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BOOK REVIEWS

Keith Stavely and Kathleen Fitzgerald: *United Tastes: The Making of the First American Cookbook*: University of Massachusetts Press, 2017: 368 pp., hardback, £93.50.

The conclusion of *United Tastes* is simple; also sophisticated, radical and convincing, even breathtaking. To reach it, Keith Stavely and Kathleen Fitzgerald have written something more than just a rigorous exercise in culinary history. They have produced an interdisciplinary detective thriller. The book explicates an unlikely source to launch the exploration of a deliberate attempt at creating a unique American social and political culture based on the ideals of an unlikely provincial elite.

In the process, Stavely and Fitzgerald execute a daunting manoeuvre in their synthesis of agricultural, architectural, commercial, cultural, demographic, ecclesiastical, intellectual, political, social and art history that also implicates assays into anthropology, geography and horticulture. A proper understanding of their subject and its context would not have been possible without all those inquiries.

That early national project, now largely overlooked, was, the authors demonstrate, for the most part a most unlikely success in imposing the values of a small region on the nation writ large. The feat was accomplished, they explain by quoting Trish Loughran, through an equally unlikely combination of '[s]heer ideological willpower and shrewd intellectual maneuvering' in the face of 'seemingly overwhelming material impediments and persisting regional allegiances.' (*UT* 264-65)

The depth and breadth of scholarship required to create *United Tastes* is so substantial that its authors have at times necessarily relied on secondary sources. No problem; Stavely and Fitzgerald have chosen the best helpmates, among them Joseph Conforti, Clifford Geertz, Gilly Lehmann and Gordon Wood, this latter for his lesser-known articles as well as blockbuster books.

American Cookery, whose putative author, Amelia Simmons, probably but may not have existed, is the putative subject of *United Tastes.* The slim volume of a mere 192 mostly short recipes is considered the first American cookbook. It originated in Hartford, Connecticut, during 1796, and was reprinted or plagiarized in various, shrinking, guises at other apparently unlikely places until 1831. It is by any conventional measure a bad book. *American Cookery* is poorly organized; the chapter on preserves, for instance, 'is rendered distinctly startling by the presence within it of recipes for "Alamode Beef" and "Dressing Codfish".' (*UT* 184) Other than a more or less unhinged introduction and afterward the book itself is for the most part plagiarized or adapted from British

sources, while its original recipes are, as Stavely and Fitzgerald properly describe them, 'oddly truncated or rushed.' (*UT* 207) Haste was remarked upon by foreigners as characteristic of an impatient America on the make; the slapdash nature of the original as opposed to plagiarized recipes in *American Cookery* along with its chaotic format reflect that too.

Stavely and Fitzgerald discern 'a coherent social rationale in the book's culinary content.' That rationale, they believe, developed out of powerful forces; the eighteenth-century 'expansion of Anglo-American cookbook publishing, the culture of print in New England, the social structure of early national Connecticut, the evolving American codes of refinement and egalitarianism, and the practices and attitudes relating to agriculture and trade in the region.' (*UT* 206)

In their reading, *American Cookery* therefore represents a direct manifestation of, and to a limited extent reaction against, a coherent Federalist subculture indigenous to Connecticut. It first spread, like the book itself, where, and only where, residents of the state emigrated. *American Cookery* found printers only in parts of New England, New York and Ohio, this 'Greater Connecticut' as Stavely and Fitzgerald properly call it. Unlike the little book however, Greater Connecticut eventually would exert an influence far beyond its geographical scope.

The Connecticut Federalists practised and proselytized a less hierarchical, more compressed and relatively egalitarian programme than adherents of Federalism elsewhere. Their ideal society envisions the sort of deferential aspiration that characterizes *American Cookery*. The connection is no surprise because, as Stavely and Fitzgerald make the convincing case, the Connecticut Federalists had a heavy hand in its creation and dissemination. 'Simmons' could not have produced the book alone; she probably could read but not write and therefore hired a transcriber, possibly one recommended by her publishers; the book reflects particular patterns of food production and consumption that were significant components of the Connecticut Federalist project; while the printers of her first and second editions were leading proponents of its dissemination.

Within this worldview the lower orders, including even the disenfranchised or impoverished, may rise up, but not too fast or too far. The elites, while setting the terms of society, reciprocate that restraint in their way. They may not push themselves too far past the middling majority in terms of wealth, display or condescension. By examining contemporary portraiture and domestic architecture, Stavely and Fitzgerald show that a 'matched and meshed striving and stooping amounts to a paradigm of Connecticut's image of itself in the years that saw the creation, publication and distribution of *American Cookery*.' (*UT* 91) This was, in the authors' judgment, 'a culture that was part plain, part fancy, part republican, part genteel' across nearly the entire social spectrum. (*UT* 145)

The Federalist subculture essentially celebrated the economy and social structure of the Connecticut River Valley, a region of middle sized farms,

skilled artisans, cottage industry and small scale traders ensconced in tidy towns but no large city.

The selection of recipes for *American Cookery* reflects this jostling, compressed and fluid hierarchy. It contains 'culinary instruction which exhibits a careful balancing of elegance and restraint' along with 'an equally careful balancing of aspiration and deference.' (*UT* 260) The balancing act extends to the recipes: '*American Cookery*, and the Connecticut Federalist perspective that informed it, is grounded in a tempered and moderated artistry in cooking and a tempered and moderated sophistication in diet.' (*UT* 198) Simmons therefore levelled her British sources by omitting all their numerous French preparations, because in 'England, French cooking in unadulterated form was associated with the stratospheric reaches of aristocracy' and 'such thoroughgoing social stratification was not to be permitted' in Connecticut. (*UT* 194, 195)

Based on the analysis of Stavely and Fitzgerald, the recipes that did make the cut fall within three rough categories. Some of them are for plain dishes, cheap preparations intended for basic sustenance; some 'festive or elegant;' and the majority, those 'used to assert the family's prosperity' through the moderate use of fancier but not luxury ingredients and moderately but not overly sophisticated technique. (*UA* 187, 185) In other words they embody the Connecticut vision of middling freeholders who aspire to gentility.

The preface in particular, with Simmons' strident republican rhetoric coupled awkwardly with an almost supine deference to her betters, embodies the tension inherent in Connecticut Federalism. Federalists, in Connecticut no less than anywhere else, considered the kind of Jeffersonian Republican rhetoric found in the preface of *American Cookery* 'the conspiratorial rumbling of criminals the ranting of madmen, and the howling of wild dogs.' (*UT* 243) Its Federalist printers published it anyway.

Unlike the grandees of Boston, Connecticut Federalists knew better than to try and suppress such things: 'Once the cat of popular assertiveness had once and for all been let out of the bag, the Connecticut group, opting for deflecting rebellious impulses into safe channels, had devised the shrewder strategy for holding onto position, privilege, and power.' (*UT* 244)

During the revolutionary and early national era the farms and people of the Connecticut River Valley were uncommonly fertile. The alluvial soil from the river enabled the place to function as the breadbasket of the northeast United States (including the 'insatiable maw' of New York City). The rate of reproduction coupled with soil exhaustion resulted in mass outmigration toward the end of the era: The population of New York State, for example, tripled in the two decades following 1790, mostly the result of an influx from New England, and more than any other state Connecticut.

The state exerted outsized cultural capital within its region as a result of the 'deliberate initiatives and policies' of the Connecticut Federalists. (*UT* 254)

Throughout the period of emigration from Connecticut into the Hudson River Valley and outer New England, the itinerant Connecticut Missionary Society sought to spread, with considerable success, the social and cultural as well as religious values of its Federalist sponsors. Where settlers and missionaries went, peddlers followed, bringing with them the books, including *American Cookery*, printed in the Connecticut River Valley and, eventually, Greater Connecticut itself.

The distribution of *American Cookery* therefore reflects and confirms a 'Connecticut diaspora' of culture as well as people. So for example the locations of documented religious revival meetings organized by the Connecticut missionaries outside their home state correlate to the places where the book was advertised, plagiarized or reprinted at the same times. (*UT* 261-62)

In the end, for better or worse, the Connecticut Way won out in much of America. The competing Jeffersonian vision, shorn of merchants and manufactures as it was, would become 'increasingly compromised by its association with slavery and then further discredited by the outcome of the Civil War. As the nineteenth century wore on, therefore, the most influential ruralistic outlook in the United States became the one first articulated forcefully in Connecticut.' (*UT* 265)

'The creation of suburbia after World War II amounted,' as Stavely and Fitzgerald wryly note, 'to the mass production of the Connecticut way…. ' And yet by then 'the Connecticut roots of this vision were forgotten.' (*UT* 267)

American Cookery encapsulates both that vision and the tools the Connecticut Federalists chose to promote. In one sense the book is more a product of the Connecticut of its time than of the entire nation, but in another, as an artefact of the Connecticut way, it therefore also represents a foundational American artefact. As Stavely and Fitzgerald conclude *United Tastes*: 'Restraint in the pursuit of happiness does not translate well into a battle cry. But it was the course the Connecticut Federalists wished the nation to steer between the dual perils of wealth and poverty.' (*UL* 270)

It would be reasonable to maintain that until our new gilded age the United States managed to stay that course for much of its history.

United Tastes covers so much subject matter related to the young republic that this short review can only refer to some of it. Stavely and Fitzgerald have found so many connections, have thought to ask so many of the right questions, have managed to *see* so much and have packed so much scholarship into this book with so light a touch. They can write too: a phrase as good as 'the perils of perambulation in Albany' is no outlier.

Along our own perambulation through *United Tastes* we learn a lot of things. Some of the information is not strictly necessary to an understanding of *American Cookery* but all of it enhances an understanding of the context that created the text.

Samuel Johnson thought 'women can spin very well; but they cannot make a good book of cookery' and insisted Hannah Glasse was the alias of a man (*quoted at UT* 39). Notwithstanding its essentially conservative cast, however, the Federalist socioeconomic outlook 'was relatively respectful of women and their contributions.' (*UA* 110)

Printers may have use different typeface fonts, or a single writer may have employed different script styles, to denote the sex of an author, deference or dominance and 'social signifiers' more generally. (*UT* 238-39) 'Also,' as Stavely and Fitzgerald explain, 'the term 'publisher was first applied in North America in the 1790s… but its definition was considerably different from ours: it was used to describe American printers who reprinted British books.'

Those British books continued to dominate the American market after the Revolution. (*UL* 69, 70) New Englanders were so intent to share their foodways with other regions of the new nation that, for example, 'Massachusetts congressman Timothy Pickering, staunch Federalist gentleman that he was, taught his boardinghouse landlady how to make Indian pudding' in Washington during 1810. (*UT* 315n49)

And why did the size of *American Cookery* shrink in an era of otherwise increased publishing sophistication in the cities of the young republic? It shrank, Stavely and Fitzgerald conclude, to keep it cheap and enable peddlers to carry more copies to the frontier. (*UT* 259, 260)

Historians as well as general readers may, and should, disregard everything previously written about *American Cookery* and its shadowy author. This is the breakthrough more generally, the kind of interdisciplinary and overdue analysis that too many previous culinary historians have failed to manage. It is as if Stavely and Fitzgerald have planted a banner that proclaims a new culinary and cultural historiography.

Blake Perkins

Paul S. Lloyd: *Food and Identity in England, 1540–1640: Eating to Impress*: Bloomsbury, 2015: 260 pp., paperback, £28.99.

This is a book about how food choices, or the lack of them, are bound up with social status and how people in early-modern England were defined and sought to define themselves by what they ate. To that extent it is largely successful, giving an overview of contemporary dietary theory compared and contrasted with dietary practice. The evidence for the latter is garnered from an impressive range of household accounts, diaries and books of memoranda, cookbooks, institutional accounts and court records. The majority of the source material is printed, which is excusable given the breadth; however, manuscript cookbooks would have given an additional dimension to discussion of theory versus practice, at an elite level at least.

After an introduction to the themes of food and identity the remainder