

recipes, offering a great range of old English flavour combinations. There are some real winners, both for the grand occasion and the family supper (I have earmarked duck braised with turnips and green peas, red cabbage braised with sausage meat, and potted cheese for immediate consumption). Had the recipes been more economically laid out, we could have had more historical discussion, which I must admit I hungered for. But the author's desire to place these dishes before a new and, I hope, receptive audience is to be applauded. (The lack of accents on *Deja* is as the publisher intended.)

Francesca Orestano and Michael Vickers, eds.: *Not Just Porridge: English Literati at Table*. Archaeopress Publishing, Oxford, 2017: 180 pp., paperback, £20.00.

This is a collection of essays by Italian scholars of English that were the excellent outcome of a series of gatherings, hosted by the Department of Foreign Languages of the University of Milan, in the 'attic cells of a former convent'. The tone and language are refreshingly free of scholar-speak, indeed some of the pieces read like a sixth-former's essay, with narrative and laying-out of the facts to the fore. The literary figures discussed include Samuel Johnson, Jane Austen, Mrs Beeton, Dickens, Henry James, Arnold Bennett, Joyce, Virginia Woolf, A.A. Milne, Roald Dahl and Helen Fielding. There are occasional lapses in understanding of British habits (the account of Dr Johnson seems to muddle luncheon and dinner; I was not clear whether the author of 'Tea (and lots of honey) in the Hundred Acre Wood' was describing the right sort of malt extract favoured by Tigger), but the summaries of what their respective subjects think or do about food are of interest. One might question how much influence *The Origin of the Species* really exerted on the structure of Mrs Beeton's handbook; but be very amused by the account of Henry James's adoption of Fletcherism, the crazy theory put forward by Horace Fletcher that everything should be chewed innumerable times until the goodness was extracted and the fibrous material spat out. James was a slow eater.

Allan Jenkins: *Plot 29*: Fourth Estate, 2017: 252 pp., hardback, £14.99.

This memoir by the editor of the *Observer Food Monthly* has deservedly received rave notices. Although sometimes presumed a food book, perhaps because of the author's position, it is not that at all. It began life as a journal of a year on a north London allotment: its therapeutic value, the progression from seed to fruition, the camaraderie, the routine and the beauty. Biological diversity would be provided by accounts of periods spent on a London rooftop terrace (all in pots) and beside the North Sea on a plot of woodland in Danish Jutland. But what might have been a pleasing contemplation of the joys of gardening is subverted, but at the same time enhanced, by the progressive intrusion of the author's memories of a fractured childhood and an account of his present-day