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Thomas Parker: *Tasting French Terroir. The History of an Idea*: University of California Press, 2015: 248 pp.; $70.00 hardback, $34.95 paperback.

This fifty-fourth volume in the California Studies in Food and Culture is a literary and philosophical enquiry into the origins of the concept of *terroir* in France. The strength of the book lies in the author's ability to draw together common threads from a variety of literary sources through the centuries, presenting the polysemic ambivalence of this concept and the processes behind contemporary affirmations of official definitions like AOC and IGP denominations, that are the result of a long, varied evolution from the Renaissance. As France began to frame itself as a country, *terroir* found fertile ground in the French imagination, in literary works and agricultural treatises: considerations on the influence of place became very frequent not only in regard to food and taste, but as a way to explain human behaviour and the formation of language.

The chapters follow a chronological order, showing that food and climatic determinism has been present in literary works in a variety of contexts. For example, in Chapter 1 the author shows that the poets of the Pléiades employed agricultural metaphors to convey messages about language production, using food and wine as a signifier of specific regional identities, and drawing parallelisms between the cultivation of vines and languages. Together with the metaphorical use of *terroir*, the French also developed a more technical approach to the importance of place, recognizing that physiographic aspects of the land had an effect on flavours, in works such as *Théâtre d'Agriculture et ménage des champs* (1600) by Olivier De Serres, where the word *terroir* is deployed very often (Chapter 2).

In the seventeenth century, *terroir* remained primarily an agricultural description, but we can observe a reverse trend away from locality. In the context of the centralization of power and the rise in prestige of the court of Versailles, French cuisine and products, like the French language, became valued when 'pure', and not marked by cultural specificities: with the Académie Française and the desire for a centralized, cosmopolitan language, we see that individuals actually seek to dismiss the effects of climates and places on people, culture and food. In chapter 4 the author analyses as a key symbol the garden of Versaille, a *terroir*-less place ruled by humans and not by the specificities of local plants determined by soil and climate. In the same period, cookbooks celebrated a new 'unblemished' notion of *terroir*: France is depicted as a perfect garden, a neutral place producing the finest food because of its central location in Europe. At this time, in fact, food that had no specific smells or tastes was actually preferred over food marked by the soil and by provenance. Only when the king's absolute power was finally challenged, did *terroir* make its return in more positive ways, and the earth become once more a powerful metaphor to define people's identities.

In chapter 7 the author shows how after the Revolution, the notion of *terroir* continued to be present in literary works and public discourse, and internal and regional differences acquired at this point a strategic importance in the definition of 'Frenchness'. In the mapping processes of the new departments, Paris has been conceived as the head and the departments as different parts of the body: *terroir* became a way of living the nation, rearticulating in new ways the relationship between people and places theorized in previous centuries.

The author uses an impressive range of sources showing that French culinary culture is linked to the broader philosophical and aesthetic concerns of the time. The book is an important contribution to scholars of food and culture since it offers a remarkable literary overview over the centuries, complementing other historical and anthropological books that have focused on contemporary definitions of *terroir* as distinction, hierarchy, and the re-localization of identity in a global era. This book offers a philosophical journey into the past of this concept, showing the processes that led to the formation of this complex and layered term.

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Joan Morgan: *The Book of Pears: The Definitive History and Guide to over 500 Varieties*: paintings by Elisabeth Dowle: Ebury Press, 2015: 304 pp., hardback, £45.00.

They used to say 'Pears for Heirs', which derives from the seventeenth-century expression of optimism and altruism: 'Walnuts and pears you plant for your heirs', which is not only generous but very far sighted. Three hundred years ago pears were at the height of fashion and in Herefordshire it was common to plant whole avenues of them. And then make perry in the autumn. At Much Marcle in blossom time the drive leading to Hellen's Manor is a wonder to behold. The avenue was planted in 1710 so it has lasted very well indeed. Pear trees are not only long lived, they can be very tall, up to sixty feet high and were often used as boundary markers and planted at crossroads which are more often than not, roundabouts these days. There's one north of Oxford, now called Pear Tree Park and Ride. But closer to home in the Somerset just off the A303 and A 37 is the National Trust property, Lytes Cary, which once grew over forty different varieties of pear, including the Somerton Pear, Antick Pear, Ruddick Pear, Chesil or Pear Nought, Bishop's censor and the Russett Sweatter.

But these days the word pear has different connotations. Not just *au pair* and 'pear cider'. Self help or nanny state? Get planting. Maybe the future is pear shaped after all. But 'pear shaped' has several different meanings. It can mean a voluptuous shapely lady with large hips, a rich sonorous voice or 'things going awry' which is apparently derives from Second World War R.A.F. slang. But this may even be First War slang referring to round, observer balloons which were descending fast and became pear shaped when hit by enemy fire.