muses on aphrodisiacs in an excerpt from her *A Natural History of Love*. Margaret Visser counters with an exploration of the anaphrodisiac qualities of lettuce in “For and Against Sex,” from *Much Depends on Dinner*. (Her gruesomely fascinating “The Artificial Cannibal” shows up in the section on hunger.) Lucille Clifton strikes a note of need and yearning in her poem “Salt”:

…and she is salt
to him,
something that rubs raw
that leaves a tearful taste
but what he will
strain the ocean for and
what he needs. (p. 97)

The anthology’s promise of “sensuality and humor” gives way to something darker in pieces like Barbara Ehrenreich’s scathing “Serving in Florida,” her razor-sharp first-person reportage on waitressing from *Nickel and Dimed*. And the mood turns downright haunting in Primo Levi’s somber “Last Christmas of the War,” a grim reminder that in hells like Auschwitz the very terms “eating, food, hunger,” have meanings totally different from their usual ones (p.131). Even in our comfortable quotidian lives, sustenance often comes down to “daily murder and redemption” in our struggle to “feed the gut, brain, and soul” (p.166), as we are reminded in an excerpt from Betty Fussell’s brilliant memoir *My Kitchen Wars*. Perhaps, in the end, this is a food lover’s anthology of not only sensuality and humor but death as well, as wittily presaged by Les Murray’s pithy poem at the beginning of the volume:

A fact the gourmet
euphemism can’t silence:
vegetarians eat sex,
carnivores eat violence. (p.9)

A hint of death also colors Bascove’s fine illustrations throughout the book. Her highly mannered paintings possess a surface voluptuousness yet are oddly static and restrained, teasing us with the appearance of sensuality but stopping short of deep-heated eroticism. These illustrations are technically proficient, even beautiful, but they rarely break a sweat. Her figures seem detached, emotionally disconnected: The couple in her 1988 painting *At Table* (plate before p.81) appears flattened with ennui, devoid of hunger or longing; and the hard-edged, vaguely menacing *Woman Cutting Fruit* (following p.192) fixes us with a forbidding stare. These qualities are more easily forgiven in her still lifes—of melons, peaches, thwacked leeks and halved artichokes, lush eggplants—but the knife is never far away from the flesh. “Sex without sin,” Luis Buñuel wrote, “is like an egg without salt.” Maybe in the realm of sensuality, the sinister is no less indispensable, and so this book succeeds by eschewing the sentimental in favor of the edgy, raw, and occasionally dark.

—Meryl S. Rosofsky, New York University

**Daughter of Heaven: A Memoir with Earthly Recipes**

*Leslie Li*


xix + 274 pp. Recipes. $25.00 (cloth)

Written in elegant prose, this heavenly memoir offers cultural and culinary perceptions amid the sights, smells, and tastes of two worlds, as seen through the eyes of two women. One is Nai-nai, the wife of Li Zhongren, whose husband was the first democratically elected vice president of China. The other is her granddaughter, this book’s author. Nai-nai is no ordinary lady. She lived through very interesting times, including Chiang Kai-shek’s 1949 flight to Formosa, the country now known as Taiwan. Her granddaughter, Leslie Li, has also lived through interesting times, when intercultural marriages demand understanding. As the product of one such union, Li is unsure of her heritage. She wonders who she is and where she fits in.

The author’s Chinese cultural education begins in 1958 when Nai-nai comes to New York to live with her traditional son and his nontraditional, and mostly non-Chinese, family, including Leslie Li, who defines herself as three-quarters Chinese and one-quarter Polish. She does not want to be or to act Chinese. When Grandma arrives, she cooks for Leslie, her sister, their Chinese father, their American-born Polish mother, and their friends. Granddaughter Leslie neither understands nor appreciates the efforts of Nai-nai, who cooks only Chinese regardless of others’ likes and appetites. Realizing how little the girls know about their father’s heritage, Nai-nai sets out to educate them.

The family moves frequently, to China, the United States, Hong Kong, and Europe. Chapters entitled “Moon Cakes,” “Jade Rabbits,” “Elixirs of Immortality,” “Clear Brightness and Hungry Ghosts,” and “Chinese New Year” reveal the Asian influences in their lives, while “Food Shame and Sand Wishes” and “Bitter Rice Sweet Rice” discuss Western exposure. But no matter the continent, each
chapter explores the family’s food culture, and all of the stories are fascinating. Written with imagination, they capture the powerful significance of eating. Most end with a recipe or two that provide irresistible, if overly simplified, home-style Chinese dishes as prepared by Nai-nai.

The gustatory experiences of this cross-cultural family help both reader and author understand what it means to be Chinese American. They expose the heritage the author rejected until after Nai-nai had returned to China alone. It is only then that Li begins to question her birthright, wondering whether she is Chinese or American. Some resolution occurs when she visits Nai-nai in China. When she returns home, she realizes that she is more Chinese than she had imagined, and she is finally ready for more input from Grandma. But unfortunately, Nai-nai is already in her celestial garden. Would that Li had come to her realization earlier.

At the end of this personal saga, Li explores the growing pains of an ABC, an American-born Chinese. In doing so, she concentrates on her Chinese heritage and finds that her roots need continual watering. Her book captures the liveliness of her life, exploring through a series of beautiful scenes what it means to be Chinese American.

For instance, during the Moon Festival, Nai-nai and her family buy yuebing, which the family knows as moon cakes. They “ate them at home washed down with glasses of chrysanthemum tea” (p.140). Li admits that she “wasn’t terribly fond of moon cakes—round pastries stuffed with various fillings: orange peel, red-bean paste, date paste, egg yolk, coconut, lotus-seed paste—until I stopped eating them like cookies and began nibbling at them like cake—fruit-cake, Chinese style…cut in very thin slices, [only then] moon cakes become the satisfying and substantial delicacy they are” (p.140). In a similar vignette, about buying flutes in Chinatown, Li shares Chinese metaphors for life that help her figure out who she really is. A Chinese merchant compares the flutes to the person she is, “with nothing inside…no culture inside” (p.180). Though this comment hits a sour note with Li, it encourages her to learn more about her Chineseness.

Daughter of Heaven is satisfying and substantial, filled with cultural know-how and Chinese-American sentiments. Enjoy its Breakfast Noodles, Pigs Feet with Ginger and Sweet Rice Vinegar, and sixteen other recipes. Read them; then make them to taste this culture. By writing this book, Li has finally understood her grandmother and shares her delight in Nai-nai and the heritage she conveyed to her granddaughter through food.

—Jacqueline M. Newman, editor, Flavor and Fortune

Washoku: Recipes from the Japanese Home Kitchen
Elizabeth Andoh
Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 2005
328 pp. Photographs. $35.00 (cloth)

While culinary principles make for interesting reading, few people cook by them. I find myself incanting “fresh, local, and seasonal” when I think about a menu, and Chinese theories of correspondence between food and health make tremendous sense, but nothing is framed on my kitchen wall. Most Americans, when faced with Japanese cuisine, seem to think that they are about to engage in a philosophico-spiritual-aesthetic exercise, with codes that need to be explained. Many Japanese cookbooks, trying to bring Japanese food within range of the home cook, go too far the other way, using words like “simple” or “for the American kitchen,” which seem to patronize the reader or promise only a diluted, inauthentic experience. This is unfair to the cook, who could indeed produce palatable and interesting food, and unfair to the tremendously exciting menus and dishes that make up the vast cultural menus of Japan.

To correct these problems, and to reduce the distance between the home cook overseas and the home cook in Japan, Elizabeth Andoh has undertaken the difficult tasks of balancing principles and the details of provisioning and preparation. In her new book, Washoku: Recipes from the Japanese Home Kitchen, Andoh presents us with encyclopedic references and definitions but, in the end, brings you into her own Japanese kitchen, where you can all but taste the results. The book is a treasure trove of detail and will be a permanent reference work in my library. Andoh’s heart is in the minutiae not in the conceptual framing, and her joy is in instructing the reader in delicious home cooking far from the highfalutin aesthetics of the kaiseki (tea ceremony) meal or the predictable sushi, sukiyaki, and tempura template of most overseas Japanese restaurants.

Andoh juggles correct cooking (as her Japanese mother-in-law, who seems always to be just over her shoulder, has taught her) with the need for flexibility and the tricks of the kitchen of the novice Japanese cook. To her credit, she does not dwell on the authentic, allowing for the commonsense adjustments anyone, including her mother-in-law, would make. But the way she frames her recipes—the analytical asides—are much less convincing. This reader, at any rate, perceived an attempt to create a model of what is special about the Japanese kitchen, to construct a vision of what constitutes the washoku principles and practices. What washoku means to most Japanese is not the wonderful smells and tastes of the home kitchen of an ordinary good cook.