Then on to “Supply and Demand,” where Tames traces the development of the various celebrated markets such as Billingsgate (fish), Smithfield (meat), Spitalfields (fruit and vegetables), and Covent Garden (fruit, vegetables, herbs, and flowers). In this same chapter we meet William Fortnam, who arrived in London in 1705, lodged with a small shopkeeper, Hugh Mason, and got a job as a footman in Queen Anne’s household. The partnership they formed thrives to this day. This week in Jackson, Mississippi, I bought a box of Twinings’ Earl Grey tea. Thomas Twining (1675–1741) abandoned weaving for tea, and though the firm has merged, it is still family run (p.82). Crosse & Blackwell had a similarly modest beginning in 1830. And the Tesco grocery chain, which had a profit of one billion pounds in 2001 (p.99), was built by “Jack” Cohen, son of an immigrant Polish-Jewish tailor, with a thirty pound sterling demobilization gratuity from the Royal Flying Corps.

The chapter “Foreign Flavors” surveys the impact of immigrants on the restaurant scene. The firm of J. Lyons is described as “the greatest Jewish contribution to feeding London—indeed the whole nation” (p.115). And who was Margaret Hilda Roberts, who worked in Lyons’s research laboratory? (See answer at the end.) Some interesting figures: the Bangladeshi catering industry in Britain has an annual turnover of two billion pounds and employs seventy thousand people. Like Chinese food? There are over 1,200 Chinese restaurants in London (pp.120,123).

The chapter “Eating Out” traces the development and role of the coffeehouses and pubs, each usually the focus of some particular interest, e.g., stock brokerage, insurance, publishing, clergy. Need I say what the coffeehouse founded of some particular interest, e.g., stock brokerage, insurance, role of the coffeehouses and pubs, each usually the focus of schools, and particular restaurants. Of the Café Royal (“Quality and Quantity,” surveying prisons, workhouses, people at their most English, go to the Café Royal, where Beerbohm Tree remarked: “If you want to see the English frequented by Wilde, Whistler, and Shaw, Sir Herbert—but lack of “entitlement”). Warnes avers “that malnutrition is preventable…that hunger can be overcome” (p.168).

Who today, especially those who have experienced or witnessed hunger, would find such a statement indefensible? I wonder, however, why (and how) we should look to literature to accomplish such aims. Can an expressly literary text also bear heavy political freight? It’s well known that black authors, from the earliest times, necessarily used the pen instead of the sword to argue the causes of liberation, voting rights, and fair treatment. We also know that Wright was avowedly political and seeks a way that these favorite texts can end a problem that he says is no longer Malthusian (that is, inevitable due to population growth), but rather Amartya Sen-ian (that is, avoidable: hunger too frequently is not about lack of food, but lack of “entitlement”). Warnes avers “that malnutrition is preventable…that hunger can be overcome” (p.168).

This is a very worthwhile book. Now, who was Margaret Hilda Roberts, employed in Lyons’s research laboratory? She became the first female prime minister of the United Kingdom.

—Louis J. Lyell, Jackson, MS

Hunger Overcome? Food and Resistance in Twentieth-Century African American Literature
Andrew Warnes
Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004
232 pp. $19.95 (paper)

How can major black authors solve the problem of world hunger? That’s the Herculean task Andrew Warnes, a lecturer in American Literature at Leeds University in the United Kingdom, sets for Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright, and Toni Morrison. In his estimation, black literature should be used to ken “the startling existence of food shortage within one of the wealthiest countries in the world” (p.1); by extension, such literary works would help to end similar problems around the globe. In a key observation, Warnes proposes that “hunger and illiteracy” together sketch out a recurrent theme in literary works by blacks, focusing on Richard Wright’s Black Boy, Zora Neale Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God, and Toni Morrison’s Tar Baby, but occasionally foraying into other texts, such as the eighteenth-century narrative of Olaudah Equiano to black-power advocates Bobby Seale’s and Huey Newton’s manifestos announcing the Black Panther Party breakfast program. Throughout, Warnes investigates the twinned tropes of hunger and lack of education and seeks a way that these favorite texts can end a problem that he says is no longer Malthusian (that is, inevitable due to population growth), but rather Amartya Sen-ian (that is, avoidable: hunger too frequently is not about lack of food, but lack of “entitlement”). Warnes avers “that malnutrition is preventable…that hunger can be overcome” (p.168).

Who today, especially those who have experienced or witnessed hunger, would find such a statement indefensible? I wonder, however, why (and how) we should look to literature to accomplish such aims. Can an expressly literary text also bear heavy political freight? It’s well known that black authors, from the earliest times, necessarily used the pen instead of the sword to argue the causes of liberation, voting rights, and fair treatment. We also know that Wright was avowedly political and that Morrison’s interviews frequently turn on current social issues. Still, Albert Murray’s locution of “social science fiction,” meant to warn against the missteps of well-meaning scholarship, somehow came to mind as I read this book.
Among textual discussions I found suggestive were Warnes’s treatments of the spoiled dinner scene in Their Eyes Were Watching God—as when he asks us to consider whether protagonist Janie had indeed poisoned her husband—or whether Morrison’s Tar Baby opens an intertextual dialogue with the film melodrama Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner? Intriguing ideas, both of them, yet finally unsatisfying because the author does not go far enough: for one, readers might find the first discussion more convincing were the author also to analyze the shooting death of Janie’s second husband (admittedly she killed him in self-defense, but it could make the earlier exegesis that much more compelling). Interesting, but less successful, are digressive excursions on the authorship of Joel Chandler Harris and on oranges in early modern Anglophone exploration narratives.

Let me return to my earlier cavils and repent, slightly: there is nothing inherently wrong with Warnes’s somewhat functionalist approach. Nonetheless, Warnes, having entered the conversations in African American and food studies, needs to be ready for critique from these quarters. I was puzzled by Warnes’s apparent lack of familiarity with certain ongoing discussions. For example, when he speaks of the Cartesian duality and its subsequent denigration of gendered-female “cultural practices,” I was surprised that no reference was made to Lisa Heldke, to name just one scholar studying this problem; in writing of the British predilection for sweets and its implication in the plantation slavery system and concomitant racism, Warnes quotes British scholars Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy but barely mentions Sidney Mintz, much less engages his argument; high-profile African Americanists like Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Barbara Johnson are regularly cited, but Nellie McKay, a noted Morrison scholar (one who has published on Hurston as well), is not even listed in the bibliography. The author does enthusiastically engage the scholarship of Doris Witt and treats an essay by the author also to analyze the shooting death of Janie’s second husband (admittedly she killed him in self-defense, but it could make the earlier exegesis that much more compelling).

Personal tussles with the socioeconomic effects of tea production underpin much of The Empire of Tea by Alan Macfarlane and his mother, Iris. Iris spent her early married life struggling with frustration on a tea plantation in India. Alan remembers his pleasurable childhood there, never realizing that the workers’ backbreaking efforts paid for his expensive British education. Now, he speculates that since the Industrial Revolution occurred soon after the English working class took to serious tea drinking, there may be a causal link.

Macfarlane explores this hypothesis by tracing both the history of tea and the health effects of drinking it. Most significantly, he notes that tea is safe because it must be made from boiling water. Thus, in the cities of eighth-century China, tea drinkers did not fall victim to the epidemics of dysentery, typhoid, and other waterborne diseases—an effect repeated nearly a thousand years later when tea arrived in Europe.

The first purchasers of tea were wealthy sophisticates eager to try anything new. But by 1750 when faster, more reliable ships (though not the clippers cited by Macfarlane) began trading with China, even the working class could afford tea, and like the Chinese, city dwellers were discovering that they were less subject to the intestinal illnesses caused by polluted water. Thus, tea certainly improved the health and hence fostered urban civilization in countries where it became the standard everyday beverage.

To this point Macfarlane follows the well-known history of the Chinese origins of tea, its arrival in Europe, and its emergence as Britain’s primary drink. Less familiar is the development of the Indian tea industry, a staggeringly successful British project to break the Chinese monopoly on tea.

The British began growing tea in Assam in the 1820s. By the 1860s they had introduced the harsh but efficient production methods pioneered in Britain’s factories. Tea bushes and workers’ cottages marched in straight lines. Hours were long and tasks specialized. Workers were transported hundreds of miles from their homes and had to sign onerous, incomprehensible, and unbreakable contracts. As for the managers, men with meager financial prospects in Britain went to India in droves. Tea companies paid good salaries and provided lavish homes staffed by hordes of servants. Like the laborers, managers risked dying of malaria and other

—Rafa Zafar, Washington University in St. Louis