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'Gastro-Cosmopolitanism' and 'Dining in the Restaurant' when she falls victim to tedious theorizing by fellow historians as she searches for larger points or justifications (the growth of London as a world city, gender roles, the world of work) most of which we have known about for too, too long and don't need instruction in. I wished she could have spent more time on defining the term 'restaurant' as she observes that in 1890, of the 1,659 establishments listed in Kelly's *Directory*, only 92 were primarily classified as restaurants. So that the restaurant, *proprement dit*, was actually a rare bird, is not really explored. She does, however, give us some good material about the growth of chains (the acme of which was to be Lyons) and many enticing anecdotes about the little places that serviced the worker. Her reports of waiters and waitresses are endlessly enjoyable. Although her reading of the press cuttings is exemplary, I was surprised that she had not found more material from memoirs of those in the trade. She uses Mario of the Caprice's, as well as Albert Thomas's (he ended up as butler in chief at Brasenose College and wrote *Wait and See* in 1944), but there are perhaps others whose working lives fell within her date range. But this is to cavil: there is much here to enlighten the wealthy reader (who is paying 26p per printed page, and there's no VAT on books).

Rebecca Earle: *Potato*: Bloomsbury, 2019: 107 pp., paperback, £9.99.
Potato is one of almost 50 in Bloomsbury's quirky Object Lessons series of 'beautifully produced' – and for once the publisher's hype is justified – small books 'about the hidden lives of ordinary things', ranging from natural phenomena such as trees and earth to modern innovations such as the remote control, drone and hashtag. At around 100 pages, the books are characterized by their conciseness and, if *Potato* is typical, also by a creative re-thinking of the subject that begins with a reflection on a photograph of a potato and proceeds, via the poetry of Seamus Heaney and Pablo Neruda and the early history of the potato, to consideration of the role of the potato in political economy, statecraft and the achievement of the utopian goal of health and happiness for all. Potatoes have always been a humble food, Rebecca Earle argues, suggesting that peasants rather than noblemen or gentleman farmers were the first to adopt this new crop in Europe. Nowhere were they more important to peasants than in Ireland, and Earle succeeds admirably in summarizing the causes and consequences of the Irish potato famine of the mid-nineteenth century in relatively few words (over about two small pages). 'Potatoes are part of how we understand famine', she concludes. The story is told in a brisk, sparkling style with comprehensive endnotes and well chosen (but poorly reproduced) illustrations, and concludes with a personal (and, in my opinion, less relevant) account based on family histories and recipes. It undoubtedly deserves to be described as 'a good and satisfying read' but I also wondered if it were also symptomatic of a shift that seems to have been taking

place in food scholarship over the past decade or more, away from disciplinary confines – history, anthropology, agricultural science, nutrition – towards a free-wheeling, more discursive approach. It's an evolution to be commended, so long as it retains respectful contact with the disciplinary bases and does not trivialize itself by focusing on peripheral issues.

Barbara Santich

Keith Thomas: *In Pursuit of Civility: Manners and Civilization in Early Modern England*: Yale University Press, 2018: 473 pp., hardback, £25.00.

Sir Keith Thomas is one of Britain's most distinguished historians – a Past President of the British Academy, former President of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and author of such landmark books as *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971) and *Man and the Natural World* (1983). Unlike so many historians, he is not afraid to acknowledge the influence of the social sciences, especially anthropology and sociology. In *In Pursuit of Civility*, he speaks of the 'looming intellectual presence' of Norbert Elias, the German-British sociologist famous for the theory of civilizing processes, first advanced in 1939 in *On the Process of Civilisation*. Thomas has always described himself as an enthusiast, if critical enthusiast, for Elias's ideas, and indeed served as 'patron' of the *Collected Works of Norbert Elias* in English (2006–14) of which I was General Editor. (That meant he read the proofs of all 18 volumes!) If the name of Elias is at all familiar to food historians, it will be because his discussion of 'behaviour at the table' is one of the longest and best-known sections of his celebrated study of how manners changed over generations between the late Middle Ages and the nineteenth century. Keith Thomas's home territory is seventeenth-century England, but here he strays backwards to the late Middle Ages and forwards – beyond his nominal end date of 1789 – to the theory of informalization, formulated by Elias and particularly by Cas Wouters to account for twentieth-century trends in socially acceptable behaviour. And his focus on England (as 'a Welshman and therefore something of an outsider'), he argues, is especially relevant 'at a time when Britain, like the United States, seems to be attempting to detach itself from the rest of the world'. Indeed, the whole of chapter 5 is devoted to examining 'the ways in which the belief of the English in their superior civility affected their relations with "uncivilized" peoples, particularly by legitimizing international trade, colonial conquest and slavery'. The first two chapters of the book trace early-modern notions of good manners, their place in the collective self-definition of ruling élites, and how they reinforced the prevailing social structure. Chapter 3 explores further what 'being civilized' meant for contemporaries, and chapter 4 what they thought about how England had come to be 'a civilized country'. Chapter 5 has already been mentioned. Chapters 6 and 7 show how, nevertheless, ideals of civility and civilization were very much contested, and finally Thomas considers 'how