

Matthew Fort: *Summer in the Islands. An Italian Odyssey*: Unbound, 2017: 325 pp., hardback, £14.99.

Amiable is the epithet that immediately springs to mind when thinking of Matthew Fort, a word reinforced by the heartwarming cover illustration of this, his latest and third instalment of an odyssey that has traversed the mainland, then Sicily, on a long-suffering scooter (a Vespa to start with, in this one a Lambretta). He, too, must have suffered, at his age, and this particular journey was interrupted half-way through his voyage round all the Italian islands by his rupturing of an Achilles tendon. Nothing daunted, he resumed the trip a few months later. His earlier books (*Eating Up Italy* and *Sweet Honey, Bitter Lemons*) contained a fair amount about food producers and the characteristics of local cuisines, this latest is more of a travelogue – interspersed with a plethora of restaurant meals consumed and infinite personal interactions, but not so much on local production. This may be no more than the consequence of having to get round 32 individual islands (including Sicily and Sardinia for good measure) before arrival at his ‘Ithaca’: Venice. You could fill a book on the ferry trips alone. The pace is brisk, but plenty of facts are adduced to give pause for thought, whether about the lack of fishing on Sardinia or the excess of refugees on Lampedusa. One thing is certain, you’ll hear of places you’ve never been to, and the text is replete with anecdote and fun. A warmly recommended winter read.

Kathleen Lebesco and Peter Naccarato, eds.: *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Food and Popular Culture*: Bloomsbury, 2017: 348pp., hardback, £100.00.

More than a score of articles, with a tendency to report American experience in preference to that of other countries, discuss aspects of food in relation to aspects of popular culture. The emphasis is on reportage and recent history, giving the student the essential facts before allowing him or her to speculate on future trends. Some of these summaries are banal, although offering useful repertoires of modern histories that would otherwise require endless dredging through newspapers and magazines (or Google); some add little to our knowledge (the coverage of food on TV might be an example); others have a certain interest – the discussion of Bernard Tschumi’s Parc de la Villette and architectural expressions of animal slaughter is a fine piece of work. At the end of it all, however, the feeling that impresses itself on the hapless reader is one of drear tedium. If this is Food Studies, go and study something interesting.

Jean-Pierre Poulain, translated by Augusta Dörr: *The Sociology of Food. Eating and the Place of Food in Society*: Bloomsbury, 2017: 288 pp., paperback, £21.99.

If I was a little depressed after reading the previous book reviewed, this is a corrective. First published in 2002 in France, where the author is Professor

of Sociology at the University of Toulouse Jean Jaurès, this will make the most blasé student think Food Studies worth a try. A broad panorama of the intersection between what we eat, how we cook it, and the structures of our society, it is a positive tonic. His chapter on the sociology of French gastronomy is fun, even if utterly wrongheaded. But the great value of the book lies in its laying out of several possible ways of approach to our daily fare. A grand bedtime read.