

BOOK REVIEWS

Ilaria Porciana, ed.: *Food Heritage and Nationalism in Europe*: Routledge, Oxford, 2019: 236 pp, hardback, £115.00.

In 2008 Spanish-born philosopher Daniel Innerarity published an opinion piece in *El País* headlined 'Morality's Move from the Bedroom to the Dining Room'. In it he noted a slow but steady rise of food-linked moral sensibility and the likelihood of its wider repercussions in public life. Published eleven years later, this collection of essays deriving from an EU research project examines heritage, an area of public life now marked by worldwide food-focussed projects, as predicted by Innerarity.

In an incisive introduction editor Ilaria Porciani describes contributors' real focus as 'heritage-making', viewed as a construct, and in their ten essays the academic authors examine byways of food culture, like late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century railway buffets; its sweeping panoramas, for example Austro-Hungarian imperial cookery and Ottoman cuisine; and today's heritage-making systems. All authors warn against a loss of subtlety they observe within processes of 'heritagization'. Laura di Fiore pinpoints UNESCO's 'place-based identity paradigms' as impoverishing rather than enriching our understanding of food cultures' wealth, diversity and shifting historic realities. This warning, repeated by various authors, including Fabio Parasecoli, who writes here on geographical food labelling, is emphasized by Porciana and Massimo Montanari in a brief but direct conclusion in which they comment on the advantages of food inventories as opposed to labelling and registry systems. Above all, however, they come down against presentist definitions of origins in place, emphasizing instead the importance of understanding historical process.

A first group of essays explores the praxis of heritage-making; a second offers studies of 'contact zones and exchanges', many of which challenge rigid geographical definitions. Within this group Jean-Pierre Williot's lightning survey of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century railway buffets offers unusual gourmet moments: he cites caviare sandwiches served with a glass of chai to French passengers at Eklavi station, near Baku, and smoked meat, lobsters, cherries and rye bread served to an 'ecstatic' guide-book author, Dr Bonnafont, in Scandinavia in 1880. Foodie tourism, Williot argues, softened food's boundaries.

Montanari opens this second half of the book with a brilliantly broad-brushstroked essay. He describes Europe's 'taste for diversity' since medieval times as following universalizing sacred and dietetic influences cut across by currents of cultural settlement. Over time, as he says, novelties sediment to give an alimentary geography incomprehensible unless one studies its history.

Today's tendency, he observes, is clear: 'People are getting more attached to their identity.'

Such attachment to identity plays into much of the institutional work analysed in the book's first half. This may take various directions. We are used to museums reassuringly nurturing nostalgic glances at farming or kitchen culture, but, as Susannah Eckersley reveals, displays can showcase food as a proxy for 'difficult' issues of identity, for example, hunger resulting from war, discrimination or social inequality. Her survey suggests a huge potential for food when allied with careful historical analysis.

The book also speaks loud of food history's growing diversity and range as it gains ground in European public life: the authors, born into different food cultures and working at various study centres, especially in Italy, take varying approaches shaped by institutional remits and commissions. Essays are well researched and authors' bibliographies include references ranging from UNESCO archives to journalism, charity reports, and essays from specialist heritage journals – a sign of the times.

Significantly, though, much seminal work cited is classic twentieth-century food history: names like Lévi Strauss and Barthes, Hobsbawm and Ranger, Flandrin and Montanari sit alongside Lacroix, Heiatt, the Coes, Mintz, Mennell, Aron and Arjun Appaduria. In such a context, caveats spring to mind regarding this volume's methodology. Porciana closes her introduction by alluding to hidden themes she would like readers to spot, but instead absences are glaringly obvious: nationalism is not defined, nor its distinction from regionalism, nor its shifting meaning across time and place. Indeed nationalism as a live factor in food heritage today is entirely absent from detailed analysis despite its burning relevance to urgent issues like fishing rights, to cite just one. Lack of essay footnoting or endnoting also allows multiple errors to occur with reference to food cultures unfamiliar to the authors, for example Iberian.

More disturbingly in a book taking academic high ground, some contributors pick facts around their chosen theory and academic discipline instead of exploring theoretical premises latent in the research of food history. An analysis of the birth of *nouvelle cuisine* dismisses Paul Bocuse's and culinary historians' emphases on marketing forces and Japanese influences in favour of a general sociological view of the 1960s. Alice Waters's famous repeated articulate explanation of childhood vegetable gardening as her primary kitchen influence is ignored, again, in favour of the impact of her years spent in Europe, which fits neatly into arguments of 'contact zones and exchanges'.

Ironically Di Fiore suggests in her opening essay, 'Some form of dialogue with scholars would be no bad thing to try and put an end to the limitations currently cramping the institutions' view of food as a heritage.' Likewise, closer attention here to the views of food growers, producers, communities, chefs and cooks responsible for creating the heritage discussed in this book would have

enhanced its scholarship. Instead such players are kept at a distance, in the past and present, in their historical roles, as contemporary sources and as potential readers. Perhaps the greatest danger of rising food-linked moral sensibility in public life, it is also one of the least widely commented, and would in itself make a good topic for a volume of this kind.

(The introduction, conclusion, and two chapters of this book are available in PDF format as Open Access, under a Creative Commons Attribution – Non Commercial – No Derivatives 4.0 license, on the product page at www.routledge.com.)

VICKY HAYWARD

Nicola Humble: *The Literature of Food*: Bloomsbury Academic 2020: 288 pp., hardback, £70.00; paperback, £22.99.

I approached *The Literature of Food* by Nicola Humble a little apprehensively and fiddled about a bit before finally settling to read – after all a selection of essays combining insights about food studies and literary analysis is not to be treated lightly. I'm not an academic and the first riffle through pointed to a scholarly dissertation examining why so many literary texts are preoccupied with portrayals of food and the relationship between food that is imagined and food that is real. Well outside of my usual remit I thought but it sounded interesting so I took a deep breath and plunged in.

Her definition of 'literary texts' extends the boundary beyond the usual novels, poems and essays to include cookbooks, food memoirs and food journalism. She contends that the 'literature of food' should not be simply confined to books about food but can encompass any texts where food has power. Thus cookbooks and other practical food writings should be taken equally seriously as worthy of study. This is an intriguing departure from the usual view and makes interesting reading for the food writer.

Nicola Humble is Professor of English at the University of Roehampton and her book is, essentially, an introductory course book for students of this somewhat (to me) idiosyncratic branch of Eng.Lit. Its range is broad and the subjects chosen for discussion eclectic. It examines the inclusion of food in texts from the 1830s to the present, focusing mainly on British and American writing, and aims to explore the multifarious ways that food both works and plays within her definition of 'literature'. Rather than a straightforward plod through food found in literary texts from the early nineteenth century onwards, Humble creatively applies a number of different approaches aimed at showing the many different ways that food is depicted in narrative form and the variety of functions it serves. The book divides into two sections: in the first four chapters she examines, from an historical perspective, some of the themes that occur in food literature and in a further four, considers form and genre.