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David Downie: *A Taste of Paris: a history of the Parisian love affair with food*: New York: St Martin's Press, 2017: 280 pages, hardback, £20.99.

From a marketing point of view, this being the attention-deficit 21st century, David Downie has erred. His book is not for skimming. I've tried: it isn't possible. You just have to settle into it and read what he wants you to read. Within a few pages your resistance will crumble.

Downie's writing is nutritious, tasty, allusive, inimitable. He naturally begins with Roman Lutetia, strolls through Paris in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, expands on the gourmand seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, reaches culinary modernity. But don't be deceived. Every page turns out to be a chronological kaleidoscope. Each historical episode is at the same time an exploration of some Parisian neighbourhood from its gastronomic origins to its contemporary food landmarks. There could hardly be a better culinary history of Paris.

Wisely chosen historical recipes are fully quoted with added notes for the modern cook. It is good to find the dictums of Grimod de la Reynière and the aphorisms of Brillat-Savarin rehearsed at full length (pp. 200–203). One likes the thought of Louis XV admiring La Pompadour's fruit baskets (p. 118), and one is pleased to find Louis XIV's less savoury amusements likened to 'all the things hereditary oppressors, tyrants, and certain contemporary presidents do'.

Downie and Montaigne: a footnote: Reading Downie's quotations from Montaigne I wanted to read them again in Montaigne's own words. Downie was not allowed, or did not allow himself, footnote references. Damn. In one case I managed easily, because the Montaigne on my shelves has an index. The former *maître d'hôtel* of Cardinal Caraffa, discoursing magniloquently on the science of gastronomy? Find the one occurrence of Cardinal Caraffa in Montaigne's *Essais* and there I have the text before me. Wonderful, although I read it a little differently from Downie. It seems to me that Montaigne disapproves. He is ridiculing the use of grandiose expressions for something as obvious as the choice and sequence of dishes at a meal.

In the other case – Montaigne proclaiming that his heart belongs to Paris – it wasn't so easy. He mentions Paris many times, and my index stops at one. Damn again. But thanks to the Web I soon found a recent author who quotes the same passage, and allows Google Books to share this snippet with the world, and (note this, Downie) gives a detailed reference to the 1588 edition of the *Essais*, the last published in Montaigne's lifetime. Leaping onwards, I found several bloggers celebrating the fact that the Bibliothèque nationale has recently put on line the Bordeaux copy of the 1588 *Essais*, the precious copy that was heavily annotated by Montaigne himself. And in a trice, purely owing to Downie's absent footnotes, I found myself unexpectedly reading Montaigne's re-thoughts on Paris in his own handwriting.

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It's payback time. The incomplete index of my Montaigne edition had led me to a different passage of the *Essais* which deserves quoting. I should explain that Downie, a native San Franciscan, now lives in Paris in the heart of the Marais ('the Marsh': pp. 59–61), a stone's throw from the site of the Hôtel Saint-Pol, royal residence established by King Charles V, to whom Taillevent was chef de cuisine. And why was I guided to Montaigne's book I chapter 55, 'On Smells'? Because the chapter ends with these words, which add a nuance to Montaigne's love for the French capital: 'My main concern when finding lodging is to escape heavy and stinking air. Those fair cities, Venice and Paris, are diminished in my estimation by the sharp odours from the mud of the one and the Marsh of the other.' Could this, incidentally, be why the Hôtel Saint-Pol didn't remain a royal residence for very long?

Andrew Dalby

Sara Pennell: *The Birth of the English Kitchen, 1600–1850*: Bloomsbury, 2016: xiv-265pp., hardback, £85.00; paperback, £22.99.

This ground-breaking book takes us away from palace and country-house kitchens, and into the less-studied spaces of the plebeian and middle classes in town and country. Sara Pennell comes at her subject from the perspective of material culture, and she seeks to re-examine the kitchen as a physical space: its position within the house, its functions, its equipment, and its significance to patterns of everyday life, whether physical or spiritual. This book goes much further than earlier studies of material culture as evidenced by inventories, although inventories are a major resource here. Whereas the work of scholars such as Lorna Weatherill examined the social distribution of household goods, Pennell is interested not simply in the 'who' of ownership, but also in the 'where' and the 'how' these goods were used: a new interpretation of these documents is offered here. As well as inventories, Pennell draws on a wide range of sources, including accounts of Old Bailey trials, diaries and letters, planning and building regulations, advice in domestic manuals and cookery books, popular literature, and popular prints. (It is a pity that in this regard the author has not been well-served by her publisher: the black-and-white reproductions of prints are too small and often so uniformly grey as to make it impossible to detect the details which Pennell mentions; furthermore, it is frustrating to find that sometimes, a print discussed on one page does not appear until much later, and so the reader must leaf through the book to find the appropriate image, as for instance the frontispiece discussed p. 23 and reproduced p. 77.) The result is a fascinating, multi-layered account of the development of the kitchen over 250 years.

One of the interesting things that emerges from Pennell's account of the development of the kitchen from its early-modern to its nineteenth-century form is its essential modernity throughout. Time and time again the reader is