Dunmire does not ignore the tension or conflict that might have arisen from the imperialist expanding European influence that underplays any deprivation of native diet diversity, as it did especially in California. The brutality of Spanish colonialism lies long in the past, and today the Southwest’s indigenous cuisine represents a harmonious mixture of old- and new-world influences. There is nothing wrong with putting a positive spin on what the author correctly describes as “the grandest migration of plants, agriculture, and foodstuff in all of human history.” In fact, given the current obsession of food scholars with promoting the local, it is refreshing to read a book that actually celebrates the transworld blending of diverse food cultures.

—Jeff Charles, California State University—San Marcos

The book would also benefit from a fuller discussion of the limits of Spanish influence. Natives were not always welcoming of the new foods and styles of farming forced on them. The great Pueblo rebellion of 1680, which expelled Spanish colonists from much of New Mexico for over ten years, was partly spurred by a famine blamed on missionary meddling with agricultural rituals. Also, considering that what Dunmire calls “the big three” of sixteenth-century Spanish cuisine—wheat, olives, and old-world grapes—never became central to southwestern cookery, it is clear that natives adopted Mediterranean foodstuffs on their own terms.

Still, no one can gainsay the transformation to the region’s diet brought by chicken, pork, beef, melons, and stone fruit, not to mention herbs like cilantro and spices like cinnamon. The brutality of Spanish colonialism lies long in the past, and today the Southwest’s indigenous cuisine represents a harmonious mixture of old- and new-world influences. There is nothing wrong with putting a positive spin on what the author correctly describes as “the grandest migration of plants, agriculture, and foodstuff in all of human history.” In fact, given the current obsession of food scholars with promoting the local, it is refreshing to read a book that actually celebrates the transworld blending of diverse food cultures.

—Jeff Charles, California State University—San Marcos

Biting the Hand That Starves You: Inspiring Resistance to Anorexia/Bulimia
Richard Maisel, David Epston, and Ali Borden
New York: W.W. Norton, 2004
xii + 314 pp. $35.00 (cloth)

Anorexia nervosa (AN) is the refusal to maintain body weight at 85 percent of that expected for age and height. Bulimia nervosa (BN) involves episodes of binge eating followed by inappropriate compensatory behavior such as vomiting, misuse of laxatives, and excessive exercise. Both eating disorders, characterized by an intense and obsessive fear of weight gain, have proved challenging to treat through psychosocial interventions. Some studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and interpersonal therapy (IPT) in the treatment of bulimia. CBT has been found to be less successful in treating anorexia, with better outcome rates seen through family-based techniques like the Maudsley Method. Evidence-based research on psychotherapy in the treatment of eating disorders is limited.
In Biting the Hand That Starves You, Richard Maisel, David Epston, and Ali Borden present an alternative to the prevailing psychosocial approach to anorexia and bulimia. Based on their years of clinical experience with eating-disordered clients, the authors propose that eating disorders be viewed as an external influence on, rather than an internal condition of, the sufferer. This position is in stark contrast to the prevailing psychosocial view of the eating disorder as occurring "within the people it afflicts—something they have or are" (p. 76). In the authors' appraisal, an individual does not have an eating disorder; they struggle with an eating disorder. The distinction, which may appear small in linguistic terms, amounts to a considerably different philosophy of treatment. The authors worry that the current therapeutic paradigm may actually harm patients by inducing them to identify with—and even seek validation through—their eating disorders. In the words of one client: "[From traditional therapy] I believed I was anorexic... that I had to be a better anorexic..." (p. 77).

Maisel, Epston, and Borden encourage clients to regard their eating disorders as an external enemy against which they must engage in metaphorical warfare. A former client explains the value of this exercise: "Before, I had just talked with doctors about anorexia. No one ever taught me that you have to be against her... When I talk against anorexia there's more of a chance of getting free because I can start hating her and when I do, I can let her go" (p. 80). The authors liken eating disorder sufferers and survivors to the captives of Nazi concentration camps, starved and beaten down by an outside dictator—their eating disorder. To survive, they are empowered to fight back.

What are some of the combat techniques described in Biting the Hand? Clients are trained to distinguish the voice of their eating disorder from their own voice, as though each voice is a separate entity that can be completely disentangled from the other. Anti-eating disorder outrage is promoted as a means of siphoning from the disorder its false moral authority. In a chapter devoted specifically to parents, the authors make clear that they do not hold caregivers morally responsible for eating disorders in young people. Instead, they hold up parents as an important potential ally in an eating-disordered child's struggle to develop a spirit of resistance to the disorder.

The book closes with a letter written by an eating disorder survivor, Chloe, to a woman named Thalia, who is in danger of dying from anorexia. In part of the letter, Chloe addresses Thalia's eating disorder directly: "Anorexia, I despise you and what you do to a young woman like Thalia... however hard you may try to infiltrate my words and twist this letter for your evil purposes, you can never succeed in stealing it completely because you can't take away the fact that it was written with anti-anorexic spirit in total and utter defiance of you... I despise you [anorexia] for trying to take Thalia's hopes, dreams, and values away from her" (p. 295). This excerpt, in its dramatic and adversarial wording, vividly demonstrates the view of eating disorders taken by the authors and their patients.

While often sensational in style and chaotic in tone, Biting the Hand nevertheless presents a persuasive and inspiring way to think about eating disorders and their treatment. The stories of healing recounted in this book, told in the grandiose language of war, are ultimately stories of resistance and liberation. The authors' methods remain systematically unproven, however, and scientific study is suggested before they are brought to the mainstream.

—Maria Frisch, University of Minnesota

Bookends

Dinner for Architects: A Collection of Napkin Sketches
Edited by Winfried Nerdinger; Foreword by Philip K. Howard
New York: W.W. Norton, 2003
vi + 58 pp. $19.95 (paper)

Printed on a deliciously creamy, thick paper, Dinner for Architects is a collection of ink sketches by famous architects who were invited to contribute drawings on 16-inch square dinner napkins. Originally published in German as Serviettenskissen für das Architekturmuseum, this book is the catalog for an April 2003 exhibition in celebration of a new gallery at the Pinothek der Moderne, Munich. The exhibit was conceived as a set of napkin sketches left behind after a dinner party. Each architect's symbolic "place at the table" is literally represented by the napkin set on a large table in the gallery. Only, in this case, neither the drawings nor the napkins have any of the customary relationship with food, drink, or conversation that compels the designer to draw something on a surface at hand to communicate with her dinner companions.

Dinner for Architects does not ask us to take a symbolically staged meal terribly seriously, and yet I could not find an ounce of irony in it, either. The curators carefully explain that the projects were produced by mailing a napkin to a design office and requesting that a sketch on the napkin be returned to the museum. The curators are gently amused.