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Coghlan, Michelle J, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Food*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2020. Pp. 285. ISBN 978-1-108-44610-5 (paperback).

It is only befitting that an issue devoted to the burgeoning field of food studies should include the review of a book focusing on literary representations of food. *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Food* edited by J. Michelle Coghlan comprises sixteen captivating essays authored by leading scholars who comment on literature and taste from the Middle Ages to the twenty-first century.

The volume is structured according to a chronological perspective, pointing to crucial moments in the development of aesthetic taste, with a special emphasis on the anglophone world. The chronology of major works and events with which the volume opens reinforces the chronological perspective the editor has chosen for her volume. The volume displays a certain eclecticism in terms of method, postcolonial views mingling with historical, gender, critical race studies, or ecocriticism.

The first literary texts in English – *Beowulf*, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* or *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* – are investigated from the perspective of the cultural capital invested in food. Thus, Aaron K. Hostetter reads in medieval feasts relations of strength and power but also keen ironical or satirical social comments. The position of prominence that food held in the early modern period is further scrutinized from the vantage point of the connections between the culinary and poetry. The making and consumption of food is cleverly transferred by Joe Moshenska to the realm of literature as early modern poets such as John Milton, Edmund Spenser or Ben Jonson reflected in their works on how close the art of the cook was to that of the poet. Despite Socrates'

claim that cooking is “a mere routine,” early modern poets suggested that one could discern in food the ingenuity of its creator, a position which came to the fore in debates about the consecrated bread of the Eucharist. Denise Gigante expatiates on the “Romantic Revolution in Taste” which meant a critical overturning of the philosophical hierarchy of the senses in favour of the “gustatory aesthetics” upheld by William Hazlitt in his essays and John Keats in his poetry. The repositioning of the role of somatic taste in the Romantic period is also seen in relation to the cultural institutions associated with gastronomy, which were emerging at the time: restaurants, dining clubs, tasting juries, food journalism. The gastronomical turn in aesthetics was opposed, however, by radical dietary politics (as espoused by P. B. Shelley), stemming from an ecocritical concern with the sufferings of animals.

From the gastronomical debates carried out on the British Isles, the volume shifts grounds and moves to the USA in order to investigate early American taste. Starting from the story of the first Thanksgiving, Lauren F. Klein argues that good taste was equated with good citizenship in the USA. Her analysis of the works of the generation of American novelists born immediately after Independence shows how the tropes of food and eating were used to refine the taste of their readers with a view to effecting social and political change.

The Victorian era, which was an unprecedented age of consumption, is labeled by Kate Thomas “a Gastronomic Age” as it was an era that constructed a new relationship between eating and reading all the more so as this was the time when cookbooks emerged for the first time in commercial form, becoming best-sellers. As Thomas argues, “The pleasure of reading gestured at an interrelation between food and text that was newly possible in the Victorian era” (73). As a matter of fact, cookbooks are given ample space in this volume. Thus, Allison Carruth, well-known to the reader for her seminal volumes in the field, elaborates on the gastronomical writings which emerged in opposition to bourgeois food culture at the turn to the twentieth century. While analyzing F. T. Marinetti, Lorine Niedicker and M. F. K. Fisher, Carruth enlarges on the boundaries of the cookbook form in relation to modernist

modes of writing. On the other hand, Julia Child's 1961 cookbook, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, is read by J. Michelle Coghlan from the perspective of the role its author played in invalidating Cold War domestic ideology by her translation of French cuisine to American readers. Cookbooks were also instrumental in challenging, according to Katharina Vester, the normative claims that had been set in the nineteenth century, altering the features of the genre in terms of structure, language, and rules of cooking instructions in order to inscribe queer identities into the American mainstream.

On the other hand, when it comes to African-American cookbooks, they seem to have remained an "underexplored site of textual production and experimentation" (183). Erica Fretwell discerns in early black community cookbooks a concern with social taste to the detriment of sensory taste, as many striving African-Americans were less interested in preserving their own heritage or in proving their own authenticity than they were in obtaining citizenship.

Another strand which runs through several of the contributions is that of post-colonial studies approaches, which have deeply fertilized the field of food studies, leading to an increased understanding of the aesthetic value of the material culture of food in colonial or post-colonial times. Thus, food as a means of control in colonial Africa and its availability in post-colonial times are recurrent tropes in contemporary African literature, as Jonathan Bishop Highfield convincingly argues. Food and foodways offer access to forgotten histories as food archives a history of global imperialism which meant enslavement, the plantation system, as well as the replacement of native crops with imported species. The "colonial mouth" ever hungry for profit as well as food has yielded rich harvests of fiction in which the tropes of hunger and famine on the American plantations, in Ireland or in the British colonies, feature prominently.

The farm as an apocalyptic agricultural landscape and farmworker activism are dealt with in a pair of essays which illuminate the differences between the two: farmworker literature "often highlights the distance between the ideal of Jeffersonian

agrarianism and the reality of farmworkers' exploitation" (200). In the writings of John Steinbeck, Carey McWilliams and Helena Maria Viramontes, it is the farmworker not the farmer who emerges as the true inheritor of agrarian virtue. As Sarah D. Wald astutely argues, "the farmworker transcends the possessive impulse, belonging to the land rather than having the land belong to him" (200).

Quite unexpected is the analysis of children's literature through the lenses of food. Catherine Keyser demonstrates how the food imaginary has changed in keeping with the times, how it has incorporated social and economic changes such as intensive agriculture or the industrialization of the food system, serving them back to children in a highly-mediated form.

The last chapter explores the ways in which blogs and blogging – a significant phenomenon of the 21st century – help construct gender identities. Emily Contois sets out to fill a void in literary scholarship by analysing the way in which blogs construct masculinities, validating specific representations of men through food choices and cooking practices. By focusing on one highly-gendered type of food – dude food – which conveys conventional notions of masculinity by means of "culinary elements such as flavor, ingredients, cooking techniques, portion size, plating, and nutritional composition" (245), Contois skillfully illuminates the different ways in which four bloggers communicate the culinary traits of dude food through various authorial personae and narrative styles.

In this way, by focusing on topics less explored in criticism, the volume offers an inviting plate featuring dishes that put forth a lot of food for thought. It is an enriching read and a must for any scholar or student interested in the latest developments in the field of food studies. One of the numerous merits of this finely researched assortment of essays is to bring new and fresh perspectives on a topic as old as the world, which has only recently started receiving the attention it deserves.

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