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School of Culinary Arts and Food Technology

Articles

Dublin Institute of Technology

Year 2006

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Theodora FitzGibbon

✦ 1916–1991 ✦

THEODORA ROSLING WAS BORN OCTOBER 21, 1916, in London. Her Irish parents lived apart for most of their marriage, and she was brought up by her maternal grandmother. She attended convent schools but was, as she wrote later, “always a recalcitrant child at school.” At age sixteen, she refused to go on with her formal education and instead traveled, alone, to Calcutta to join her father, Adam Rosling, a veterinary surgeon. After a time in India, he brought her to France where she spent a term in finishing school. Theodora aspired to be an actress, and appeared in a few plays and films. Being quite beautiful, she supported herself between acting jobs by modeling. (She was perhaps never entirely secure in her view of herself since she had grown up in the shadow of a great beauty, often overhearing “She’ll never have half the looks of the mother.”)

From 1938 to 1943, she lived with the photographer and painter Peter Rose Pulham, first in Paris, from which she escaped by bicycle, pedaling just ahead of the invading Germans, then in London during the Blitz. Theodora and Peter lived a very social, Bohemian life, making friends with the many artists and writers she found so stimulating—including Norman Douglas, Augustus John, Donald Maclean, and Caitlin and Dylan Thomas—most of them as penniless as they were creative. They scabbled daily to find enough to eat. She made pâté from horse liver and often served rook and other lesser-used wild birds at her soirées.

Although Theodora and Peter maintained an affectionate relationship, she fell in love with Constantine FitzGibbon and married him in March 1944. After the war, Constantine began his writing career. It took some time to complete his first novel and find a publisher and, although Constantine taught at a local school for a while, the couple was quite impoverished, a condition that remained constant for much of their marriage.

During all this time, Theodora served as a muse for others, but made no attempt to do any writing herself. One day while she and Constantine were entertaining Derek Verschoyle, he commented that she always prepared wonderful meals and suggested that she write a cookbook, which he himself would publish. The result was *Cosmopolitan Cookery in an English Kitchen* [1952], with recipes from the countries she had lived in, adapted to the rationing in England. This was a huge success, and was followed by other cookbooks, magazine articles, short stories, a novel, and broadcasts on the BBC. Ultimately, she published more than 30 books.

Constantine’s jealousy over his wife’s success helped bring to an end their already deteriorating marriage, and the couple divorced in 1960. At that time Theo-



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dora began work on her encyclopedia, *The Food of the Western World* [1976], which includes roughly six thousand entries from 34 countries. From the late sixties she lived in Dublin and produced a steady stream of books and articles, writing a cookery column for the *Irish Times* for over twenty years. She was cookery editor for *Image* magazine and the *Irish Times*, and she lectured widely.

Theodora also wrote two autobiographical volumes, *With Love* [1982] and *Love Lies a Loss* [1985]. The later volume concludes with a reference to her years of happiness during the last period of her life in Dublin, working on her “life-giving career of writing.” She married George Morrison, the film-maker and photographic archivist; with whom she collaborated on the “*A Taste of...*” series; Morrison compiled and prepared the period photographs that accompanied these volumes. Theodora FitzGibbon died in Dublin on March 25, 1991, at the age of 74.

— MÁIRTÍN MAC CON IOMAIRÉ

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Weekend Cookery, 1956
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