

as Humble notes ‘it would have missed many of the interesting ways in which food appears in literary texts, and the very different forms of narrative work it performs.’ Rather than going through the motions of listing food in literature from the early nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries, she unpicks the social and political relevance of these episodes. Humble’s analysis demonstrates how rich and strange food can be in literature. Each chapter approaches how food is depicted in literature from a different angle. For example, Chapter 2 examines the ‘difficult dinner party’ from the Victorian soirées filled with aspirational middle-class guests eating gentrified foods (think mock turtle soup) where ‘the dinners *are* Society’ to the simpler, more bohemian, suppers of the early twentieth century that feature in the works of Virginia Woolf. Other chapters cover hunger, gender and fantasy food (which touches on cannibalism in children’s literature). Even the cookbook as a form of literary text is explored. Humble is Professor of English at the University of Roehampton. Given her area of expertise and her publisher it would be fair to say that *The Literature of Food* is primarily aimed at the academic market. That said, you don’t have to be a student (under-grad. or otherwise) to enjoy it. As with her previous books, *Culinary Pleasures: Cookbooks and the Transformation of British Food* and *Cake: A Global History*, Humble’s style is fluid enough to keep the reader engaged and avoids too much academic jargon. An appreciation of literature and food is probably a given although even if social history is more your thing it would be of interest. If you relish pondering the questions posed for book clubs at the back of a novel then the depth of this book and the alternative way of looking at the texts will certainly be appealing. *The Literature of Food* may not inspire you to head directly for the kitchen to recreate a literary feast (there are no recipes in the book per se) but at the very least it should inspire you to pick up one of the many novels discussed and cast a refreshed eye over it.

SAM BILTON

Regula Ysewijn: *Oats in the North, Wheat from the South*: Murdoch Books, 2020: 264 pp., hardback, £25.00.

Samuel Johnson defined oats as ‘a grain, which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people.’ This may have been a sweeping statement but in some respects he was quite correct. In terms of baked goods oats were indeed favoured in the north as they were easier to grow in that part of Britain with its cooler, wetter climate (think of parkin or clapcake, an oat based crisp bread) whereas wheat was grown in the relatively balmy south. This geographic difference in terms of crops provides the inspiration for the title of this book by Belgian author, photographer and anglophile Regula Ysewijn. She reveals the history of savoury and sweet British baking from classic raised pies to beloved biscuits like the custard cream and recent classics like carrot cake. One of the joys of this book is its combination of everyday fare like the

Rich Tea Biscuit and the more exotic Tamarind Tart based on an eighteenth-century recipe by Charles Carter. Ysewijn also takes the reader on a foray over the border to Scotland recreating often overlooked recipes like yum-yums and the Aberdeen buttery rowie (described as having ‘the richness of a croissant with the bonus extra heartiness through the addition of lard’). Ysewijn clearly loves the culinary history of Britain. Like her first book *Pride and Pudding*, the provenance behind each recipe has been meticulously researched but is succinctly summarized in the introductions accompanied by an infectious enthusiasm which cannot help but kindle a desire to turn your hand at some of our nation’s traditional bakes. Yes, the photography is exquisite but in a homely, appealing way ensuring they look achievable rather than the puffed and preened pâtisserie that appears in some baking books. You may well ask whether there is room for another book on baking in the cookbook market. I would say wholeheartedly ‘yes’. *Oats in the North* takes a nuanced look at British baking and reminds us Brits of some of the everyday classics we take for granted. For that reason alone it deserves its place.

SAM BILTON

Elizabeth Romer: *Beppina and the Kitchens of Arezzo, Life and Culinary History in an Ancient Tuscan City*: Prospect Books, 2020: 286 pp., paperback, £17.99. The author’s gift for friendship along with her professional skills as archaeologist and illustrator, make this, and her earlier book *The Tuscan Year, Life and Food in an Italian Valley*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984, a thoroughly enjoyable read. Silvana Cerotti in her remote Tuscan valley, and Beppina, an upper-middle-class housewife in late nineteenth-century Arezzo, are presented in their surroundings, the Tuscan landscape, formed by the centuries-old agriculture that fed the cities; and the townscape formed by the complexities of daily life, local politics and religion, and the daily routines of buying and cooking food, lavish or sparse. Elizabeth Romer introduces us to personalities we enjoy meeting, the benign avuncular Pellegrino Artusi, author of *La Scienza in Cucina et l’Arte di Mangiar Bene*, the acerbic Pietro Aretino, whose thoughts about food and eating are hardly known, the brilliant Francesco Redi (already the hero of Elizabeth David’s *Harvest of the Cold Months*, with his scientific approach to ice-cream making), Francesco Gaudentio’s *Il Panunto Toscano* is mentioned for his use of *battuto* and *sofritto*. Romer’s book has over a hundred recipes, some embedded in the text, where their background story is part of the narrative, like the *zuppa Tarlati*, a creamy chicken soup, with a fair amount of tourist anecdote attached, which she deals with crisply, while most of them are in a section at the back. Her informal narrative recipes, in the style of Artusi and Beppina, are a joy to work from, after the bossy car-repair manual style of some publishers. Traditional Tuscan dishes like *ribollita* and *panzanella* are described in the setting of rural and urban family life rather than trendy tourist