

of jobs. Coles's participants relate how their pride pulled them through and helped them navigate derision, racism, and being social and political outliers.

While the images and texts about the lack of food and poverty are primary, there are important subtexts that must be noted and are additional reasons to read this book. When originally written, the goal was to bring real people and their plight forward to Congress for immediate legislation. Today, we can see that Coles understood it takes scaffolded political, economic, social, and cultural strategies to lift people out of poverty. There are historical lessons visible now for political scientists and historians to evaluate. There is plenty for economists to wrestle with about how and why poverty and wealth coexist, often in proximity. Educators have perhaps come the furthest to understand that children do not learn when they are cold, hungry, and ashamed, but not all school systems have fully accommodated these realities. Perhaps the most subtle but important aspect is Coles's own self-awareness in his role as an investigator. He occasionally indicates when he reevaluated and questioned his own bias and social class to recognize they could be part of the problem. Perhaps this is a key lesson for us readers. His openness as an investigator to learning about people and striving to deeply understand them rather than just gathering data, unveils institutional social and political biases, which hold economic structures in place that actually sustain poverty and food insecurity.

Everyone should read this book for there is much to glean even from such a slim volume. The images and texts balance the hard messages with nuggets of information to help the reader understand how a wealthy, food-rich country can have citizens starving in rural and urban areas even today. The next step is for inspired readers to use their time, money, and votes to help support programs and legislation that might solve hunger in America once and for all.

—Shannon Thomas Perich, *National Museum of American History*,  
Washington, DC

### *Here Let Us Feast: A Book of Banquets*

M. F. K. Fisher

Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2018

378 pp. \$19.95 (paper)

If you have not yet had the pleasure of encountering the work of M. F. K. Fisher, *Here Let Us Feast*, her eclectic primary source collection of food writing first published in 1946, is not the most obvious place to start. After all, Fisher left many other more likely points of entry for those new to her work on eating and drinking: *Serve It Forth*, *The Gastronomical Me*, *An Alphabet for Gourmets*, and dozens of other books and essays.

Whether you know Fisher already or not, however, there is something both deeply pleasurable and illuminating in this new edition of her favorite food writing by other authors, which includes an introduction by Betty Fussell. Fisher's choices are intensely personal, with excerpted sources ranging from the Bible to *A Thousand and One Nights* to Jane Austen to Leo Tolstoy to *Alice in Wonderland* to John Steinbeck. Selections are interspersed with Fisher's occasionally quirky commentary, such as when she notes that modern diets based on processed food probably render human flesh unpalatable, although she could imagine relishing a "well-rounded adolescent" who had been raised in the country on "fresh apples and plenty of creamy milk." Readers' reactions are likely to be personal too, and their favorite parts will probably say more about their own tastes than about Fisher or anything else. As for me, Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's description of seducing two abstemious elderly neighbors into an epic day of feasting and drinking has been bouncing around my brain, as has his perfect observation, translated by Fisher herself: "Long practice has taught me that one pleasure leads to another, and that once headed along this path a man loses the power of refusal."

This is not a typical primary source reader. The selections are idiosyncratic and lean heavily toward Western sources and toward fiction. Written more than seventy years ago, moreover, Fisher's commentary would itself be a primary source in a classroom context, and some of her casual comments on ethnicity and gender would rightly raise objections. Dated though she is on some matters, however, on others she feels uncannily modern, even timeless. An unapologetic sensualist, Fisher was gloriously alive to the physical pleasures of food and alcohol, and her writing has drawn in generation after generation in part because she seems to invite readers to live as fully as she did.

Yet however ardently Fisher sucked the marrow from life, she was never a simple bon vivant. At the very time she was working on *Here Let Us Feast* in the mid-1940s, she was experiencing personal tumult and tragedy, including the suicides of her brother and second husband, and some of that depth of experience feels palpable in all her writing afterwards. In this collection, hardly all excerpts are happy tales of feasting. One of Fisher's "favorite meals in all of literature," for instance, is the blue scene from W. Somerset Maugham's *Of Human Bondage* where a puritanical vicar eats a single boiled egg in front of his hungry, grieving, adolescent nephew, offering him only the tiny dome of the egg's top and considering himself very generous for doing so, too. The scene was unforgettable, Fisher wrote, for "its downright selfish hatefulness." Through Fisher's eyes, we see the tragedy

of human limitations as well as, just as often, the humor of them.

Fisher's writing heightens readers' pleasure in food by focusing our attention on it. It endures, however, because she found it impossible to separate physical hunger from human hunger for just about everything else—for conversation, for connection, for love, and for intensity even when intensity leads to pain. Fisher takes her title from Alexander Pope's

translation of Homer: "Here let us feast, and to the feast be join'd / Discourse, the sweeter banquet of the mind." It points to Fisher's love of eating and drinking as ends in themselves and as ties to other equally essential kinds of human nourishment.

—Helen Zoe Veit, Michigan State University