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Tickling the Palate: Gastronomy in Irish Literature and Culture

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VOLUME 57

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire and Eamon Maher (eds)

'TICKLING THE PALATE'

GASTRONOMY IN IRISH LITERATURE AND CULTURE

'Tickling the Palate'

Reimagining Ireland

Volume 57

Edited by Dr Eamon Maher
Institute of Technology, Tallaght

PETER LANG
Oxford • Bern • Berlin • Bruxelles • Frankfurt am Main • New York • Wien

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire
and Eamon Maher (eds)

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Foreword

Ireland, until recently, appeared as only the smallest of dots on the map of high gastronomy. Too many self-avowed connoisseurs were convinced that Irish food began and ended with cabbage and potatoes – or the lack thereof. True, Irish soda bread had transcended the country's borders to become a bread-baking beginner's staple, but the lilting names of dishes like colcannon and fadge beckoning from the pages of cookbooks held, for many readers, more linguistic than actual appeal. The prevailing idea of Irish food as limited and monotonous – the result of want and famine – could not, it seemed, be dispelled. Even as food studies came into its own as an academic discipline, Irish foodways failed to receive their due. In *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish and Jewish Foodways in an Age of Migration* (2001, p. 85), Hasia Diner maintained that only the Irish – unlike the Italians and Jews who are also subjects of her book – did not have a richly developed food culture. She averred that 'Irish writers of memoir, poems, stories, political tracts, or songs rarely included the details of food in describing daily life'. And yet, any reader who delves deeper than *Angela's Ashes*, Frank McCourt's memoir of poverty so desperate that he subsisted largely on bread and tea, discovers that in fact Irish literature is replete with descriptions of food. This food claims a beautiful simplicity as an elemental expression of the land and the sea – natural delights such as smoked mussels and salmon, rock lobster and dulse, fennel-scented soda bread and floury potatoes.

To realise the meaningfulness of these essential flavours we need only turn to the first stanza of Seamus Heaney's 'Oysters', the opening poem of his 1979 collection *Field Work*:

> Our shells clacked on the plates.
> My tongue was a filling estuary,
> My palate hung with starlight:
> As I tasted the salty Pleiades
> Orion dipped his foot into the water
>
> (Heaney 1979, p. 3)

The immediacy of taste at once unites the oyster eater with his environment, with a very localised estuary, but as the poet continues to eat the briny bivalve, his world expands, until he becomes one with history and, ultimately, with the universe. Eamon Grennan's 'Food for Thought' similarly conjoins the poet with nature as a 'green butteriness' fills his mouth when he chews on a blade of grass (2001, p. 9). From this simple gesture the poem becomes a meditation on poetry and love, invoking the gods, like Heaney's poem, to capture the sense of timelessness that a moment of blissful experience can bring.

Ireland has suffered twice for its famines and food shortages: first due to very real deprivations; and second because these deprivations present an obstacle to the exploration of Irish food. All too often the story begins and ends with potatoes or famine. But again, literature can be revelatory. Two particular passages expressing opposite poles of Irish practice have stayed with me over the years, one featuring the refined, French-inflected dishes of the Anglo-Irish elite, as described in Molly Keane's *Good Behaviour*; the other presenting the earthy, gutsy food of the common folk, celebrated by James Joyce in *Ulysses*.

Good Behaviour begins with food, in a scene that juxtaposes the restrained sensibility of the Anglo-Irish gentry (down-in-the-heels as they may be) with the vibrant sensuousness of the Irish Catholic world, here represented by the servant, Rose. Aroon, the daughter of the manor, complains:

> Rose smelt the air, considering what she smelt; a miasma of unspoken criticism and disparagement fogged the distance between us. I knew she ached to censure my cooking, but through the years I have subdued her. Those wide shoulders and swinging hips were once parts of a winged quality she had – a quality reduced and corrected now, I am glad to say.
>
> (Keane 2001, p. 3)

Although Aroon knows that her invalid mother detests rabbit – the mother has, in fact, a pathological fear of the meat due to a virus infecting Irish rabbits – she decides nevertheless to prepare rabbit quenelles and present them as her offering:

> The tray did look charming: bright, with a crisp clean cloth and a shine on everything. I lifted the silver lid off the hot plate to smell those quenelles in a cream sauce. There was just a hint of bay leaf and black pepper, not a breath of the rabbit foundation. Anyhow, what could be more delicious and delicate than a baby rabbit? Especially after it has been forced through a fine sieve and whizzed for ten minutes in a Moulinex blender.
>
> (Keane 2000, pp. 3–4)

Aroon pretends that she has prepared chicken mousse. Her mother is not fooled, however, and her indignation is so great that she suddenly dies, without having taken a bite.

Food in this introductory scene emblematises the strife between mother and daughter and, even more significantly, the differences between the Anglo-Irish gentry and the Catholics who serve them. Food, in the form of a French dish strained through the tastes of the English, also provides the arena, the metaphorical bones of contention, for a three-way battle of wills among a former oppressor, a current oppressor – both Anglo-Irish – and Rose, the Catholic servant, whose healthy, unconstrained movements literally throw open the window to fresh air. Rose's 'wide shoulders and swinging hips' threaten Aroon, who has been raised to keep herself restrained, girdled, and controlled.

Such blowsy lack of containment is, by contrast, celebrated in *Ulysses*, where sensuality rules. In the 'Calypso' episode, early in the novel, we see how one appetite inspires another when Bloom goes into a butcher shop to buy a kidney for breakfast and encounters the girl who lives next door: 'A kidney oozed bloodgouts on the willowpatterned dish: the last. He stood by the nextdoor girl at the counter ... His eyes rested on her vigorous hips ... Strong pair of arms ... Mr. Bloom pointed quickly. To catch up and walk behind her if she went slowly, behind her moving hams. Pleasant to see first thing in the morning' (Joyce 1934, pp. 58–59).

Rabbit quenelles from French *haute cuisine* and raw kidneys with their potent reek of uric acid – these foods, and the context in which they are presented, tell a more complex story of Irish cuisine, one that goes beyond the potatoes and cabbage of common perception. And it is this other story that the volume at hand, a study of gastronomy in Irish culture, seeks to tell. Here, at last, is a serious consideration of Ireland through its food, drink,

and language: a corrective to the false impression that Irish foodways are unworthy of attention.

To some degree this volume mirrors what has been happening in the world of Irish food outside of academia. Thanks to changing tastes and to Ireland's beautiful fresh ingredients, the country has at last appeared on the world's culinary map, and its extraordinary natural produce and artisanal cheeses are now recognised as among the finest anywhere. While lacking the variety and refinements of cuisines from countries where both climate and politics were more conducive to developing a rich food culture, Ireland nevertheless sings with brilliant flavours based on the food of poverty and the preparations of necessity. Such products as salmon smoked over old whiskey casks, organic oatcakes and dandelion syrup are now construed as signs of Irish culinary revival. Perhaps most significant of all is the newfound pride in the Irish land and culture (its agri-culture, quite literally), and a sense of a valuable and specifically Irish contribution to the global marketplace. The blossoming of smallholder food production has been accompanied by a renewed awareness of Ireland's long tradition of hospitality – as we learn from Brian Murphy's essay on pub culture, the '*briugu* or hospitaller' was one of the most important roles in ancient Celtic society. Here, again, literature comes to mind. Joyce's great short story 'The Dead' celebrates Irish hospitality, repeating the word five times during Gabriel's speech at the lavish dinner party featuring two dozen deliciously described enticements, floury potatoes among them (Joyce 2005, pp. 167–168).

Because the renaissance of artisanal food production in Ireland coincided with the burgeoning of food studies throughout Europe and North America, it is not surprising that a serious volume on the history of Irish gastronomy should appear. Indeed, as Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire and Eamon Maher, the editors of this volume, note in their introduction, even the Royal Irish Academy is getting in on the act, with a volume on food and drink in Ireland slated for publication in 2015. But it takes more than coincidence for such projects to come to fruition. Through the vision and tireless efforts of Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire, the first Dublin Gastronomy Symposium was held in June 2012, to great acclaim for its diversity of papers and for the many conversations stimulated by the confluence of presenters from

vastly different spheres of culinary production, from academia to tourism to food purveying. The Symposium was marked not only by the broad range of its papers but by the depth of those papers' investigations. Thus it is a particular pleasure to introduce the resulting volume of essays. *'Tickling the Palate'* has much to offer both readers already familiar with Irish foodways and those who know little about them.

While the volume's focus on Ireland makes it the first of its kind, the strength of the collection lies also in its multidisciplinary approach. Quite beyond the new material they present, the essays open up questions for further investigation into other aspects of Irish culinary culture. Ranging across genres (literary criticism, semiotics, sociology, tourism studies) and time (from the eighteenth century up through the present and into the future), they consider the very nature of Irishness in relation to food and drink. As Brian Murphy asks in his exploration of the Irish pub abroad, 'How can the exportation of a gastronomic identity play a role in improving people's relationship with a place without it being perceived as false and inauthentic?' Meanwhile, within Ireland's borders, John Mulcahy has a vision for promoting all that is best about Irish food culture: 'So this is about creating, in Ireland, an imagined community of gastronomy that accommodates and balances innovation and tradition, individual creativity and time-honoured conventions, the singular and the collective.'

Such thoughts underlie Marjorie Deleuze's reflections on why Ireland is turning into a 'foodie nation'. She notes that as late as 1974 the Irish Tourist Board, in promoting Ireland as a destination to the French, defensively stated: 'Ireland is certainly not the country of gastronomy. But there's no need to denigrate Irish cuisine as a whole ... With modesty, we let those who know make complicated culinary preparations. What we serve is first and foremost simple.' By 1987, the Board's presentation was cautiously positive, revealing a growing self-confidence: 'It is obvious now, that over the last few years, Irish cuisine is getting better. Good restaurants are opening everywhere and for all pockets. Obviously, people are not coming for Irish cooking alone, but you never know ...'. Twenty-five years later, Fáilte Ireland (as the Irish Tourist Board is now known) is quite justifiably – and successfully – marketing Irish food to tourists as part of an 'authentic and local' experience.

The essays in this volume make clear that politics have been extraordinarily important in the construction of Irish cuisine, with a constant tension between the elite and the lower classes that did not lead to the sort of trickle-down effect so discernible in French cuisine. Yet here, again, this volume confounds expectations as it upends the upstairs/downstairs dichotomy. Tara McConnell's study of beer consumption in elite households in eighteenth-century Ireland demonstrates that the gentry and aristocrats enjoyed ale as well as beer and small beer, beverages commonly associated only with the working classes. And if we thought that *haute cuisine* was confined to the country manors of the Anglo-Irish elite, then it comes as a surprise to learn from Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire that in the mid-twentieth century, Dublin was home to what were named the finest restaurants in the world – even though the concept of the restaurant had entered the Irish lexicon only in the second half of the nineteenth century.

This volume's nuanced literary, cultural and sociological interpretations of Ireland and its food leave the reader with a sense of repletion. Even as we acknowledge the enforced sparseness of the Irish meal in the past, we can embrace the country's possibilities for Joycean excess and welcome the many iterations of Irish food practices that lie in between. Above all, *'Tickling the Palate'* conveys the wonderful richness of the Irish language and the traditions of Irish conviviality. I hope that this will be only the first of many volumes to explore Ireland's flavoursome gastronomy.

Darra Goldstein
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Introduction

There has been a gradual but noticeable growth in scholarship concerning food globally, particularly in the last decade. One of the longest running and most influential forces behind this phenomenon is the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery (1981–present) which was originally founded and co-chaired by Alan Davidson, pre-eminent food historian, diplomat, and author of *The Oxford Companion to Food*, and Dr Theodore Zeldin, the celebrated social historian of France. This spawned a dedicated publishing house, Prospect Books, which published the conference proceedings and also the journal *Petits Propos Culinaires* (PPC), now approaching its 100th issue. Prospect Books boast an impressive catalogue of monographs, translations, conference proceedings and collections of essays around the subject of food and cookery. *Petits Propos Culinaires* was joined by other journals interested in food and culture including *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* (University of California Press); *Food, Culture and Society: An International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* (published on behalf of the Association for the Study of Food and Society (ASFS)); *Food and Foodways* (Taylor & Francis); *Food and History* (biannual scientific review of the Institut Européen d'Histoire et des Cultures de l'Alimentation/ European Institute for the History and Culture of Food (IEHCA)); *Journal of Culinary Science & Technology* (Taylor & Francis); and, most recently, the *International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science* (AZTI-Tecnalia/ Elsevier).

A number of the University Presses (Oxford, Columbia, Chicago, California) have added food collections to their catalogues, and other publishing houses such as Bloomsbury, Berg, ABC-Clio, Greenwood Press, Altamira, Grub Street and Reaktion also have dedicated food series. Since the publication of *The Oxford Companion to Food* (Davidson 1999), there has been a surge in reference books and encyclopaedias around the topic (Kiple and Ornelas 2000; Smith 2004; Parasecoli and Scholliers

2011; Albala 2011; Kraig and Sen 2013). Food and cooking have become so visible in popular culture that many international journals have brought out special issues focusing on culinary materialism (*Collapse: Philosophical Research and Development*, Vol. VII, 2011), food history (*International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 2013), cookbooks (*M/C Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 2013) or food cultures (*Cultural Studies Review*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 2013).

The study of gastronomy in Ireland, equally, has shown steady growth in recent years, with doctoral research in particular casting new and much needed light on previous perceptions of Ireland's food heritage which traditionally had focused more on famines than on feasting. A number of individuals have laid the foundations for this work: scholars such as Anthony T. Lucas, Louis Michael Cullen, Kevin Danaher, Leslie Clarkson, Margaret Crawford, Fergus Kelly and Regina Sexton immediately come to mind. The Agricultural History Society of Ireland (AHSI) held a special conference in 2013 to discuss the veracity of Lucas's (1960) assertion that 'from prehistory to the close of the 17th century, corn and milk were the mainstay of the national food'. Scholars from the disciplines of food science, archaeology, history and folklore, using the most up-to-date analysis techniques, concluded that Lucas was broadly correct, but that a higher level of beef consumption than previously believed was evident from the osteo-archaeological data they unearthed. The prevalence of pig meat noted in written sources compared to the actual archaeological evidence was thus explained. Pig meat was a celebratory food, used at feasts and banquets, which made it more likely to be documented than other elements of the everyday diet.

One by-product of the intense road building programme of the 'Celtic Tiger' years (1995–2007) is the Archaeology and the National Roads Authority Monograph series, which includes the 2009 volume *Dining and Dwelling*, in which one can find a clearer picture of our culinary heritage based on archaeological evidence. Indeed, such is the current interest in gastronomy that the Royal Irish Academy has commissioned a special thematic volume of the journal *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy, Section C*, titled *Food and Drink in Ireland*, due to be published in 2015.

Areas of gastronomy have had dedicated core modules in the Culinary Arts programmes in the Dublin Institute of Technology for nearly fifteen years now. Gastronomy has been interpreted in its widest sense to include the history, sociology, anthropology, psychology and aesthetics of food and beverage, and not merely the narrow definitions of 'the culinary customs of a particular region' or 'the art or science of good eating' associated with the word in many dictionaries. It is this wider definition of gastronomy that is embraced by the Dublin Gastronomy Symposium (DGS), and indeed by this volume. Many of the chapters in this book stem from presentations at the inaugural DGS in 2012, while others arrived independently or by request in order to strengthen the Irish angle.

There are still some commentators, however, who argue that Ireland does not have a food culture and that the term 'Irish cuisine' is oxymoronic (Myers 2002; Cotter 1999). Diner (2001, p. 85) suggests that Ireland failed to develop an elaborate national food culture, and that, unlike other countries, 'Irish writers of memoir, poems, stories, political tracts, or songs rarely included the details of food in describing daily life'. She also notes that those who observed or recorded Irish voices seldom represented them as wanting to eat better or as craving exotic food items. Though there may be some truth in these arguments as they pertain to certain classes of migrants at a specific time and place in history, as a methodology this overlooks a long tradition of hospitality in Ireland. Indeed, one only needs to consider how the Middle Irish tale '*Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*' or Antaine Ó Raiftearaí's (1784–1835) poem '*Bainis an tS'leacháin Mhóir*' employ food to satirise a lack of hospitality to find illustrations of how prominently gastronomy features in Irish literary representations. Diner also ignores a long tradition described by Simms (1978, p. 78) as 'guesting and feasting', whereby the Brehon Law tracts outlined various legal rights to hospitality in Ireland, or where hosts voluntarily issued invitations to a feast. Cullen (1981, p. 141), writing about the early modern period, notes that butter consumption in Ireland was the highest in the world, that meat consumption per capita was also relatively high, and that the range of meat eaten was uniquely wide-ranging, making the Irish diet and cooking 'one of the most interesting culinary traditions in Europe'.

Terry Eagleton (1997) proposes that the most celebrated food-text of English literature is the work of an Anglo-Irish patriot, Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* (1729), in which he bitterly recommended munching babies as a solution to his country's economic ills. During the Great Famine, this may well have happened. As Swift's fellow Dubliner Oscar Wilde observed: 'life has a remarkable knack of imitating art'. Eagleton suggests that the starved words, gaunt bodies and sterile landscapes of Beckett's dramas may well carry within them a race memory of the Irish famine, and that it is possible to read Beckett's meticulously pared-down prose as a satirical smack at the blather and blarney of stage-Irish speech. Beckett, he argues, 'hoards his meagre clutch of words like a tight-fisted peasant, ringing pedantic changes on the same few signs or stage properties like someone eking out a scanty diet'. Eagleton continues that there is, perhaps, a Protestant suspicion of superfluity in evidence here, in contrast to the extravagant ebullience of James Joyce, the linguistic opulence of John Millington Synge or the verbal gluttony of Brendan Behan. Language in Irish culture, however, is associated less with food than with drink. The three main themes of this volume are language (literature), food and drink. As drink flows in, so words pour out, each fuelling the other in a self-sustaining process. In fact, despite our reputation for drunkenness and the close association with Guinness particularly, Eagleton points out that 'apart from the notoriously bibulous trinity of Behan, Flann O'Brien and Patrick Kavanagh, remarkably few Irish writers have been alcoholics – far fewer than American authors, for whom alcohol seems as much of a prerequisite as a typewriter' (Eagleton 1997).

Given the stereotypical propensity of Irish writers for the demon drink, it is logical that this volume should open with a section dealing with literary representations of Irish gastronomy. Dorothy Cashman's essay explores an aspect of the Anglo-Irish writer Maria Edgeworth's work that may not be widely known, namely her culinary sensibility. Elite households such as the one in which Edgeworth lived ate a strange mixture of Anglo-Irish cuisine and a native Irish diet. In Cashman's view, 'this co-existence would not be unusual in the culinary history of a country'. Archival research into the household accounts of the period produces fascinating findings as to what was being consumed by the elite classes, who looked to France and

England for examples of best practice, but evidence of what the ordinary Irish were consuming is less readily available. Then there is that other issue, particularly prominent in nineteenth-century Ireland when Edgeworth produced much of her literary work: the narrative of famine, a narrative that does not take in the whole story of food in Ireland. Cashman manages to make a strong case for a closer consideration of the way in which Irish eating habits in the period during which Edgeworth wrote offer an excellent insight as to the mores and mentality of the time. Venison, sweet plums, salmon, lobsters, game of all sorts – this was the fare that was served at the tables of the better-off members of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy, who saw themselves as the equal of their English counterparts at the time.

James Joyce was never one to see himself as being inferior to anyone, English or Irish. Flicka Small's chapter delves into the rich food compendium that is *Ulysses*, a novel that starts and ends with breakfast. Leopold Bloom's diet is rather exotic – he loves eating the inner organs of beasts and fowls – and, strangely enough for the time, his domain is the kitchen. Small points out the particular role that food plays in Joyce's novel: 'Bloom's memories of a more intimate time with Molly are related to food, and many of the happiest ones are of the two of them eating together'. 'Food memories' abound in *Ulysses* and the world is viewed very much in terms of food. Small notes how Bloom considers that 'a vegetable diet can make a person poetical. He can almost taste death, which he imagines tasting like raw turnips; he thinks that cheese is like the corpse of milk ...'.

Michael Flanagan's chapter deals with the prevalence of food in children's literature, a constantly recurring motif in that particular genre. The examples chosen come in the main from classic texts such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1866), Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* and *A Christmas Carol*, Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), and numerous fairytales such as *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Sleeping Beauty*, all of which would have been widely read in Ireland. These texts have a strong emphasis on food (or the lack thereof), which is viewed as being inseparable from the characters' other preoccupations. Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* books are interesting simply in terms of the amount of time which these intrepid young sleuths devote to eating. According to Flanagan, the five have a balanced diet: 'Sweets are eaten

sparingly; hunks of crusty bread are accompanied by handfuls of radishes or fresh fruit. The children manage a structured approach to eating.'

Eamon Maher delves into the literary imagination of John McGahern and finds a treasure trove of references to food and drink. From pints of Guinness and ham sandwiches in Blake's Pub in Enniskillen, to the mandatory meal in The Royal Hotel that Mahoney offers as a reward to his son for getting a university scholarship in *The Dark*, or the sophisticated London restaurants described in *The Leavetaking* and *The Pornographer*, it can be seen that McGahern's literary universe revolved around the table or the bar counter. The most common culinary treat in the various fictional texts of the Leitrim writer is what would have been referred to as the mixed grill. Lamb chops, sausages, black pudding, tomatoes, eggs and fried bread were the main ingredients of this popular dish, celebrated in McGahern's texts, which also provide detailed descriptions of whiskey and Guinness that could only have been written by a connoisseur of these drinks. Gastronomic culture, for McGahern, was an indispensable component of the various social and religious rituals that punctuate the lives of his characters, which is undoubtedly why he spent so much time lovingly evoking them.

The first section of the book concludes with Rhona Richman Kenneally's discussion of Sebastian Barry's 2002 novel *Annie Dunne*, which, she argues, illustrates the extent to which food is a source of communal expression in Ireland. Set in the late 1950s, the novel 'devotes remarkable attention to growing, preparing, serving, eating, and even excreting food'. Food is also a source of empowerment for the eponymous heroine of the novel, who is an accomplished food provider. The contrast between eating habits in the city, Dublin and the more traditional rural areas evoked in the novel are quite stark: 'The transition to commercialised, standardised food production, and its increasing displacement from country to city, are sources of dissatisfaction to Annie, although it is true that she is also depicted as having missed Dublin life (and food) during her first years in the country ...'. Kenneally concludes that a fictional account like that contained in *Annie Dunne* confirms the view often made by historians like Joe Lee (1989, p. 384) that one must turn to its writers for insight into the 'larger truth' of Irish culture and society at any given moment in time.

Section II deals with culinary and dining traditions in Ireland, beginning with Tony Kiely's chapter which uses oral history as a tool to unlock the richness of the life experiences of Dublin Tenement mothers. He focuses on how these accomplished food providers 'managed', performing the daily miracle of putting food on the table for their families during the 1950s. The chapter reveals the various mechanisms used by these extraordinary women as they negotiated the power of the Catholic Church and of less than co-operative husbands. The food choices, purchasing and storage routines varied between households. Stews, for example, were 'your mother's stew' and, being gleaned from family tradition, 'never changed', often causing familial problems after marriage. One woman commented: 'He [her husband] spent the whole of his life longing for his mother's stew.' Oral history also forms the basis for Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire's chapter, which traces the influence of French *haute cuisine* on the development of Dublin restaurants. From the opening of Restaurant Jammet in 1901 to the continued success of Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud, the key milestones and individuals on this journey are identified and discussed. Despite the assertion by the editor of *Le Guide du Routard* in 2011 that 'the Irish dining experience was now as good, if not better, than anywhere in the world', few are aware that two Dublin restaurants in the 1950s were considered among the best in Europe, and that in 1965 Egon Ronay suggested that the Russell Restaurant must be among the best in the world. Mac Con Iomaire's chapter charts the rise, stagnation and gradual rebirth of fine-dining restaurants in Dublin over more than a century.

In her essay, Marjorie Deleuze asks 'why has Ireland turned into a nation of foodies?' She traces the term 'foodie' to Gael Greene in 1980 and notes how the pejorative connotation Paul Levy and Ann Barr attached to their *The Official Foodie Handbook* has progressively been lost, although it might still sometimes retain a 'mocking edge'. Deleuze charts the gradual growth of interest in food in the media from 'finger licking' Monica Sheridan in the early years of *Raidió Teilifís Éireann* (RTÉ) – the state broadcaster – to today's ubiquitous food programming, cookbooks and blogs. She suggests that the declining influence of the Catholic Church has resulted in the Irish regarding food less as an occasion of sin and more as a symbol of national pride, as we promote the consumption of local,

ethical, artisan food. Taking examples from *Bord Fáilte* brochures over the years, this chapter outlines the role that both the tourism and food industries have played in promoting Irish food. It is this promotional process, and the influence wielded by each Irish citizen through their food choice, that concerns John Mulcahy's chapter. The Irish economy and society, he suggests, could be transformed through gastronomic nationalism. Giving examples from Singapore, New Zealand, Scotland and Norway, Mulcahy argues that a gastronomy-driven economy is realistic, viable and sustainable, as gastronomy offers a scalable, cost-effective means of local and regional development, with the potential to strengthen identity, enhance appreciation of the environment, and encourage the regeneration of local heritage and the local economy.

The final section of the book concerns itself with beverage consumption and the psychological melding of the pub with a certain sense of 'Irishness'. Tara McConnell's chapter details how 'beer and ale not only formed a necessary element of the daily nutritional intake of servants and workers, but also found a place on the sideboards of the privileged classes in this period'. Traditionally, it would have been wine, and claret in particular, that would have been associated with the nobility and gentry of Georgian Ireland. However, beer consumption was also common among this class, who, along with other groups, often considered it 'a nutritious and wholesome alternative to unsafe water supplies'. Beer formed part of the remuneration package of labouring men, in the form of a beer allowance. Some of the larger estates, such as Carton in Kildare, engaged the services of a full-time brewer, who was expected to produce high quality produce, which was often served at meals. McConnell concludes by remarking that beer was 'the most democratic of beverages', being employed equally in servants' halls and elite dining rooms.

Brian Murphy's chapter begins by quoting from a January 2012 edition of the *Lonely Planet* in which it was stated that the pub was the main attraction for visitors coming to Ireland. It is seen as the place which captures the real pulse of the Irish nation. In his examination of the lessons that can be learned from the success of the Irish pub abroad, Murphy argues that the general perception of Irish culture and society has ultimately been enhanced by this locale, which has become synonymous with 'craic', music

and animation. The chapter concludes by noting that the Irish pub abroad acts as a type of 'cultural ambassador' that establishes strong ties to Ireland and ultimately brings more tourists to our shores.

Eugene O'Brien brings the section and the book to a conclusion with a lively discussion of how Bloomsday and Arthur's Day, two highly successful icons of Irish culture, have become what he refers to as 'secular sacraments'. Quoting the description of how to pull a pint of Guinness correctly available on the website of that famous company, O'Brien detects 'a ritualistic and almost sacramental aspect' to the instructions provided. He describes the process 'as a form of secular transubstantiation', something that might go some way towards explaining why Guinness has been so long associated with Ireland and Irishness. The emergence of Arthur's Day, which is akin to a 'Guinness feast day' – something that causes heated debate between the drinks groups and those concerned about the unacceptably high incidence of heavy drinking among all generations of Irish people – 'is an example of sacramental time being interfused into secular time', and it has begun to gain the same type of traction that one associates with Bloomsday. Social and cultural capital are linked with the two events, which leads O'Brien to conclude that, just as *Ulysses* is as much an event as a book, so too Guinness has become more than a black drink with a creamy head; it is now a cultural symbol with almost sacramental status.

Smoked salmon, lamb, beef, whiskey, Guinness, stew, the Irish breakfast, milk, potatoes, chocolate, a warm welcome, the pub, hotels, restaurants ... when one thinks of it, Ireland has a lot to offer visitors in terms of the quality and variety of the gastronomic experience they will encounter here. Long gone are the days where the potato was served with every meal and where sauces were a rarity. Wine consumption is increasing exponentially and the Irish, having become accustomed to eating out more regularly during the Celtic Tiger period, now continue to consume a greater variety of food and drink products, often in the home. More and more Irish people now have an intimate knowledge of their food and wine and are not content with a dreary, monotonous diet. For those who can afford it, there are an increasing number of places to sample various forms of cuisine. One could even go so far as to suggest that, in an era of technological sophistication and rapid communication, the good news story of Irish

gastronomy might be transmitted to a broad audience in order to dispel the myth that one cannot enjoy reasonably priced and locally produced food and drink in this country. Clearly, it will take a long time to compete with the likes of France and Austria in this area, but it is possible that the world will soon come to appreciate that Ireland can tickle people's palate with the best of them.

What follows is by no means an exhaustive study of gastronomy in Irish culture and literature and in the Irish public imagination. Rather, it is a first step in what will be an ever-increasing preoccupation for anyone who is even remotely interested in how food and drink contribute in a singular fashion to the economy, identity and literature of the island nation that is Ireland. We hope that readers will find something with which to sate their appetite as they explore this fascinating subject.

Bon appétit!

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire and Eamon Maher

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