author’s efforts presented for the reader’s delectation on a single “menu” in such a fascinating volume.

—Dr. Lynn Visson, Monterey Institute of International Studies

**Bookends**

*Eat My Globe: One Year to Go Everywhere and Eat Everything*  
Simon Majumdar  
New York: Free Press, 2009  
xviii + 279 pp. $26.00 (cloth)

“The bastard can write.”

These are the words that Anthony Bourdain bestows on Simon Majumdar, former book publisher and now heralded food blogger and author of the kinetic memoir cum gastronomic travel adventure *Eat My Globe: One Year to Go Everywhere and Eat Everything*. Bourdain is correct: Majumdar can write. He can also eat. A lot. With passion, reverence, gusto, hilarity, and verisimilitude.

The premise for his book is simple. Feeling trapped and bored by a job he “loathed,” Majumdar stumbled upon a notebook with a to-do list for his life, which included having a suit made to measure, running a marathon, fixing his teeth (he’s British, enough said), and—the impetus for the book—GO EVERYWHERE, EAT EVERYTHING, spelled out in bold capital letters. And that’s pretty close to what he did. He quit his job, drained his bank account, and endured close to one hundred flights to and through more than thirty countries in an attempt to sample the world’s food.

With wit, humor, and a desire to follow food to its source, Majumdar writes in great detail and with refreshing candor about his gustatory experiences. He is not influenced by cultural trends or celebrity imprimatur, as evidenced by his harsh criticism of his meal at Chez Panisse—“vegetables so mushy I wanted to look in the kitchen to see if the old cook from my elementary school had been flown in especially for the occasion” (pp.160–161). He just as easily lavishes praise on the tiny Mrs. King’s Pork Pies in the town of Melton Mowbry, calling the pies served there one of the greatest tastes in the world. Such pronouncements make you trust Majumdar as a writer, not to mention be more forgiving for his over-the-top enthusiasm, which can sometimes slide into the excess of a devotee.

The appendices should not be overlooked. They underscore Majumdar’s wonderful humor and delight in the world of food—especially his top twenty tastes, including pho in Hanoi, *jamón Ibérico* in Spain, and souvlaki in Melbourne; and top ten worst tastes (braised dog in China, cod sperm sushi in Japan, and fermented mare’s milk in Mongolia).

It seems that Majumdar’s parents (to whom he lovingly dedicates the book) as well as his brother (whom he calls “the Great Salami”) fueled his lifelong love for and pursuit of the world’s greatest food. This helps explain not only why the book is so interesting but why Majumdar is, as well. As he says about his quests, “Food is not just what I eat, it is what I am and what I do” (p.xvii).

—Stefani Bardin, New York State University at Buffalo

*The Gastronomy of Marriage: A Memoir of Food and Love*  
Michelle Maisto  
New York: Random House, 2009  
xvii + 236 pp. $15.00 (cloth)

Food and love are not new topics in the memoir genre—we have seen a number of these books in recent years, and some of them even make it to the big screen. So is there room for another food and love story? Absolutely, when it is as beautifully written and exquisitely detailed as Michelle Maisto’s *The Gastronomy of Marriage: A Memoir of Food and Love*.

Maisto’s memoir is a journey through one couple’s preparation for their upcoming wedding. Structurally, the book outlines the relationship between Maisto and Rich, her soon-to-be husband, as they undergo the stress of paying for and organizing a wedding. Recipes for their favorite dishes are interspersed throughout the book—a common technique in memoirs about food. Maisto’s recipes, however, have a more personal and conversational tone than recipe sections I have come across in other memoirs. An expansion of the recipes in this book would do very well in the cookbook genre.

As is evident from both the narrative and the recipes, this couple loves food, which connects them from the very first date when Rich orders a chocolate soufflé. This realization, “that he was a good eater, and an eater I could respect” (p.xi), seals the deal for Maisto. Moving in together, however, complicates their eating habits. Maisto comes from an Italian background and is a vegetarian; Rich grew up in a traditional Chinese family and loves meat. Compromise is no easy task. Maisto points out the adjustments that are necessary when two people who share a home and table attempt to merge food habits. There is more to it than just two jars of peanut butter in the pantry.
...there is actually no reason to expect that two people who grew up in different traditions and approaches to eating and meals, and who have ethnically different versions of comfort foods, varying ideologies about what is acceptable to consume, and bodies with vastly different metabolisms and digestive traits, should easily be able to sit to the same meal each night. And yet this is what we now negotiate” (pp.8–9).

We often hear of the financial or geographical conflicts between two people who are marrying but don’t usually consider the question of what to eat for dinner as a major point of contention or compromise. But *The Gastronomy of Love* explores those negotiations in minute culinary detail. The simple task of figuring out what to cook for dinner becomes a larger metaphor for how to overcome all sorts of challenges in relationships.

Mamisto’s writing and attention to detail is reminiscent of other great food writers like Ruth Reichl or M.F.K. Fisher. It takes an accomplished and talented writer to convey the sensual delights and atmosphere of food through the written word. Mampreets description of New York’s Chinatown alone is worth the price of the book. It’s a rare book that successfully transports a reader to a destination through language, but Mampreets writing does just that. I enjoyed every step of the journey.

—Lisa Stowe, University of Calgary

*Ground Up*
Michael Idov
304 pp. $14.00 (paper)

In his debut novel Michael Idov tells the story of a young New York couple who attempt to spice up their bourgeois life with a little downtown bohemian cred by opening an unfortunately named Viennese coffee shop called Café Kolschitzky. Mark and Nina quickly find that misguided yuppie dreams built on urban ennui and the romantic impulse to be consummate hosts don’t last long on the not-so-rough-and-tumble streets of the gentrified Lower East Side. Loosely based on his own experience of opening a café (recounted in an earlier essay for *Slate*), Idov’s novel successfully and hilariously satirizes the lifestyles of the bored and boho, though for some New York readers the story will be all too familiar.

From the outset Mark and Nina know “that the bizarre desire to own a café had nothing to do with the entrepreneurial drive of a born businessman” (p.45). In fact, they want “to be paid in meaning” (p.45). Such obviously flawed thinking sends the two tottering toward fatalistic failure. And yet, as Idov so rightly states in his *Slate* essay: “The scary part is that you think you can do better.” The fact that Mark, as the narrator, is so exceedingly self-aware makes the situation all the more funny and painful to experience.

Mark and Nina do mean well, but they eventually come to the realization that no matter the good intention, owning a business comes down to dollars and cents. And there is much more at stake than financial loss, as Mark and Nina’s marriage teeters toward similar doom.

Idov’s writing is smart, sharp, and especially funny. Although he tackles big themes here (class, marriage, the American dream), the novel never takes itself too seriously or self-aggrandizes. Idov has created a wonderful supporting cast of characters, including Avi Sosna, the Israeli landlord whose exchange with Mark regarding the gentrification of the neighborhood is especially memorable: “People have character. Neighborhoods have buildings with rentable first floors” (p.262).

But Idov truly succeeds in his ability to take grand themes and render them astutely by means of the seemingly minor experiences and interactions we have every day. From the comically uncomfortable moments of Mark’s class guilt (his desire to have the construction crew like him “began to grow into a nervous tic, a kind of weird, desperate, asexual flirt” [p.76]) to his description of Nina’s beauty (“in the way accidental patterns are beautiful, the radial splatter of spilled milk or quills of sunlight refracted through a crystal ashtray: every minute, something about her would flicker and shift” [p.15])—Idov writes with an incisive ease that is remarkably insightful, no matter the emotional tone. For all those who have chased, or perhaps stumbled, toward their dreams, *Ground Up* is for you.

—Jennifer Sit, New York, NY

*Transactions in Taste: The Collaborative Lives of Everyday Bengali Food*
Mampreet K. Janeja
New Delhi: Routledge, 2010
185 pp. Rs. 695.00 (cloth)

Mampreet Janeja’s book examines how food informs daily domestic and social interactions among Bengalis. Although Bengal is mostly rural, the author opts for detailed observation and analysis of the role of food in the lives of two major Bengali cities—Calcutta (now Kolkata), in the Indian state of West Bengal, and Dhaka, in Bangladesh.