PPC 118 (2020) 122-123
https://doi.org/10.1558/ppc.27854
Petits Propos Culinaires (print) ISSN 0142-7857
Petits Propos Culinaires (online) ISSN 3029-0651

as she says, we should all be more thoughtful about the food we eat – both for our own good and the good of the planet. To help her readers to become more personally 'FoodWISE', she even includes her own list of the foods and recipes she thinks fit her criteria. We are told how, when shopping for food, one can follow her guidelines to consider its carbon footprints, where and how the food is grown, or even how one might grow one's own. She suggests one could keep chickens in one's own backyard but warns of the possibility of 'truant dogs and marauding owls'. Baraldi's shopping list looks much the same as everyone else's and her recipes seem based more on simplicity of preparation than any holistic guidelines. I slightly queried, given she is American and based in the USA, her use of Roquefort and the suggested alternatives of Stilton or Parmesan, in view of the distance these cheeses must travel to reach her young cooks. One might also query the amount of energy required to roast nuts all night. I wondered too at the inclusion of recipes containing products such as 'Dijon' mustard, chocolate and lamb! I pondered on why she would go to the trouble of making her own yoghurt yet buy ready-grated cheese. It was at this point that I became convinced that this book is definitely aimed at the very young and inexperienced American student and, as such, is probably 'a good thing'. It is possible that a young person will find this book helpful in their search for some meaningful relationship with the food they eat. She is encouraging them to think about what they put in their mouths and how it affects their own health and the environmental health of the planet. Nevertheless, given the huge, almost impossibly, apocalyptic nature of the times we are living through, with worse yet to come, one has to ask whether simply advocating the eating of whole foods and being 'mindful' is quite enough to head off disaster. Setting even *that* aside for a moment, surely what she is saying is so patently obvious, so part of one's normal thinking, so inherent in one's view of how the world could/should be, that even the youngest of her students could hardly have missed it.

Di Murrell

Nicola Humble: *The Literature of Food*: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020: 296 pp., paperback, £22.99.

Reading is a form of escapism. It is a chance to be a voyeur into an author's world, an opportunity to temporarily dismiss the everyday goings on in our lives, without any danger of becoming physically embroiled in the dramas of another's. Being a food writer, it is of course a natural preoccupation to notice how often eatables and drinkables are mentioned in literature. In the past perhaps I had not truly noted or analysed the relevance of these incidences but Nicola Humble's latest book has displayed classic and modern novels in an entirely new light. The simplest approach to discussing this subject would have been to catalogue the food events as they appear in literature. However,

as Humble notes 'it would have missed many of the interesting ways in which food appears in literary texts, and the very different forms of narrative work it performs.' Rather than going through the motions of listing food in literature from the early nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries, she unpicks the social and political relevance of these episodes. Humble's analysis demonstrates how rich and strange food can be in literature. Each chapter approaches how food is depicted in literature from a different angle. For example, Chapter 2 examines the 'difficult dinner party' from the Victorian soirées filled with aspirational middle-class guests eating gentrified foods (think mock turtle soup) where 'the dinners *are* Society' to the simpler, more bohemian, suppers of the early twentieth century that feature in the works of Virginia Woolf. Other chapters cover hunger, gender and fantasy food (which touches on cannibalism in children's literature). Even the cookbook as a form of literary text is explored. Humble is Professor of English at the University of Roehampton. Given her area of expertise and her publisher it would be fair to say that *The Literature of Food* is primarily aimed at the academic market. That said, you don't have to be a student (under-grad. or otherwise) to enjoy it. As with her previous books, *Culinary Pleasures: Cookbooks and the Transformation of British Food* and *Cake: A Global History*, Humble's style is fluid enough to keep the reader engaged and avoids too much academic jargon. An appreciation of literature and food is probably a given although even if social history is more your thing it would be of interest. If you relish pondering the questions posed for book clubs at the back of a novel then the depth of this book and the alternative way of looking at the texts will certainly be appealing. *The Literature of Food* may not inspire you to head directly for the kitchen to recreate a literary feast (there are no recipes in the book per se) but at the very least it should inspire you to pick up one of the many novels discussed and cast a refreshed eye over it.

Sam Bilton

Regula Ysewijn: *Oats in the North, Wheat from the South*: Murdoch Books, 2020: 264 pp., hardback, £25.00.

Samuel Johnson defined oats as 'a grain, which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people.' This may have been a sweeping statement but in some respects he was quite correct. In terms of baked goods oats were indeed favoured in the north as they were easier to grow in that part of Britain with its cooler, wetter climate (think of parkin or clapcake, an oat based crisp bread) whereas wheat was grown in the relatively balmy south. This geographic difference in terms of crops provides the inspiration for the title of this book by Belgian author, photographer and anglophile Regula Ysewijn. She reveals the history of savoury and sweet British baking from classic raised pies to beloved biscuits like the custard cream and recent classics like carrot cake. One of the joys of this book is its combination of everyday fare like the