for seasoning, techniques, and timing that the spare instructions cannot make up for. In attempting these recipes, the home cook grasps uncertainly at the alchemical je ne sais quoi needed to transform a head of raw red cabbage with pink garlic and tarragon into "a firework which explodes with sparkling flavors" convincing to anyone but the most committed vegetable lovers (p.72). The lavish hues of blood-dark whole beets sprinkled with lavender flowers, set on a sauce of blackberries, purple basil, balsamic vinegar, and soy sauce, emulsified with milk, were intoxicating in the mind's eye (p.70); yet the chaos that ensued in their preparation platting with two other Passard dishes left this cook feeling more like an aspiring conceptual artist reproducing Sophie Calle's monochromatic meals from Double Game.

This is not necessarily a failing, however, and quite in line with the spirit of The Art of Cooking with Vegetables. Here, Passard challenges us with the whimsical decadence of getting the odd couple of turnip and tomato drunk together by dousing them with an entire bottle of Beaujolais (p.66) or trying "the simplest recipe in the book," which entails baking four yellow beets encrusted in 4.4 pounds of salt as though they were lamb or duck (p.94). Contrary to the nutritional wisdom of conventional vegetarian cooking, Passard offers these vegetables as part of an extravagantly unbalanced meal.

—Katrina Dodson, University of California, Berkeley

Julia Child’s The French Chef
Dana Polan
295 pp. including index. $23.95 (cloth)

Julia Child earned her status as an American icon only after she burst onto the small screen in 1963 with her cooking show, “The French Chef.” Although it aired two years after the publication of her hit book, Mastering the Art of French Cooking, no biographical detail or specific personality emerges from the cookbook, as Dana Polan astutely points out in his meticulously researched and entertaining book, Julia Child’s The French Chef, which analyzes the rise of Child’s popular cooking program and TV persona and her lasting influence upon the genre of the TV cooking show as we know it today.

Child had a palpable passion for her subject—to make French cooking make sense—which meant that she wanted to import and translate the secrets of French gastronomy for the American housewife, or man. Polan notes that Child did not cater to a particular or gendered audience, and in fact her show became popular with male as well as female viewers. She did, however, specify that her show was for adults. Interestingly, it became popular among some children as well, no doubt because of her larger than life personality, which came across so brilliantly on screen, as well as her “willingness to get physical with the food, showing how visceral the mastering had to be” (p.15).

This book calls attention to some ways in which her cooking methods—in particular, her fairly rigid adherence to recipes not her own—now seem antiquated. “Child’s version of French cooking is—unlike, say, Alice Waters’s—about planning, codes and codification, structured transformation, logical permutation, controlled combination” (p.112). Her television show was carefully codified too, but it was decidedly ahead of its time. In a chapter entitled “Television Cookery B.C. (Before Child),” Polan points out that many people today wrongly give Child credit for creating the form of the TV cooking show, when in fact there were other television cooking shows in postwar America, but none with a star like Child.

There is a reason these shows faded from our collective memory, while The French Chef remains sharp. “The emphasis on the pleasures of consumption that would be so central to The French Chef was not yet present in the early shows, where all that mattered was the homemaker’s efficiency in getting food made and not the enjoyment that ensued from eating it.” (p.46). By contrast, Child made cooking look like fun, never drudgery; she prepared “food that was fully socialized and no longer about domestic obligations; food that increasingly valued taste over sustenance; food that, it was claimed, went beyond the familiar and opened new gustatory horizons” (p.76). Also, she always ended her show by eating whatever she had prepared with the same palpable passion that she brought to everything she did in the kitchen. Polan shows how she was the first to use a “first person” approach toward filming, allowing the camera to look over her shoulder while she was cooking, and so placing the viewer in her shoes (p.29). Amusingly, this apparently helped viewers not to feel like couch potatoes, by making “the very act of TV watching seem a form of do-it-yourself activity,” combatting “notions of television viewing as wasteful and slothful” (p.35).

It is widely acknowledged that Child was a fascinating figure: “a bit freaky, not classically feminine and even somewhat masculinized” (p.183). Polan describes her as strong and soft, skillful but clumsy, a tireless advocate for French cooking, and yet decidedly American in her appearance, manners, and pragmatism. She has become almost a caricature at this
point, so much has already been written on her. But Polan manages to find something new here by focusing on what it took for her to create and sustain the ten-year TV show that made her into the icon she remains. By including scripts, receipts, photographs, screen shots, newspaper clippings, and letters, he enables readers to understand how Child planned her show meticulously and yet left room for happy accidents. The show, in other words, was not only the creation but also almost an extension of the woman. With that tremulous falsetto, endearing clumsiness, and willingness to improvise, not to mention her infectious enthusiasm, it is no wonder Julia Child made People’s Top 50 list of greatest TV stars ever, a star on par with Captain Kangaroo and Vampire, according to Polan. While his book is an academic title (he teaches in the cinema studies department at NYU), it’s sure to appeal to all Julia-philes hungering for a new angle on their favorite French chef.

—Malena Watrous

Du fait de cuisine / On Cookery of Master Chiquart (1420)
Edited and translated by Terence Scully
Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, vol. 354
Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2010
viii + 327 pp. $70 (cloth)

This unique and fascinating book of recipes compiled by the fifteenth-century master cook Chiquart, who served Duke Amadeus VIII of Savoy over a period of thirty years, offers a precious and vivid insight into late medieval cooking and eating practices. Terence Scully has meticulously transcribed the single manuscript, provided a very readable English translation of the original Middle French, and added a general introduction, myriad detailed footnotes, and a number of useful indices. The result is an engaging slice of gastronomic history that will be of interest to medievalists, food historians, and amateurs alike.

Master Chiquart structures his cooking treatise around an elaborate two-day banquet in two versions, one for “meat” and one for “lean” days. Chiquart’s text is vivid and detailed; it sparks the imagination and brings home the staggering amount of work and resources needed to feed medieval nobles. Many dishes are monumental in both their size and the labor needed to prepare them: one stunning example is a castle made of molded meat paste, adorned with five fire-breathing roasted animals, innumerable smaller molded figures, and a fountain spraying rosewater and mulled wine. The necessary provisions alone, listed at the beginning of the text, are mind-boggling: Chiquart recommends that the cook overseeing such a banquet have access to six thousand eggs per day, among myriad other items.

Complementing Chiquart’s work, Scully offers an informative introduction situating food and eating practices in late medieval culture. Scully’s discussion of “culinary theory and practice,” which details the relationship between cookery and medicine according to humoral theory, is particularly interesting. According to medieval medical science, maintaining a balance among the body’s humors was the basis of good health, and each food had its own humoral properties, being classified as hot, dry, cool, or moist. Such classifications, as Scully explains, determined which sauces were served with which dishes and, indeed, dictated a whole range of food and flavor combinations. A warm and dry ingredient, such as parsley, in a sauce, moderates the cool and moist nature of many types of fish, but it would be taboo to serve a dry sauce, such as mustard, with a dry meat, such as hare.

The sheer volume of Scully’s scholarly accomplishment, like that of Chiquart’s preparations, is impressive. Numerous texts and contexts are cited in the extensive footnotes, which offer a parallel discourse to both the introduction and Chiquart’s text, allowing the book as a whole to be read on several levels. The bibliographies, especially the multilingual list of primary sources, constitute a precious resource. Three separate indices allow the reader to search the text according to ingredients, prepared dishes, and a miscellany of “conditions and circumstances.” Treasures for the logophile abound: in one index, for example, one learns that the French word souës, meaning a prepared dish, is the ancestor of the English word “souey,” which is used to call pigs (p.319).

Nevertheless, while Scully’s overall achievement is monumental, a few quibbles could be raised. Most potentially troublesome was the lack of English translations of quotes in the footnotes: knowledge of Latin, Italian, and both middle and modern French would be required to read the footnotes in their entirety. Yet this practice was not consistent: certain footnotes instead give the author’s English translation of a medieval text (for example, p.30, fn.59), but not the original text. The practice of translating original texts (or not) should have been standardized throughout. What seems to be similar assumptions about the reader’s linguistic level of preparedness occasionally make for difficulties in reading, as in the introduction, where a list of kitchen personnel with French job titles is cited and discussed, but the titles themselves are not translated (pp.31–32). It is only two pages later that we finally learn that a sollier is a scullion, and one would need to look up (or already know) other terms such as fornier and carronnier; translations in brackets could easily have eliminated any confusion here.