

BOOK REVIEWS

Paul-Henry Bizon: *La Louve*: Gallimard, 2017: 248 pp., paperback, €20.00.
I was alerted to the existence of this novel by a reference in some paper about organics and modern food tendencies that was offered to the Oxford Symposium. I had never heard of it and report it here for two half-good reasons. The first is that you will spend an enjoyable evening (perhaps enjoyable is the wrong word, but you will smile); the second is that if you are not absolutely up to speed with the French food scene in 2017, this will give you some helpful background. If you are up to speed, it may make you cringe (just as Houellebecq's latest had me cringing). The style is by-and-large Mills & Boon and, of course, there is a happy ending. The facts centre on the establishment of an organic growers' co-operative in the Vendée masterminded by the afflicted (emotionally, that is) peasant *redivivus* Camille Vollot and his plucky, and spectacularly beautiful, wife Victoire. This co-op becomes enmeshed in the definitely murky schemes of the villain Raoul Sarkis who is intent on creating an Eataly-style food hall such as has been pioneered by Oscar Farinetti in collaboration with Slow Food in Turin, Milan and further afield. For background, there is plenty on marketing organics, agroforestry and permaculture, as well as the Paris restaurant scene, *Le Fooding*, bistronomy and Parisians' preoccupation with restaurants. It's knockabout, badly written and great fun.

Mary F. Williamson: *Mrs Dalgairns's Kitchen: Rediscovering 'The Practice of Cookery'*: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2021: 608 pp., hardback, £28.50.
In 1829, Catherine Dalgairns compiled *The Practice of Cookery Adapted to the Business of Everyday Life*, a stylistically unornamented repository of more than 1400 reliable recipes that garnered favourable notices upon publication. *The Practice of Cookery* sold well and enjoyed a number of evolving editions until 1861. Eventually however the book drifted into obscurity, a neglect Mary F. Williamson intends to rectify with *Mrs Dalgairn's Kitchen: Rediscovering 'The Practice of Cookery'*. It highlights an overlooked classic that should appeal to the general reader and so should the selection from the book of original recipes modified by Elizabeth Baird for twenty-first-century cooks. Williamson provides a sound description of the early nineteenth-century Anglophone kitchen and its implements before reproducing the text itself, altering the original spellings in conformity with twenty-first-century norms, another apparent attempt to entice the general reader. In her uneven introduction Williamson traces the history of its drafting and publication. 'The saga,' as she asserts, 'sheds invaluable light on the highly personal and flexible world of early nineteenth-century publishing in Britain.'