of course, food. One may enjoy reading about James Fenimore Cooper as the founder and president of the Bread & Cheese Club of New York, or reading John Updike’s description of his favorite meal, or perusing a review of Suetonius’s *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars* that features the tale of Vitellius. Written with such precision, the words themselves create even more visual imagery than do the illustrations by Saul Steinberg. These very words may also prevent the reader from truly engaging and appreciating such a delicacy. Perhaps, penned in the spirit of translation, Buzzi’s words tend to be rigid instead of gentle, archaic instead of modern, at times disjointed instead of fluid. Little assistance is given to the student (reader), who is expected to have knowledge of the Vehling edition of Apicius’s *Cookery and Dining in Imperial Rome*, to know Carlo Emilio Gadda’s *Acquainted with Grief*, and to be well acquainted with Marinetti’s philosophical treatise *The Futurist Cookbook*. Yet even though it is aimed at experts in the field of food culture, even the novice gastronome will be enticed by Buzzi’s recounting of such great recipes as stuffed pigeon, Galen’s white soup, and tartsch.

—Myron Beasley, Brown University

Don’t Try This at Home: Culinary Catastrophes from the World’s Greatest Chefs
Edited by Kimberly Witherspoon and Andrew Friedman
New York: Bloomsbury, 2005
320 pp. $24.95 (cloth)

Masses of escaped eels on the kitchen floor, slimy against the ankles of cooks. Pavarotti, late but not really hungry. Failed cia mashed potatoes. Jackie O, pedaling away on her bike, denied a reservation. Scooping up spilled hollandaise sauce from the nasty floor of an old Datsun station wagon… and putting it back on the food. Each night as I picked up this book to read another of its forty stories, I hesitated. Did I want to know about pheasant that is really chicken in disguise? Meringue that is actually a white garbage bag… teased, powdered, and minted? *Don’t Try This at Home: Culinary Catastrophes from the World’s Greatest Chefs* reveals the mishaps that have befallen the culinary stars of our time.

We have seen or heard many of these chefs on television or radio, and their voices ring familiar here. Anthony Bourdain swears for us; Michael Lomonaco enchants us; and Sara Moulton quietly mocks herself. But the standouts in this collection are the stories told by chefs who do not have daily appearances on American cookery shows. Pino Luongo’s “A User’s Guide to Opening a Hamptons Restaurant” combines humor, astute class observation, and dire warnings about staffing. Tamasin Day-Lewis’s eloquent multigenerational story, “Euphoria,” teaches us that kitchen disaster stories “spurred [her] on, made [her] realize that failure, kitchen disaster, was not only an option, it was a given” (p.110).

I’m not usually in awe of professional chefs or any other kind of celebrity and am confirmed in my impression that any celebrity who tries to appear humble often comes across as insincere. Although some insincerity is apparent in this collection, overall the chorus amusingly returns to the theme of “I messed up. We messed up. Nobody was the wiser for it, until now.” Apart from occasional self-aggrandizement (several contributors pronounce that failure is not an option when working in the professional kitchen), this volume offers entertaining insights into the community of chefs and restaurateurs who respect each other, work with each other, fire each other, and laugh at one another.

—Traci Marie Kelly, University of Wisconsin–Madison

*The Devil’s Picnic: Around the World in Pursuit of Forbidden Fruit*
Taras Grescoe
New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005
368 pp. $23.95 (cloth)

Ever since Taras Grescoe first read about absinthe as a teenager, he felt the lure of the illicit, and *The Devil’s Picnic* details his travels and adventures to seven different countries in search of “forbidden fruit.” Grescoe casts himself as the central character in his travel adventures as he interviews colorful local informants, officials, and experts. Although he relates his experiences of intoxication amid carefully researched historical material, he is more of a journalist than a scholar: the book has no index or bibliography. Yet each chapter brims with lore, vivid descriptions, and detailed observations.

In Norway, Grescow sampled moonshine; in Singapore, he smuggled in crackers baked with illegal poppy seeds; and in France, he savored Époisses, a raw-milk cheese. He dined on bull testicles and baby eels in Spain, puffed on Cuban cigars in the United States, and drank mate de coca in Bolivia. In Switzerland, he finally sampled his long-desired absinthe and visited a euthanasia clinic that dispenses deadly pentobarbital sodium.