

## THE PROBLEM OF NUTRITION. EXPERIMENTAL SCIENCE, PUBLIC HEALTH AND ECONOMY IN EUROPE 1914–1945

BY JOSEP L. BARONA (BRUSSELS: PIE-PETER LANG, 2010).

Reviewed by Anne Lhuissier, INRA

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*The Problem of Nutrition* deals with the development of nutritional concerns during the interwar period in Europe. In this book, Josep L. Barona, Professor of History of Science at the Instituto de la Medicina y de la Ciencia (Universidad de Valencia-CSIC), aims to show how nutrition became a central issue on the European agenda and how international organizations contributed to boosting experimental science and to shaping public health expertise on nutrition in this period. The title of the book refers directly to a series of four reports published by the League of Nations Health Organization (LNHO) in 1936 and gathered under the same title “The Problem of Nutrition.” Barona’s rather short book (164 pages) gives an in-depth reading of these reports and the context in which they were progressively elaborated. Interestingly, the author not only considers the issue on a European level but also makes the connection with different national situations. More specifically, he devotes one chapter to Spain, a country that he has studied closely. This book follows on from Barona’s previous publications (Barona 2007, 2008) which he extends to new topics.

Barona points out that the series of reports and the issue addressed by the LNHO arose from a particular context combining new scientific knowledge with the political and economic crisis. At the time, Europe was experimenting with the “new science of nutrition” based on exact physiological concepts that enabled the border to be drawn between health and pathology, from minimal to optimum nutritional standards. The notion of *optimum diet* had been introduced at the beginning of the twentieth century, based on physiological research into calorie intake and energy expenditure, as well as protein, fat, mineral and vitamin requirements. Foodstuffs



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were classified into two main groups: *protective foods*, such as milk, eggs, meat, cheese, vegetables, potatoes and cod-liver oil; and *supplementary energy-yielding foods*, such as cereals, fats and sugar. Nutritional standards, particularly the individual dietary factors that make up a healthy diet, were scrutinized and the quantity of food required was calculated. Then, in the late 1920s, the circumstances of the Depression revealed the social potential of international standards. Set up in 1922, the LNHO was primarily concerned with the standardization of mortality statistics, or providing a quantified basis for chemotherapy drugs and vaccines, and did not take diet into account at first (Weindling 1995a, 1995b). The problem of nutrition—as experienced in Europe with the economic crisis and the fear of a new war—and the solutions proposed were seen as a consequence of the imbalance between food production, trade and demand. Barona underlines that the LNHO supported the rapid development in nutrition research from the early 1930s.<sup>1</sup> The increasing interest in nutrition research can be understood in the light of two main factors.

The appointment of the British nutritionist W. R. Aykroyd, who joined the LNHO in 1931, helped reinforce the ambitious programs for optimum standards promoted by the LNHO with the technical staff of the International Labour Office (ILO). In 1935, there was enormous pressure at the Assembly of League of Nations and the International Labour Conference to tackle the problem of nutrition in Europe. In September of that year, the Assembly of the League of Nations urged governments to examine the practical means of securing better nutrition and invited the LNHO to continue and extend its work on nutrition in relation to international public health. As a consequence, three committees were founded in 1935. First, within the LNHO, a Technical Commission on Nutrition was established under the chairmanship of Edward Mellanby, which dealt with the “Physiological Bases of Nutrition” (League of Nations, 1936b). Second, the Mixed Committee of Experts on Nutrition, chaired by Lord Astor, included representatives of the ILO and the International Institute of Agriculture (IIA). They gathered information relating to the economic and financial aspects of human nutrition (League of Nations, 1936a), nutrition in various countries (League of Nations, 1936c), and, in collaboration with the IIA, statistics for food production, consumption and prices (League of Nations, 1936d). At the same time, the ILO set up the Committee of Experts on Workers’ Nutrition chaired by C. V. Bramsnaes to address the social and economic aspects of food consumption and nutrition, and more specifically, standards of living (International Labour Office, 1936). Their main objective was to obtain a formula for a standard human diet.

According to Barona, the Final Report of the Mixed Committee (League of Nations, 1937) marked the culmination of the nutritional program to tackle international malnutrition. Increasing the consumption of “protective” foods was a dual strategy to tackle malnutrition and agricultural depression. The report stressed the need for governments to take the lead in raising public understanding of nutrition, and established the centrality of consumption for global trade and agriculture improvements. At the same time, one of the main conclusions of the ILO report stated that workers’ families with low incomes evidently found the

protective foods too expensive and could not afford them. The question of income was thus at the root of the nutrition problem. The report made recommendations to governments encouraging further scientific research with a view to ascertaining the optimum standards for each individual country, emphasizing the importance of updating information when training medical students, health practitioners, officers and district nurses, and following a vigorous policy to educate the general public. The experts stressed the need for further scientific research and the application of modern nutritional science to social practices for the benefit of the population's different age and occupational groups, as well as the need to improve international cooperation in the field. It stated that there had to be international commitment, led by the League of Nations, to fight malnutrition. Moreover, in order to allow comparisons to be made in assessing nutritive requirements, the Technical Commission on Nutrition drew up guiding principles for experimental research and social surveys (Bigwood 1939) which led to the creation of national institutes of food to coordinate food policy, trade and availability.

As well as its objective to standardize European nutritional policies, the LNHO faced the problem of nutrition and the war. Based on several reports published in the LNHO Bulletin, the two final chapters of Barona's book focus on the Spanish civil war and famine and disease in internment camps respectively. From the fascist military coup d'état in 1936 to the end of the war, nutrition and epidemics in Spain were monitored by Franco's government as well as LNHO experts. However, as Barona suggests, "the new science of nutrition was useful in identifying the problems (malnutrition and several deficiency diseases) but was impotent in offering practical solutions." Barona presents a report published in 1944 in the LNHO Bulletin which described the nutritional situation of inmates in internment camps. An overall assessment of the nutritional situation in Europe at the end of the hostilities was necessary, and two major reports were published in 1943 by the LNHO. Despite the lack of and variations in statistical material from one country to another, both offered a terrible picture of the state of health and nutrition in Europe in the early 1940s. Experience gleaned from the previous war helped to encourage the health and statistics authorities from different countries to collaborate with the League of Nations' Epidemiological Intelligence Service to tackle epidemic diseases and disseminate information among administrations and relief organizations.

This book convincingly demonstrates how the new science of nutrition was to become the cornerstone of a healthy diet and food production, as well as the major role played by the League of Nations in this task. The ILO and LNHO emphasized scientific knowledge and became international transmitters of new nutritional knowledge. Reformers used this as a basis to put pressure on their national governments to raise minimum standards and social benefits. This was part of a more general trend which began in the 1920s with a shift away from charitable relief to a more professionalized and scientific approach to nutrition and infectious disease relief. However, the reader may feel that many questions have been shelved. For example, the book sheds light on international experts, asserting that they played a key role in implementing the new science of nutrition, but little is said about these experts, about who they were, why they were there and what their role



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was in the national context. Furthermore, by remaining on a European level, one might be led to believe that all European countries shared the same level of development, and were in agreement with regard to the implementation of a sort of nutritional policy. However, at the outbreak of the Second World War, European countries had very different diets (see, for example, Oddy *et al.* 2009). It would be interesting to analyze local situations to see whether they implemented the LNHO's recommendations. Readers may feel somewhat frustrated not knowing whether there was disagreement within the committees regarding these policies, and what the main points of agreement and disagreement were, for example. Here, a comparison of printed reports and archive documents would have been of great interest. Apart from these minor reservations, the book gives a clear insight into the League of Nations' role in shaping European nutritional standards during the interwar period.

#### Note

- 1 This rapid development has also been observed by Paul Weindling (1995b). He showed that the number of reports published on the topic of nutrition in the "Bibliography of the Technical Work of the Health Organization of the League of Nations, 1920–1945" ran from eight publications in 1932 to a peak of thirty-nine and thirty-one publications in 1936 and 1937 respectively.

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## MEASURED MEALS: NUTRITION IN AMERICA

BY JESSICA MUDRY (ALBANY, NY: SUNY PRESS, 2009).

Reviewed by Christophe Hille and Christy Spackman, New York University

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Jessica Mudry's *Measured Meals: Nutrition in America* provides a needed history of how the language of quantification has shaped both foods and eaters. Those with an interest in the history of nutrition as science and policy in the United States, and particularly with an interest in the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), will find in *Measured Meals* a strong critique of the US federal government's approach to nutrition. Unlike other chronicles of this history, Mudry's work focuses specifically on the role of the language of the calorie, its genesis, dissemination and entrenchment in the American foodscape.

*Measured Meals* follows the USDA from its inception to its contemporary role as an arbiter of nutrition. The book begins by taking readers on a journey from ideas of quality to ideas of quantity, focusing almost exclusively on Wilbur Atwater's role in developing the scientific language of caloric nutrition. Atwater's legacy haunts the book, as Mudry demonstrates how authority for determining the quality of a food has shifted from the hands and mouths of consumers to the authoritative voices of laboratory instruments, scientists and policy makers.

Building on the development of the calorie as a unit of quantity, Mudry presents four foundational aspects of this rhetoric of quantification. First is an ontological argument, or the way in which "a new reality is certified by a new language" (p. 12), wherein the caloric content of a food becomes more *real* than its flavor, smell or origin. Second comes an epistemological concern, in which "knowledge about calories and vitamins is far more important than knowledge about seasonality and taste" (p. 13). Third, the *qualities* of food become their scientifically established *quantities*, and "good" and "bad" foods are defined strictly by those terms. Atwater's calorimeter facilitated a national obsession with moral economics: good foods became measured by the energetic and nutritional value they provided. Fourth is the manner in which this language quantifies the "ethically incomplete" (p. 13) American public, creating arbitrary segments according to sex, age, occupation



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and race, that do or do not meet certain health criteria, and do or do not follow policy recommendations. The most startling ramification of this last line of reasoning is Mudry's suggestion that the so-called obesity epidemic itself represents "the triumph of the ideology and politics of quantification." Absent this rhetoric, there is possibly no epidemic.

Mudry then turns to examine the development of federal nutrition guidelines and their dissemination through governmental and mass-market publications. Using the evolving food guide, Mudry shows how the rhetoric of quantification of food, as communicated through USDA food guides, eliminates considerations of culture, taste, tradition, pleasure, history, seasonality and community from the dialogue. In their place, the official discourse instead embraces the quantifiable aspects of food: calories, carbohydrates, fats, protein, vitamins, minerals, servings, portions and more. Key players are kept to a minimum as readers quickly move through the professionalization of nutrition and the first fifty years of US federal food guidance. Without further study in the field, however, a reader of this book might come to the conclusion that the USDA is *the* dominant voice and authority on nutrition in this country, and that its message is both ubiquitously heard and unfailingly internalized.

The USDA we learn about in this telling seems to have nutrition research and policy design as its primary mission. Other authors who have tackled this topic have focused more on the complex and contradictory nature of the USDA. Historically, the USDA has taken on the contradictory tasks of promoting American agriculture to both the domestic and international markets, while simultaneously seeking to educate about and encourage healthier eating. The USDA's role in nutrition guidance—intentional and accidental, beneficial and harmful—has been inseparable from and, to a great extent, defined by the conflicts intrinsic to the clash between the economic interests of food producers and the public health interests of citizens. Therefore, it may be that the USDA's failures in nutrition policy are equally—or better—asccribed to political inertia, corporate mendacity, and an inherently conflicted institution, than to the rhetoric of quantification.

Interestingly, Mudry points to but does not belabor the shift in the visualization of food guidance over the USDA's history. The largely textual 1917 guide transforms by 1946 into a visual pie chart illustrating the "Basic 7 Food Groups": leafy green and yellow vegetables; citrus fruits, tomatoes and raw cabbage; potatoes and other vegetables and fruits; milk, cheese, ice cream; meat, poultry, fish, eggs, dried peas, beans; bread, flour cereals; butter and fortified margarines. Noting that these groups reflected newly implemented recommended daily allowances (RDAs) for vitamins, Mudry argues that "symbols had replaced syntax" (p. 66). For Mudry, the visualized "Basic 7" effectively encouraged consumers to remember the basic seven at home, school, work, and when shopping. However, the USDA's entreaties to eat specific quantities of foods because they contained necessary vitamins and minerals does not necessarily indicate that consumers *understood* their foods in terms of quantified calories or vitamins. Consumer voices are distressingly absent in Mudry's work—something she acknowledges from the beginning.



The ignored consumer becomes increasingly apparent and problematic as Mudry examines the debates around food consumption of the 1970s and 1980s, and the development of the Food Pyramid. As she outlines the quandaries of health researchers and scientists in the face of rising obesity, readers may begin to question the rhetoric of quantification presented in earlier chapters. Underlying Mudry's entire argument is the assumption that individuals and institutions in the United States, essentially *do* and *believe* what they are told. Agriculture extension agencies, Mudry argues, all adhered to guidelines for the scientific language and disciplinary framework in their communication. While time and funding undoubtedly made this true, one wonders what resistance occurred in the early stages, and what we can learn from that resistance. Similarly, consumers from the days of Atwater up to the recent past are portrayed as accepting and even embracing the discourse of quantity to the detriment of other ways of encountering and experiencing foods. Did the introduction of RDAs truly "strip subjectivity from American eaters, [making] them manage their meals through calculation instead of craving" (p. 64)? Missing is an acknowledgment of other forces that shaped American eaters. Where is urbanization? Where is the food industry? Where are the distribution systems, road-building projects, or the rise of the grocery store, all of which shaped the consumption choices of the "quantified" American eater? It is only in the final chapters—the recent past—that alternative voices emerge to combat quantification.

Mudry offers, in the end, three alternative discourses about food: those issuing from the "authority of history," the "authority of geography" and the "authority of experience." These alternatives, in Mudry's telling, have been suppressed by the language of quantification and are its antidotes. It bears asking, however, whether the contemporary American foodscape and the obesity epidemic are actually evidence that alternative discourses have endured despite the USDA's language of quantification. Perhaps we are in our present predicament because of our clinging to history, geography and experience, in the midst of an unhealthy food environment? An examination of how, when and for whom these discourses of quantification, history, geography and experience hold sway will reveal the inevitable blurring of boundaries between each category, and add much-needed nuance to the current conversations and debates about eating.

Although sometimes excessively ideological in its failure to engage with the alternative discourses of the past (one asks, for example, when the authority of history has truly ever lost its sway on the imagination and longings of those living in the present), Mudry's classificatory schema of major food consumption discourses provides a useful framework for future historians of nutrition. Despite these weaknesses, Mudry's argument that "the fundamental mistake of a discourse of quantification is its attempt to eliminate" the plurality of languages about food and eating "in favor of a single, unified voice" (p. 167) deserves attention. In turning the spotlight of sustained investigation on the language of the USDA, Mudry aptly demonstrates a failure to consider individual needs. Notably, this is something that the recently discarded MyPyramid attempted to address. The most recent iteration, MyPlate, is even more abstract, dividing a plate into suggested quadrants of consumption. This abstraction meets, on some level, Mudry's call for an



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acknowledgment of “culture, tradition, experience and taste in the social practice of eating” (p. 103) by allowing the consumer to insert items onto that plate that reflect their individual values and histories.

Overall, *Measured Meals* pushes both lay and academic audiences alike to reconsider the power of language in shaping not only how we think, but also our actual physical selves. Although the lack of attention to alternative voices outside of the recent past severely hampers Mudry’s arguments, the book nonetheless provides a useful way for readers unfamiliar with the history of nutrition in the United States to gain an overview. There are certainly more comprehensive histories that exist of both Wilbur Atwater’s work, and of nutrition in the United States; however, this is the first extensive examination of the role that the language of nutrition, nurtured by the USDA, plays in creating our contemporary understandings of what *constitutes* good food.

## **POISONED: THE TRUE STORY OF THE DEADLY E. COLI OUTBREAK THAT CHANGED THE WAY AMERICANS EAT**

BY JEFF BENEDICT (BUENA VISTA, VA: MARINER PUBLISHING, 2011)

Reviewed by Jennifer Dutch, Pennsylvania State University, Harrisburg

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As yet another story of a food-borne illness outbreak makes the rounds of local and national news outlets, the relentless repetition of the idea that America’s food supply is dangerous, even deadly, seems like old news. *Salmonella*, *E. coli*, and *Listeria* pop up so frequently that it is hard to keep track of which food is infected with what microbe today. In some cases, the relatively small number of individuals sickened by an outbreak makes the story seem blown out of proportion compared with the multitude of other problems Americans could be worrying about at any one time. Oftentimes, what are missing from these news reports are first-hand accounts from the victims’ point of view—stories that would bring home the impact of food-borne illness in a personal, even visceral, way.

In his book, *Poisoned: The True Story of the Deadly E. Coli Outbreak that Changed the Way Americans Eat*, Jeff Benedict personalizes the massive American food system by zeroing in on the impact of food-borne illness on parents, food company executives, and even lawyers whose lives were irrevocably changed by bad hamburgers. Through careful recreation based on in-depth interviews and detail-oriented research, Benedict pieces together the minute-by-minute action of the *E. Coli* outbreak that struck Jack in the Box restaurants in 1992. By focusing on the details of the outbreak as they emerged, Benedict heightens the drama of the book through the raw emotions of everyone involved: the terrified parents waiting for a diagnosis as their previously healthy children teeter on the edge of death; the bewildered Jack in the Box executives blindsided by a tiny microbe and watching as their business careens toward disaster; the dedicated lawyers—on both sides—



concerned with finding the truth behind the outbreak while protecting the their clients' best interests.

The most moving moments of the book occur when Benedict takes the reader into the hospital rooms of sick kids—describing in detail the terrible havoc that *E. coli* had on their tiny bodies. There is no mistaking the heartbreak as Roni Austin holds her daughter, Lauren Rudolf, as the doctors remove life support and Roni “felt the last breath go out of her” (p. 8). It had taken just five days for *E. coli* to claim the life of a happy, healthy six-year-old. Nine-year-old Briane Kiner survived, but not before her mother, Suzanne Kiner, spent weeks sitting beside her hospital bed watching the life drain out of her. Back from the brink of death, Briane’s body was ravaged by the disease and her life was forever altered as she needed to “relearn basic things like how to read, write, walk, bathe, and brush her teeth” (p. 158). By recounting the stories of the victims and their families, Benedict effectively puts names and faces to the numbers. The story of these real people with palpable pain makes it impossible to ignore the realities of the American food system and the threat posed by food-borne illnesses like *E. coli*.

As the outbreak progresses, Benedict shifts the action from the hospital to the boardroom where Jack in the Box executives are mystified by the unfolding situation. For food industry veterans like Jack in the Box president Robert Nugent and Vice President of Quality Assurance Ken Dunkley, the idea that a mere hamburger could kill was a terrifyingly new concept—one that was suddenly all too real. For these executives, the worst consequence for undercooked meat up to this point had been nothing but an “upset stomach and diarrhea for a day or two” (p. 59). For these food industry professionals “the idea that a hamburger could be lethal was a frightening wake-up call” (p. ix). As the Jack in the Box officials come to grips with the idea that their hamburgers had “killed kids,” Benedict reinforces the idea that the American food system has changed in ways that now endanger consumers (p. x). As Benedict asserts:

Food purveyors like Jack in the Box, never mind the consumer who ate the food, had no idea where the raw materials had come from or whether or not they were processed safely. The *E. coli* outbreak in Seattle was a manifestation of the flaws in that model. (p. 104)

By focusing on the mistakes that led up to the outbreak and the steps that Jack in the Box took to fix the problems with its hamburgers, Benedict reaffirms the idea that constant diligence, and a free flow of knowledge between food producers, government regulators and consumers, are essential to assuring the safety of the nation’s food supply so that no one is ever taken by surprise ever again.

The bulk of the book deals with the ensuing lawsuits against Jack in the Box. On the side of the victims is Bill Marler, a young attorney focused on guaranteeing that the families of poisoned children are taken care of by the company that he believed had the responsibility to keep them safe in the first place. For Marler, “extracting big damages awards out of Jack in the Box” was not only a way to assure his clients find justice, but also “the best way to stop business-as-usual in the food industry”



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(p. 246). Meanwhile, lawyers for Jack in the Box hope to restore the company's reputation by making sure that the victim's claims are handled quickly and responsibly. At this point, the book often gets bogged down in legalese as Benedict focuses on discovery, depositions, and the small details of each case. None of the legal strategizing has the emotional punch of the parents' stories earlier in the book and the ultimate record-breaking settlement falls flat as an end to the action.

Unfortunately, by narrowing the focus of the book to the individuals involved in the outbreak and the legal aftermath, Benedict neglects the big picture promised in the title. Instead of revealing how the outbreak "changed the way Americans eat," Benedict merely touches upon the impact of the outbreak on the food system and American eating habits. Even the all-too-brief epilogue focuses on bringing the reader up to date on the lives of the main actors in the story. Bill Marler is now "the number one foodborne-illness litigator in the world" (p. 296). Briane Kiner continues to live with the consequences of contracting *E. coli* as her "immune system remains compromised" (p. 298). Many of the Jack in the Box executives have retired or moved onto other positions in the food industry, while the company "has been profitable every year" since bouncing back from the media impact of the outbreak in 1996. Meanwhile, new microbes continue to contaminate the "billions of pounds of ground beef" that "Americans consume" each year (p. 300). These new microbes include "unregulated strains of *E. coli*" that "the USDA doesn't inspect for" (p. 300). Far from revealing changes in American eating habits, Benedict's brief overview of the current American food system only reinforces the sense that not much has changed for the better since 1992.

Ultimately, *Poisoned* reminds us that outbreaks of food-borne illnesses are not old news—they are an ever-present danger. Today, the safety of the food system should be a constant concern for all Americans because ignoring the threat posed by this hazard could have disastrous consequences like those faced by the families in this book.

## TESTICLES: BALLS IN COOKING AND CULTURE

BY BLANDINE VIÉ. TRANSLATION BY GILES MACDONOGH (TOTNES: PROSPECT BOOKS, 2011).

Reviewed by Rachel Herrmann, University of Texas at Austin

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French art historian Blandine Vié and translator, journalist Giles MacDonogh, have paired together to produce this seminal work on cooking and eating testicles. Vié, writing about her purpose in penning this monograph about balls, says she intends "to honour them and rehabilitate them to their rightful place at table" (p. 46). She has already succeeded in handling one half of this fun project, although whether testicles will enjoy a revival on American and British tables is a question for the future.

*Testicles* is divided into three sections: “Mythology,” “Method” and “Attributes.” The first addresses the history, legends and myths related to the preparation and consumption of testicles; the second provides historical and current terminology and recipes for preparing those that belong to animals; and the third is a lexicon of slang terms that people in the United States, United Kingdom and France use to refer to their own genitals.

Vié opens her book by exploring Greek, Biblical, Qur’anic and Chinese beliefs and myths associated with testicular delicacies. She asserts that “The tradition of eating them probably goes back to Rome, where they were much given to licentious feasts—that in turn had their origins in Greece” (p. 39). She does not explain why testicles were not eaten in Greece, nor does she provide many scholarly citations for her claims. But then, it was not her main ambition to differentiate myth from reality, or to trace the global history of testicle-eating, because in her estimation most stories about testicles are interesting, amusing, and deserving of inclusion in her book. She does detail how the consumption of testicles eventually became a mark of fine dining, from the courtly tables of Louis XIV and XV, to more frequent appearances on nineteenth-century bills of fare. In the main, however, she is more interested in contemporary practices, and has spoken extensively with butchers and cooks for this sort of information.

Vié is at her strongest in her work on recipes, which she has culled from various cookbooks, cultures and literature. In France, North Africa and the Middle East, for instance, ram’s testicles are “best loved,” whereas “in Spain they prefer those from bulls” (pp. 59–60). She also describes where and how her readers might obtain testicles for cooking. Halal butchers are much more likely to have lamb testicles on hand because kosher and halal rules forbid the consumption of castrated animals. Lamb’s and pig’s testicles should be available “if you ask any butcher nicely,” although people craving bull’s testicles “should go to Spain instead” (p. 8). One also learns that according to folklore, it is better to castrate rams when it is dry outside; cocks—at least when the practice was still legal—when the weather is damp. Some of the recipes she includes are simple, and one can imagine preparing them today; others evince nostalgia for practices no longer allowed (such as cooking cock’s stones); and some are simply eye-catching. For those interested in testicular culture, Alexandre Dumas’s recipe for lamb’s fries makes an appearance, as does “The Marquis de Sade’s little salad of ram’s balls, with artichoke hearts and truffles” (pp. 86, 102). The reader learns how to prepare the testicles of a just-killed wild boar, and a risotto with cock’s stones (pp. 120, 134). “A potion to heighten virility according to Nicholas Flamel (using the left testicle of a white billy-goat),” will also garner a chuckle (p. 152).

Throughout *Testicles*, Vié pays careful attention to the connection between food and sex—a link that becomes even more obvious with her promise to pay testicles “their due—both those that we prepare for the table and those which we taste unseasoned” (p. 9). Vié is reacting against what she deems the ambivalent position that testicles occupy in the literature, where balls can be described using “words that stress the symbolic worth of testicles” or with words that decrease “their importance, making them worthless” (p. 36). She argues that even in today’s era



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of “sexual “liberty;” eating testicles “is invariably transgressive” (p. 46). Vié is not particularly convincing here, since she does not adequately explain why we also disdain other forms of offal: “calves’ heads and feet, mutton trotters, ox heart, spleen, calves’ caul, liver and lights, etc.” (p. 44). The act of eating testicles does not seem any more transgressive than eating cow’s brains—something we avoid today because of health concerns. Nevertheless, Vié’s humor keeps the reader engaged despite these lapses in deep analysis. Her observation that she “would rule against using ostrich eggs to create the illusion of elephant’s balls,” for example, testifies to her enthusiasm for her subject matter and her desire to entertain her audience (p. 146).

Although Vié’s task—carrying out the original research into the lore and traditions of cooking testicles—was certainly weightier, Giles MacDonogh works diligently and to great effect in translating Vié’s French prose. Especially in the third section of the book, MacDonogh manages to convey the linguistic richness of the literature relating to testicles, without losing much in the translation. Although the word “testicules” appeared in French first, in the fourteenth century, his footnotes inform the reader that, “The first recorded use of ‘testicule’ in English was in 1425” (p. 26). At times, however, MacDonogh’s translating lands him into hot water. For example, he concludes in his translation note that because of the plethora of French “gourmand terms” for testicles, “the French have been indulging in oral sex for centuries,” whereas the dearth of terms in English must mean that “the practice of oral sex is not more than a generation old” (p. 11). An additional footnote or two here would have served him well. Like Vié, however, MacDonogh also seeks above all to engage the reader. Recognizing that he is working for a predominantly American audience, he amusingly highlights some of Vié’s Americanisms, and adds some of his own, providing synonyms for prairie oysters such as “cowboy caviar,” “Montana tendergroins,” “dusted nuts,” “bull fries,” and “swinging beef” (p. 64). Readers will leave the pages of *Testicles* with amusing terms such as these.

This is a richly-written, entertaining book. Food studies scholars can pull humorous tales for lectures; anthropologists, historians and linguists can speculate on the stories associated with the consumption of testicles; and museum curators in rural areas will find inspiration for new food displays to reproduce for their visitors. *Testicles: Balls in Cooking and Culture* is sure to spark a conversation—perhaps even two.

## THE RELUCTANT FARMER: AN EXPLORATION OF WORK, SOCIAL CLASS, AND FOOD PRODUCTION

BY DEBBIE S. DOUGHERTY (LEICESTER: TROUBADOR PUBLISHING LTD., 2011).

Reviewed by Maxwell Philbrook, University of Missouri–Columbia

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As the corpus of food movement literature continues to blossom, there is also a growing body of work that explores problems with the movement's rhetoric. Perhaps the most pressing issue, something that is often discussed in this journal, is the status of the food producer. Popular discussion of the food movement tends to ignore the producers of food and focuses solely on the consumer as the panacea to our food problems, crying "Eat local! Buy organic! Fight GMOs!" All of these are important issues for the food movement, and yet each carries with it the danger of erasing the people who labor to produce food.

Debbie Dougherty's *The Reluctant Farmer* adds a voice to this conversation by highlighting the centrality of social class in food production and arguments made about food production. Published as part of Troubador's series on communication and social justice, Dougherty sets out to explore how social class manifests in different areas of food production and how the subtext of social class is present in food movement discourse. By locating classed language in the rhetoric of the food movement, Dougherty argues that the discourse focuses on certain food issues at the expense of people of a lower social class. If the goal of the food movement is to create healthier food, it must also consider the health of the producer. Because it doesn't, Dougherty warns that "we need to be very careful about how we talk about food and its production" (p.8). To heed that warning, *The Reluctant Farmer* connects concepts like power, gender, race and class, each as it pertains to people who produce food, before concluding with analysis of four food movement tropes that show how intricately social class is woven, often invisibly, throughout food texts.

*The Reluctant Farmer* goes through three phases to exemplify how the layers of social class impact food production: ethnography, theory building, and textual analysis. First, Dougherty describes her own experiences as a farmer and the experiences of other farmers in her central Missouri community where she owns a sheep farm with her husband. She describes this as an ethnographic/auto-ethnographic methodology for collecting data about social class, and in offering her own story she gives readers an intimate look into her life. The book opens with a story about her delivering a lamb in an ice storm; she describes her life as a reluctant farmer and academic; and she gives voices to her husband and children to show how they influence her point of view. At the same time, she acknowledges that her story is uncommon and brings in the voices of additional community members to provide a more balanced account of farming in rural, small-town Missouri. This phase of the book is quite engaging, and yet I found myself



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questioning the conclusions she drew from such data. Was she telling her reader about food production and social class? Or was she telling her reader about food production in one specific farming community in the middle of Williamsburg, USA? Dougherty acknowledges this concern, though, explaining that feminist standpoint theory is a method for better understanding social class in food production, and her methodology here exemplifies this stance. She takes a risk in utilizing a methodology that some readers will question, but doing so provides her reader a grounded, contextualized example of how social class influences her and her community.

The second phase of this book takes a more traditionally academic route as Dougherty begins developing her social class argument. Dougherty is a professor of organizational communication and leans heavily on theories of social class, power and work in this section of the book. After giving an overview of central social class theorists (e.g. Marx, Gramsci and Bourdieu) she begins developing her own conception of a communication reading of social class. For Dougherty, communication is the mortar that fills the cracks between other markers of social class, because it occurs in all instances of social class. Wealth, fashion, status and influence are all dependent on communication for them to have any credibility as a social class marker. The communicative strands of social class, then, are woven together to form a “web of power” (p. 82). Dougherty emphasizes the connectivities between the strands because social class “is not just about structure, discourse, or culture. It is about multiple, simultaneous conditions that wrap discourse with material conditions such that escape becomes difficult” (p. 134). Seeing social class this way complicates how it functions in food movement discourse because communicative expressions of social class affect the “material conditions” of food producers. Dougherty creates this framework to suggest that understanding social class, and the people who produce food, is integral in making the food movement a tool for positive change. If this section seems like a departure from the farm narrative of phase one, it should. The narrative never completely drops from the text, but this phase is much more theoretical and sometimes strays, necessarily, from the broader topic of food production.

The last portion of *The Reluctant Farmer* focuses on the discursive implications of social class for farmers and offers a critique of how current food movement rhetoric is classed in a destructive way. She devotes chapters in this phase to developing the importance of social class to two particular groups of farmers: women and African-Americans. She argues that both of these groups stand at the intersections of many threads of the web of power, which results in being “discursively and physically removed from farming” (p. 134). The communicative aspects of social class create these oppressive conditions. As Dougherty shifts the focus of her argument once again, she also shifts her methodology, returning to evidence from interviews of community farmers, historical documents and personal experience. These case studies are compelling as she paints a picture of social class conditions for farmers in diverse communities to illustrate the “web of power” from the previous section. The examples are particularly helpful for showing just how much the communicative aspects of social class can affect the material realities of



food production. These chapters offer a warning about the negative implications social class has on food producers, especially when left unexamined. These implications, as Dougherty shows in the final chapter, continue to implicate food producers in a negative way despite current food movement discourse.

Dougherty explicitly critiques food movement discourses in the final chapter using the framework she established throughout the book. She includes sections on the obesity epidemic, organic foods discourse, sugar wars, and the “curious case of transgenics” (p. 232). The general tone throughout this section is that of a person tired of food movement discourse that disregards social class and implicitly worsens social class problems. Dougherty’s critique is expansive, at various times questioning figures like Barbara Kingsolver, publications like *Time Magazine*, and other ideas like consumerist notions of “organic” and popular medical discourse. At times, this chapter sacrifices depth in order to show how extensively social class is present within food texts, and yet this broad-brush approach is still successful in showing readers the variety of food-production issues that are affected by social class.

In the end, this book is valuable to a number of audiences. *The Reluctant Farmer* should be read by those interested in organizational power, social theory and contemporary class issues. Dougherty’s synthesis of difficult social-theory texts into a workable, understandable, relevant theory is a highlight of this book, and will appeal to communication students and scholars alike. Readers interested in feminist scholarship will be interested in how Dougherty utilizes standpoint theory and intersectionality to develop her arguments about food. One of her solutions is that we take food producers’ standpoints more seriously when constructing discourse so we can better locate the communicative factors that impact them. Dougherty’s work correctly approaches food as a feminist issue. Most importantly, this book will be of value for those interested in the promise of food studies as a field. Dougherty’s conceptual framework complicates other analyses of social class in food production, which will allow scholars to examine the people who produce food in innovative ways. Dougherty has planted the seeds of future work to be undertaken at the intersection of social class and food studies.

Perhaps the most rewarding and troubling aspect of this work is its methodology. Dougherty weaves ethnographic research, social theory research, and textual analysis together in a way that is sometimes uncomfortable. In the end, however, Dougherty’s hybrid methodology allows for a nuanced treatment of social class. The book succeeds because it is honest about its position at the intersection of rural farm life and scholarly textual work. In the end, Dougherty’s methodology is a reflection of the argument she spends her book developing: without an understanding of the people behind food production and the material realities of social class, food movement discourse will never be a liberating process.



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