New York is a fascinating food town with a more colorful, seeks to fill this vacuum, bringing his considerable details, Miralda’s essential achievement and ongoing work entitle him, too, to a crown.

—Harley Spiller, New York, NY

Appetite City: A Culinary History of New York
William Grimes
New York: North Point Press, 2009
354 pp. Illustrations. $30.00 (cloth)

New York is a fascinating food town with a more colorful and intriguing restaurant history than many imagine. With a few exceptions, this story has been surprisingly under-reported by historians and food writers. Now William Grimes, a former restaurant critic for the New York Times and author of the cocktail history Straight Up or On the Rocks, seeks to fill this vacuum, bringing his considerable experience as the official palate of New York to his latest work, Appetite City: A Culinary History of New York.

Although Grimes titles his work a “culinary history,” his nearly exclusive focus is on public eating establishments in New York City from the late eighteenth century to the present, garnished with a soufflé of market history. This market history is some of his best work, as he brings to life the sights, smells (both pleasant and not so), and mucky streets of the cacophonous Fly, Fulton, and Washington Street Markets that sated both New York’s fancy folk and hoi polloi through much of the nineteenth century.

One would expect that someone as knowledgeable about food as Grimes obviously is from his years of restaurant reviewing would bring as astute an eye to evocations of the cuisine of yesteryear as to the market. When he invests the time to describe the making of a proper turtle soup—from displaying the gargantuan beasts publicly to attract notice (Nibo’s Coffee House), to the required butchery and blood-draining, the initial cooking, prying the succulent meat from the shell, creating the turtle stock with the shell and traditional calves’ foot and ham, and then the final assembly with the memorable addition of glistening turtle fat (Nash and Crook Chophouse)—Grimes is at the top of his game. Although I came away ruing my inability to time travel to taste this epicurean marvel, his detailed description came as close as the printed word ever could to allowing me mentally to savor this renowned dish. Equal to the sensual pleasure created by Grimes’s insights is his ability to convey the utter extravagance of this nearly forgotten dish and the social milieu in which this type of cuisine could flourish.

Grimes does not paint these superb pictures often enough. Instead, there is a flat quality to his reporting of the seemingly identical menus of chops and potatoes, or spaghetti and fish and red wine in straw-covered fiaschi, or of whatever the particular style du jour was that formed the fare of many establishments. While Grimes has clearly plumbed plenty of primary sources, as his bibliography makes plain, he adds little insight or context to them. This failure to step back from his subject and discuss a bigger picture is disappointing.

Grimes occasionally shows a casualness toward culinary history that may simply be part of his failure to put events in a careful chronology or in context. In his opening pages he relates the tale of the “dashing Louis de Singeron, a French nobleman who fled revolutionary France [and] chanced into a career as a confectioner” (pp.9–10). He credits Singeron with stunning early-nineteenth-century New Yorkers with the inventiveness of the French culinary arts by “introduc[ing] the practice of stamping New Year’s cakes with hearts pierced by arrows” (p.10) and never mentions the long Dutch tradition of intricately stamped New Year’s cakes. Thus a reader could easily come away with a misimpression of the culinary practices that were already established in the city Singeron encountered.

Grimes’s breezy treatment of a broad subject through time may come from his background as a reporter, and for some it will make Appetite City an ideal starting point for learning a bit about New York’s public dining. Grimes catalogs virtually all of the notable restaurants that have opened their doors to New York’s voracious diners. With the exception of the grand dames of New York restaurants, such as Delmonico’s, Le Pavillon, or the Colony, or various chains and conglomerates such as the Alice Foote MacDougall or Restaurant Associates empires, few establishments merit more than a brief paragraph or two, and Grimes often relies on the décor or the notable personalities that kept the places running to describe the restaurant scene. For readers desirous of tasting the smorgasbord of New York dining, Appetite City fits the bill nicely. For those who want to drink deeply of the social and culinary history underlying
the restaurant and its role as a cultural force in New York, *Appetite City* will likely leave them thirsty.

—Cathy Kaufman, New York, NY

**Born Round: The Secret History of a Full-Time Eater**
Frank Bruni

354 pp. Illustrations. $25.95 (cloth)

It’s hard to reconcile the Frank Bruni who extolled a four-star restaurant’s tiny breadstick as a “hummingbird’s Q-tip” with the Frank Bruni whose Ford Temp’s floor contained so many bones discarded from Tyson precooked chicken that a friend had to ride with her feet on the dashboard. Yet we meet both the sophisticated gourmand and the junk-food junkie in this fascinating memoir. The “dream job” (p.268) of replacing William Grimes as the *New York Times* restaurant critic in 2004 threatened hard-won moderation after some forty years of disordered eating. A former bulimic and binge eater, Bruni is acutely conscious of the “big, fat irony” (p.2) of the job offer: it was like promising a recovering alcoholic an endless supply of free cocktails.

The memoir takes the reader through Bruni’s checkered history with food. It begins with the toddler who could consume several hamburgers in one sitting and introduces the child whose clothes came from the husky department and who would rather ride a golf cart than play sports. His mother, Leslie, originally from “Cheever territory” (p.15), dutifully absorbed Bruni Italian family traditions that equated food with love. She plied her husband and four children with heaping dishes, vying with her sisters-in-law to create the child whose clothes came from the husky department and who would rather ride a golf cart than play sports. His mother, Leslie, originally from “Cheever territory” (p.15), dutifully absorbed Bruni Italian family traditions that equated food with love. She plied her husband and four children with heaping dishes, vying with her sisters-in-law to create

As enjoyable as the book is, the fact that Bruni never questions his fat phobia is a strange blind spot for an otherwise perceptive writer. Self-actualization is measured by those moments when Bruni is comfortable enough with his body to remove his shirt at the beach. His greatest triumph is neither his Pulitzer-nominated work on sexual abuse and the Catholic Church nor his ascent to foodie royalty. Instead, it’s when he feels sufficiently slender for a photo in *Men’s Vogue*. It never occurs to Bruni that he might have been a worthwhile human being in one of his overweight incarnations. It is heartening that Bruni’s homosexuality did not alienate family members or cause Bruni self-doubt or pain, but did Bruni, who became sexually active at a time when HIV/AIDS represented a death sentence, really worry more about his love handles during relations than about sexually transmitted diseases? Those of us whose love of food takes its toll not only on our waistline but also on