she admits that she pays no attention to defined hunting seasons and in fact employs means of fishing that are well apt to result in killing legally undersized fish.

Veovode’s stated purpose in writing *The Contented Poacher* is to bring a smile to the reader’s lips, and she occasionally succeeds. In describing the madness that often accompanies deer-hunting season, she notes that as each day goes by “the deer get smarter and the hunters get stupider” (p.90), and the book contains a number of humorous anecdotes involving the foibles of gun hunters. Yet, far more often Veovode manages to bring a painful grimace to the reader’s lips with implausible hunting tales and techniques, overly folksy prose, factual errors, and stunningly inhumane descriptions of animal killing.

For example, no one would dispute the fact that moose are profoundly dimwitted, but Veovode’s purported technique for moose killing calls into question both the animal’s ability to survive in the wild as well as the reader’s gullibility. The technique involves rolling a large boulder into the usual path of a bull moose. The moose will construe the obstacle as a territorial foe, whereupon he will repeatedly ram his antlers into the boulder until he dies. Or so she says. Anyone foolish enough to attempt this maneuver at home is going to be disappointed.

Some of the book’s tales are related in an endearingly rustic manner, but all too often the author’s style becomes annoying, such as when she notes that “There’s a guy just outside Bayfield Colorado who raised him up a dog what’s legendary in those parts” (p.59). Factual errors also plague *The Contented Poacher*, including the description of a “Moose versus Car” scoreboard maintained in Montpelier, Vermont (there is no such thing, though something vaguely similar can be found in northern New Hampshire), and painfully inaccurate descriptions of typical weights of certain fish species.

Veovode includes dozens of recipes for cooking game, and many of them are useful, including Pheasant and New Potatoes Marinated in Bordeaux and Sesame Venison. But numerous others seem to have been included merely for shock value. The recipe for Thrice Cooked Javelina Brain will have limited appeal (calf brains can be used as a substitute, if that helps), and the nation’s economy may have to decline precipitously before the Field Mouse Tempura and Hot Hunan Stir-Fried Mouse recipes find many proponents.

But the most objectionable aspect of this book involves some of the techniques described for killing game. Veovode expresses a belief that animals should be killed humanely, and some of her hunting techniques accomplish that goal. For example, pheasant can be attracted by placing corn in a cardboard tube, whereupon the bird can be grabbed by the neck and quickly dispatched. In other instances, however, she describes the means of capture without specifying how the animal is to be subsequently killed. Wild turkeys can be lured into nets and prairie dogs smoked out of their holes, but in neither case does the author describe how the hunter is to administer a fatal blow. Wild turkeys can be both sizeable and cantankerous, so this is not a trivial matter.

Then again, having read her description for killing squirrels and chipmunks, the reader might not want to be privy to all of Veovode’s executorial recommendations. Squirrels are to be stunned by ball bearings fired from a slingshot and then whacked over the head by a hammer. Chipmunks do not require the ball bearing step and can simply be hammered. The reader who hopes to find subsequent passages that describe these techniques as grisly jokes will be found wanting.

The irony, of course, is that Veovode ably lampoons the exploits of some foolish gun hunters only to offer up alternatives that are at times considerably more distasteful.

—Roy Towlen, Burlington, VT

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**Dining at the Lineman’s Shack**

John Weston


225 pp. $17.95 (paper)

Writing a memoir is bittersweet. Ghosts and scenes from the past emerge to inflict pain as well as pleasure. When food is the lens for examining one’s own life, the task is no less complex. Food is about relationships—often with mothers, intimacy or the lack of it, and social conditions like poverty.

These subjects are the focus of novelist and poet John Weston’s *Dining at the Lineman’s Shack*. He evokes the culture of the Southwest (Arizona) from the Great Depression to just after World War II. Quirky, witty, and literary, this is no ordinary memoir, as the first sentence signals: “When The Palace reopened on Montezuma Street, the new owner served mountain lion *barbacoa*” (p.3). (This was a lion shot with a government bounty on its head.) After Weston downs his lion sandwich, slathered with barbecue sauce, at a saloon in Prescott, he writes that he “swaggered into a life of experimental gastronomy” (p.3).

The roots of that life trace back to his poignant experiences as the youngest of five siblings living in poverty in an abandoned lineman’s shack—formerly occupied by ranch workers who maintained the “lines,” or fences—in tiny
Skull Valley, Arizona. With no refrigeration or indoor plumbing, a leaky roof, and a well that ran dry every summer, it was not an auspicious beginning for a culinary life. His plucky, non-self-pitying mother, Eloine, like so many women during the Depression, coaxed versatility out of any foodstuffs available. “Her strength lay in a practical and poverty-born sense that there must be more edible food in the world than most people realized” (p.67).

The strongest part of Weston’s book is an ode to this southern-born woman. When his father, a murky, distant figure referred to as “the Dad,” brings home a deer shot out of season, Eloine makes jerky, drying the meat on the tin roof while “the national wolf of starvation scratched at our door” (p.27). When the mile-away grocer will no longer carry the family’s account, Eloine urges them to “scratch around” (p.58). They bring back wild garlic and grapes, black walnuts, elderberries, and crawdads. These gleanings are supplemented by handouts, raids on neighboring farms, government allotments of beans, flour, and rice, and “cheap meat” (offal disguised with gravy) (p.85). “If I recall a boiling pig’s head now and then,” Weston writes, it is simply a “recurring flicker of food memory” (p.25). These foods and foraging are not so unusual in this part of the country, enriched as it is by Native American and Mexican heritage.

Eloine’s menus were heavy on biscuits, white gravy, fried chicken, cornbread, oxtail stew—everything drenched in lard. One of her more inventive dishes was “spaghetti and standing egg”—an individual pasta nest, topped with the ubiquitous white gravy, and crowned with a raw egg on the half shell. The challenge was to stir the egg into the spaghetti while still hot so that the egg would scramble.

The family never went without meals, though Eloine scorned some foods that were available in abundance, such as piñon nuts, prickly pear fruit, and cactus paddles (reminded her of Indians), squirrel, possum, and catfish ("Nigra foods") (p.77). Even in poverty there is a hierarchy of acceptable foods. Every midsummer the community-wide Goat Picnic, an оргiastic day- and night-long event of acceptable foods. Every midsummer the community-

recounts coming-of-age stories, sexual-identity conflict, and fictional vignettes that disrupt the heart of his memoir. We gain no sense of closure to Eloine’s life, as if the author couldn’t bear to go there.

By the time The Palace Saloon reopens in Prescott after World War II and serves barbecued mountain lion, we’re a long way from the lineman’s shack. As Weston observes, “Forgotten tastes, like smells, sometimes cross back over the brink of introspection and enliven a buried scene” (p.85). This perhaps explains why the quintessential meal for Weston remains homemade hot biscuits spread with Nucoa and a thick slice of ripe tomato—a lifeline to earlier innocence, youth, and maternal love.

—Linda Murray Berzok, Stephentown, NY

_The Marriage of the Sea_  
Jane Alison  
262 pp. $24.00 (cloth)

Two sets of characters contend for our attention in Jane Alison’s second novel, _The Marriage of the Sea_. Seven people, all artists of one sort or another, interlock to form one set; their lives oscillate between the two cities that constitute the second set. The human characters connect in patterns far more elusive than those that link the places, Venice and New Orleans. Alison’s sensuous prose beautifully evokes two watery worlds, once enriched by water and now at its mercy. Along with her characters she sniff New Orleans’s drenched air, trip on its buckling streets, and shudder at its termite-laden walls, and we wander the _calle_
s and squares of Venice’s glorious mud and water, reminded of its transcendent and transient beauty. The sulfurous humidity of the one, the lapping waves and salt-tangy taste of the other, pervade _Marriage of the Sea_.

Impermanence unites the architectural motifs of these threatened cities with the fates of the characters. Most seek their permanence via love. Max, a historian of food, accepts an invitation to teach in New Orleans in order to woo Lucinde, the film location scout who enthralled him. She in turn hides from him, running away to Biloxi and flying off to Venice. Anton, an architect with no permanent job in New Orleans, accepts a teaching stint in Venice, leaving his wife, Josephine, at home to undergo repeated, painful fertility attempts. Lucinde’s friend Vera, a painter, wins a fellowship to Venice and takes up residence in a house owned by Lach, the lover who just dumped her and who is