

John Baxter: *Eating Eternity. Food, Art and Literature in France*: Museyon, New York, 2017: 268 pp., paperback, \$19.95.

The Australian John Baxter, now living in Paris, is famous for his guided walking tours of that city: immersive tourism – intellectually as well as physically pushing the envelope. He has already written several pedestrian (literally) guides to Paris, as well as an evocation of the Côte d'Azur in the 1920s, but in the volume here noticed he combines his enthusiasm for art with that for the table in 29 short chapters ranging over the whole of French gastronomic experience. The word gastronomic is perhaps the key, the text reminds one strongly of those old *bons-vivants* and their vast fund of anecdote, often instructive, frequently amusing, and willing to recruit any number of tendencies and cultural constructs to their service. It can be broad brush, with sweeping statements that elide a host of details that may run counter to the point he's making, but the whole provides an admirable bedside book with lots of nice illustrations. The word culture is also key as each chapter usually takes a cultural fact (existentialism and the Left Bank, the impressionists, Versailles, Millet's gleaners, or Josephine Baker and jazz) and links it back to eating and drinking. All good stuff, but sometimes the mythical fact caps reality. He is also hot on French colloquialisms, and instructive too, though some of his turns of phrase might sound odd from the mouth of a denizen of today's *banlieux* even if spot on for Bertie Wooster.

Carolyn Korsmeyer, ed.: *The Taste Culture Reader*, 2nd edition: Bloomsbury, 2017: 404 pp., paperback, £28.99.

This first appeared in 2005 and was fast adopted as a necessary textbook thanks to its catholic selection of extracts and articles from the best of sources, old and new. The second edition has added some ten chapters, mostly of original writing rather than reprints, which broaden the approach and, in some cases (for example modernist cuisine) bring it up to date. Welcome new entrants include Charles Spence, Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, François Jullien and Denise Gigante. The paperback is affordable; the hardback is for libraries.

Peter Naccarato, Zachary Nowak, Elgin K. Eckert, eds.: *Representing Italy through Food*: Bloomsbury, 2017: 269 pp., hardback, £85.00.

The price is not a mistake, although Amazon are offering it for the time being at £70.99. This volume is the outcome of a conference at the Umbra Institute in Perugia, where two of the editors hold posts. The idea of Italian food as a construct, subject to different interpretations (and varying wildly over time) in different parts of the world and in different media, has long been current. This set of essays offers infinite evidence of just that fact with studies of film (*The Godfather*), the novel (Camilleri's Inspector Montalbano), the Italian/American identity seen through the prism of pasta sauces, Italian food in Israel,

the Italian-ness of Leggo's products in Australia, 'authentic' Italian cooking in America, and some interesting material on gender and gendering in Italy today and in Italian advertising. The contributors are *sans pareil*: Ken Albala, Rachel Ankeny and Massimo Montanari to name but three. For once, this is a set of proceedings that seems to hang together and whose topic is ultra-relevant. Worth exploring. It is a pity that the text is set in a sans-serif typeface that tired eyes will find impossible, especially when paying 39p for every page (including blanks).

Christianne Muusers: *Het Verleden op je Bord – Vijf eeuwen receptuur uit de culinaire collectie van de Koninklijke Bibliotheek*: Karakter Uitgevers BV, 2016: 160 pp., hardback, €29.99.

'The Past on a Plate – Five centuries of recipes from the cookery collection of the Royal Dutch Library' is the latest offering from the indefatigable Christianne Muusers, whose website <[www.coquinaria.nl](http://www.coquinaria.nl)> is a tremendous resource for historical recipes and Dutch food history. In this handsome book (alas my Dutch is founded on Google translate) she presents a chronological sequence of recipes from the Middle Ages to 1900. Not all her sources are echt-Dutch. Reasonably enough, foreign literature has taken its place in the Dutch canon: Platina, Marx Rumpolt, la Chapelle and Gouffé get a look in. But there is lots of interest for the English reader, especially the influence of the Orient on Dutch cookery, and it is so attractively presented that it makes one want to settle down with Google to elicit the details of the recipes. Ms Muusers has carefully interpreted each original for the modern cook, but the first version of the recipe is presented in an appendix, and the bibliography is as it should be. A model of this particular culinary art-form.

Bridget Ann Henisch: *Food for Thought*: published by the author, 2017: 134 pp., paperback, n.p. (contact <[bahenisch@gmail.com](mailto:bahenisch@gmail.com)> for copies and details).

Readers of *PPC* will by now have enjoyed two of the essays contained in this collection. As she puts it so well in her preface, 'The essays in this cluster touch lightly on a few of the ways ... in which food has been used, whether as an image to catch the essence of an idea, a state of mind, a person, a building, a landscape, or as an actual construction material with which to model some miniature simulation of the familiar world.' A lifetime's attentive reading has contributed to pieces about table decoration, early photographic albumen paper and its by-products, custards and custard castles, confectionery architecture, the word 'pudding', 'Patty-pan' Birch Lord Mayor of London, and Benson E. Hill and the *Epicure's Almanac* of 1841. Each is a delight, revealing a score of facts new to most of us. Reading it might be likened to drinking a nice dry Champagne: reviving, pleasing, and tempting us to more.