season ground fat beef or lamb in the vigorous early modern British style with a characteristic combination of allspice, cinnamon, clove, ginger, mace, black and white pepper, and salt. Andrews admits to underspicing his version 'to come up with something not too aggressively flavored,' which undercuts the point of the preparation, but at least he has found the dish, something akin to potted meat that could keep a long time with the original dose of spice and salt.

Andrews includes good recipes for potted foods, of rabbit, shrimp and Stilton, in his exemplary chapter on whets (a seventeenth-century term for salty starters) and savouries, along with other traditional after dinner delights; angels on horseback, mushrooms on toast, Welsh rabbit of course which, however, he misspells.

The British Table represents a creature of this aspirational era in which excess is expected of most culinary publications. Considerably less than half the book's bulk consists of the standard 150 recipe format; full page colour photographs from the founders of fashionable Canal House proliferate, personal anecdotes abound. At over a kilo and three quarters in weight and 28 by 24 by 3 centimetres in size it would be difficult to envision this thing spattered with gravy and grease from kitchen use, its spine split by the scrutiny of a serious cook. That would be a shame.

Andrews has not written *The British Table* for a scholarly audience – his prose is too good for that and he does not delve deep in his historical narratives – but even so wields a certain scholarship with a deft touch. His sources in a

word are spectacular. Selections from the work of a pair of exemplary figures lead an array of short sketches that recur along the length of the book.

The fiction of Tobias Smollett is a wonderful source for eighteenth century British foodways, now neglected by the reading public and, unaccountably, by most food historians but not, to his credit, Andrews. He cites an evocative passage from *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* in which a Squire Bramble describes the culinary autarky at his seat in Wales, where he brews beer, ferments cider from the apples in his orchard, raises all manner of free range livestock, hunts, fishes, bakes bread 'with my own wheat in my own mill' and boasts that 'my table is, in a great measure, furnished from my own ground.' The squire quite evidently was, as Andrews describes him, 'an early locavore.'

A passage from William Kitchiner on the attributes of an epicure, along with a thumbnail biography, flanks the one from Smollett. Kitchiner was one of the more accomplished amateur eccentrics of any age; as Andrews explains, an optics inventor and member of the Royal Society, 'an amateur musician, a prolific author, and a serious cook,' this last an unusual attribute in his Regency social class. Andrews might have added that Kitchiner tested every recipe published in his *Cook's Oracle* with a Committee of Taste that met for dinner on a regular basis at his Fitzrovia residence. Few if any of his contemporaries took such pains to ensure that their instructions worked.

Kitchiner styled himself an MD, but in fact was a fraudulent autodidact in terms of qualifications. Also to his credit, Andrews does not take the author at his word and fall into the standard trap of describing Kitchiner as a doctor.

Andrews does amend his recipe for Kitchiner's idiosyncratic wow wow sauce with a lovely note on Terry Pratchett, whose characters take to heart the observation by its creator that his sauce may be rendered more '*piquante*' through the addition of various substances. The characters choose other ones instead, including scumble, sulphur and wahoonie. The Pratchett version is, as Andrews explains, 'highly volatile and capable of dissolving tree roots.'

The required references to Elizabeth David, who did as much as any other force of nature to impair indigenous British foodways during the twentieth century, are mercifully measured, infrequent and appropriate.

Andrews knows about the great culinary Scots, all of them women except for David Hume, whom he quotes to good effect. *The British Table* cites Margaret Stout, whose obscure and indispensable repository of lost Shetland foodways, the 1925 *Cookery for Northern Wives*, is the basis for that saucermeat recipe; F. Marian McNeill; Sue Lawrence, whom he himself knows; and the greatest of them all, Christian Isobel Johnstone.

Under the pseudonym Meg Dods, a character created by her friend Sir Walter Scott, Mrs. Johnstone wrote one of the best social satires, comic novels, nationalist manifestos and cookbooks of any era, all a single book, her *Cook and Housewife's Manual* from 1826. Andrews gives her proper due, and includes

a version of her superb curried rabbit with bacon, although it appears a bit demeaning to call this novelist, historian and only woman to edit an Edinburgh journal during the entire nineteenth century (*Tait's*, rival to the legendary *Maga* [*Blackwood's*]) a mere protégée of Scott.

Richard Bradley is a fascinating eighteenth century figure, author of his own cookery book and first professor of botany at the University of Cambridge. Following his death Bradley was unfairly traduced by a rival and therefore has been nearly forgotten, but he sits with the Scots at *The British Table*. So does William Jerdan, a journalist who knew and liked Kitchiner, and described him as 'a "real" Original.' Andrews understands, as most do not, that Orwell took a lifelong interest in British food and wrote a pair of essays 'defending' it, although it would have been good to have disclosed that the second, longer piece was in fact so derogatory that the British Council, which commissioned the project, declined to publish it.

Despite the breadth of knowledge Andrews displays, three distinguished elephants have infiltrated the dining-room of *The British Table* in the guise of Elisabeth Ayrton, Theodora Fitzgibbon and Jane Grigson, whose writings are too important, and too good, to have been omitted from an intended survey of British cuisine. Andrews can be glib, and is sometimes insufficiently fastidious in ways other than omission. John Farley, for example, did not write the 1811 cookbook that bears his name. A hack plagiarized it from a number of works (also written primarily by women) in an effort to capitalize on the fame of Farley and his London Tavern.

Do any of these flaws matter to the audience for *The British Table*? Probably not; luminaries like Ruth Reichl and Alice Waters are, according to the book's back cover, fulsome with praise, and overall Andrews provides a lively introduction to an underrepresented and misunderstood subject.

Readers may, however, be granted leave to skip a pedestrian introduction that roasts too many chestnuts – Beatles, Mary Quant, Swinging London; Andrews even exhumes the famous, fatuous denigration of British food by Jacques Chirac from 2005. He drops too many names – Andrews is a founder of *Saveur*, still the best of the glossy guilty pleasure cooking magazines, and travels in celebrity circles – but if he incites aspirants to open *Humphry Clinker* or steam a savoury pudding so much the better.

Blake Perkins