

Garval on Reverzy and Marquer, eds. (2013)

Reverzy, Éléonore, and Bertrand Marquer, eds. *La Cuisine de l'œuvre au XIXe siècle: regards d'artistes et d'écrivains*. Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2013. Pp. 248. ISBN: 978-2-86820-550-6

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The long nineteenth century in France stands out as a golden age of gastronomy. Restaurants evolved and flourished; the democratization of fine dining spurred the rising bourgeoisie to eat with sophistication once reserved for *Ancien Régime* aristocrats; chefs from Antonin Carême through Auguste Escoffier refined and expanded the culinary repertoire, imposing the French culinary model across the globe; and gastronomic writers from Alexandre-Balthazar-Laurent Grimod de la Reynière and Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin pioneered novel ways to sing the pleasures of the table. While these developments provide an essential backdrop to Reverzy and Marquer's volume, they are not its focus. Instead, in looking at a time and place so fixated on food, *La Cuisine de l'œuvre* examines how nourishment—or the lack thereof—informs a wide swath of literary and artistic endeavors.

The volume consists of sixteen essays, by scholars mainly from France, but also from Canada, Belgium, and the United States. In good Cartesian fashion, it divides into three parts. The first, “Diète littéraire,” takes on the task of “explorer les représentations entourant le régime de l'artiste, et le rapport—physiologique ou métaphysique—qu'il établit entre nutrition et innutrition” (13). Claudine Giacchetti looks at the implications of *gourmandise*, as exhibited by the Comtesse de Ségur's *petites filles*, while Jean-Louis Cabanès examines how the Renaissance notion of *copia*, or “la parole copieuse” (51) informs nineteenth-century literary works. On the more dysfunctional side of eating, Emmanuelle Tabet ponders the implications of asceticism in Joseph Joubert's writings; Bertrand Marquer studies perceived connections between indigestion and genius; Michel Delville tackles a problematic of “inappétence” (77) in Percy Shelley, Herman Melville, and Frantz Kafka; and Geneviève Sicotte, reflecting upon writers' penchants for “nourritures bizarres,” envisions a broader literary “gastronomie extrême” (39).

The second section, “Le vivre et le couvert,” turns to the meal as a metaphor of society. Christophe Refait considers Stendhal as a reader of Malthus; Stéphane Gougelmann interrogates the parasitic “personnage du pique-assiette” (129); Sophie Ménard undertakes an “ethnocritique” of Émile Zola's *Conquête de Plassans* (145); and Éléonore Reverzy contemplates J.-K. Huysmans's abortive project for a novel entitled *La Faim*. In the section's only essay on visual culture, Laurent Baridon offers an excellent reading of Grandville's print series, *Carte vivante du restaurateur*.

Finally, the section “Goût, dégoût, ragoût,” focuses on the axiological use of culinary language, within creative work and in criticism thereof. Colette Becker and Frédérique Desbuissons examine, respectively, Zola's “gourmet” art criticism, and the contemporaneous appreciation of color through the prism of food. Coming back to literature, Marie Scarpa offers an “ethnocritique” of the stomach in Zola's *Ventre de Paris*; Joëlle Bonnin-Ponnier analyzes hunger in Guy de Maupassant's work; and Stéphanie Bertrand weighs the role of hunger and *gourmandise* in André Gide's turn away from symbolism.

The collection's title and cover illustration of Honoré Daumier's *Le mangeur d'huîtres* are somewhat misleading, suggesting relatively more emphasis on visual art. In fact only three of the sixteen essays tackle art and artists; the rest deal with literature and writers. Of the literary pieces, three focus on Zola. This is understandable, considering the proliferation of cooking and food-related vocabulary and symbolism in his work, but perhaps it is too much of a good thing, given the abundance of other writers who could be studied fruitfully from such perspectives. One wonders for example why George Sand, so involved with food in her life and work, has been left out. It should be noted as well that the volume delves into the dark underbelly of nineteenth-century French gastronomy, considering hunger, innutrition, disgust, indigestion, Malthusian alarmism, parasitic scrounging, and freeloading. To be sure, this is a justifiable choice intellectually, but one that may disappoint readers interested in a more joyously epicurean take on food. Readers may also be surprised by strange, unfortunately inedible *coquilles*, including the marginal notation “voir pdf corrigé” (183); or bizarre accents in the index, like “Briffault, EugÈne” or “Chateaubriand, FranÁois-RenÈ” (245).

These are minor concerns, however. On the whole, this is a well-conceived, and eloquently argued collection that will appeal to more general and more specialized readers within nineteenth-century French studies. As Grimod de la Reynière asserts in year four of his *Almanach des Gourmands*, “la Gourmandise est un livre immense, sans cesse ouvert à quiconque y sait lire, dont les pages offrent une suite de tableaux mobiles, et dont l'horizon s'étend à perte de vue.” In much the same spirit, *La Cuisine de l'œuvre* pushes into exciting new territory, to explore the rich interconnections between the period's thriving food

culture and its extraordinary artistic and literary creations.

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