analyses of food writing aim to illustrate the messy and murky connections between the two periods of Indian history.

Roy arranges her book around the themes of disgust, abstinence, deaht, and appetite, a structure that allows her to move nicely across periods and genres. The first two—disgust and abstinence—look to the colonial period of the 1857 Indian uprising and the nationalist movement led by Gandhi; while the latter themes—dearth and appetite—analyze a diverse group of postcolonial writers such as Mahasweta Devi, Madhur Jaffrey, and Sara Suleri. Roy’s handling of this wide range of material and period is deft. She is able to show, for example, how descriptions of the forced eating of the “forbidden”—blood, powdered bones, grease—became important to contemporary British representations of the 1857 uprising. To take another example, her discussions of Gandhi’s vegetarianism and fasting reveal them as crucial parts of his resistance to colonial modernity. Sometimes Roy’s choice of primary texts can restrict her argument. Her 1857 documents are almost exclusively British; and although she does mention Munshi Jivanlal, Mainodin Hassan Khan, and Mirza Ghulib, Roy does not delve into their writings, which could have yielded a fascinating counterpoint to normative British accounts of the uprising.

Roy does offer some sparkling readings of the postcolonial texts. She rightly sees Devi’s Shishu and Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay and Pirtha as exemplary stories of famine that question the category of “citizenship” in both colonial and independent India. Roy then uses Jaffrey’s culinary writing and Suleri’s Meatless Days to show how food shapes the nationalist imaginary on the part of transcontinental and cosmopolitan subjects. She could have gone further here by considering how such self-proclaimed cosmopolitan identity can endorse the most reactionary kinds of nostalgic nationalism. But her readings of Jaffrey’s recipes, in particular, are witty and enjoyable to read.

In April of 2011, Anna Hazare, an Indian activist, began fasting against political corruption in India and was soon proclaimed a leader of a mass movement. Hazare’s tactics have been intensely debated, and he has been interpreted as at once a fascist demagogue and an authentic Gandhian nationalist. But what does disavowal of food mean in a country where 20 percent of children under the age of five suffer from acute malnutrition and that has 30 percent of the world’s malnourished children? Roy’s book is a timely reminder that both representations and material acts of eating remain a pressing issue in an independent India.

—Pablo Mukherjee, Warwick University

NOTES

Wild Flavors: One Chef’s Transformative Year Cooking from Eva’s Farm
Didi Emmons
320 pp. $34.95 (cloth)

Eva Sommaripa had a life-changing experience during the summer of 1968, when she found fresh strawberries and freshly cut tarragon in a small storefront in the French Alpin town of Chamonix. This display was an epiphany: a business with minimal packaging, no advertising—so untouched (p.124). Over time, her garden in Dartmouth, Massachusetts, became her livelihood as she supplied culinary herbs to the Boston market. Today, Eva’s Farm is at the heart of a community of chefs, restaurateurs, and farmers.

Chef Didi Emmons spent a year living at Eva’s Farm, and Wild Flavors is the distillation of her discoveries there. The narrative is structured as a journey through the four seasons that highlights forty-six plants through brief descriptions, growing tips for aspiring gardeners, preservation methods, and, finally, recipes to put these herbs and plants on the table. Emmons also explores Eva’s values of thrift, recycling, networking, bartering, and conserving. Neighbors and community members also make cameo appearances throughout, contributing their own expertise and specialized knowledge of farming and gardening. Eva is an iconoclast: she skewers the notion that the “bitter green stem” on a clove of garlic should be removed, countering generations of cooks and cookbook narratives (p.257).

A core principle of Eva’s Farm is high-quality soil and carefully tended plants that deliver intensely flavorful produce—plants and herbs so potent that they can be served without seasonings or salad dressings. Rutabagas, curly dock, goosefoot, Japanese knotweed, African blue basil, Autumn olive, cardoon, claytonia, and sunchoke are among the pantheon of unusual plants that Eva cultivates. Emmons examines each from a variety of perspectives, including their health virtues. As she writes at one point, “purslane contains more omega-3 fatty acids than any other leafy land plant. For a land vegetable, it has an extraordinary amount of eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA), an omega-3 fatty acid found mostly in fish, some algae, and flaxseed” (p.186).

To bring this all into our kitchens, Emmons has compiled 150 recipes that do justice to these superior plants. Her skill in combining ingredients encourages us to experiment, to be
Oyster Culture
Gwendolyn Meyer and Doreen Schmid
Petaluma, CA: Cameron + Company, 2011 144 pp. Illustrations. $19.95 (paperback)

A collaborative effort between photographer Gwendolyn Meyers and writer/curator Doreen Schmid, Oyster Culture is a kind of love letter to California’s Tomales Bay region and the briny bivalves that flourish there. Rather than an early blushing romance, however, the book reflects a mature and abiding love for this rugged, beautiful place and the cuisine it inspires. Both Meyers and Schmid are longtime California residents, and their intimate sense of Northern California permeates the book. While ultimately a coffee table book (with scant text scattered among pages of photographs and recipes), Oyster Culture accomplishes what it sets out to do: It captures a moment in time within a unique food industry.

The book begins with a primer on the history of oyster farming in the region, which began in the San Francisco Bay in the nineteenth century. The industry relocated north once mud runoff from gold mining had smothered the oyster beds and trains appeared to transport the shellfish out of the otherwise remote coastal area of Tomales. The book also touches on a more recent history through its timeline of proposed developments in West Marin and the conservation movement that first took shape in the 1970s and 1980s.

Oyster Culture also provides readers with an up-close look at modern oyster production. Every one of these bivalves starts its life in warm laboratories before entering the chilly bay waters as “oyster seed.” From that point of origin, Schmid and Meyer illustrate the lifecycle of the shellfish and detail the approaches that the area oyster farms take. Tomales Bay Oyster Company uses a bottom bag method, for instance, while the popular Hog Island grows their oysters in bags.

Oyster Culture was published before the much-contested decision by the National Park Service not to renew the lease for the 100-year-old Drakes Bay Oyster Company’s in 2012. Taken after the fact, the book may serve as an accidental elegy to the company and its important role in the estuary.

Beyond its researched account of the industry and its methods, Oyster Culture is also a book of lyrical reflection on this raw food. “Eating a fresh oyster is like tasting the entire ocean,” Schmid writes at one point. But the phrase also hints at two larger principles: oysters, as filter feeders, are necessary to clean the waters they inhabit and are, moreover, a keystone species in a rapidly shifting marine environment.

On one of Oyster Culture’s last pages, Schmid describes for her readers the dangers oyster farmers face as increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere enters the oceans, as marine waters grow more acidic, and as oyster shells thus fail to develop properly. She writes: “Shellfish have survived for millions of years by adapting to environmental changes but may not be able to do so quickly enough this time. This does not bode well for the entire food chain, as shellfish are a primary food source linking fish, whales, seabirds, and humans” (p.139).

This dark side of the oyster’s story is folded in to what is otherwise a celebration of the mollusk and the aquatic and culinary cultures it inspires. Although it is clear that exploring this element further would have meant a very different book, its brief appearance adds an element of urgency to Oyster Culture. Ultimately, the book implores readers to seize the day (and the oyster), while we can.

—Twilight Greenaway

From the Jewish Heartland: Two Centuries of Midwest Foodways
Ellen F. Steinberg and Jack H. Prost

From the Jewish Heartland tells a history of Jews in the American Midwest through the food that they grew, cooked, sold, ate, and wrote about. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, the authors explore “the state, shape, change, and evolution of Midwestern Jewish cuisine through time.” As in other frontier Jewish communities, Jews in the Midwest in the early nineteenth century struggled to locate kosher food on their journeys westward, and the book details the meagre choices they faced: to carry their own food, to hope for food they could gather or purchase along the way, or to stop at the few kosher hotels or boarding houses that sprang up along the most popular routes. As Jews began to create small frontier communities in the Midwest, they first searched for a rabbi and second for a shochet (ritual slaughterer) so that they could be guaranteed a steady source of kosher meat. Delving into

playful, to engage our culinary imaginations, and to craft our own variations. Wild Flavors is imbued with a sense of generosity that includes readers in an intimate conversation with kindred spirits and invites us to share in the simple pleasures of gardening, harvesting, food preparation, and shared meals.

—Gregory Gould, Albuquerque, NM