

## Gastronomic Pleasures

In writing about my favourite cookery and wine books I have had to face a stark and worrying truth: I'm a conservative. And decidedly 'nouvelle' at that. It is definitely a case of 'professional chefs rule OK' - in particular Mosimann, Roux, Guerard, and Troisgros. Clearly an incomplete hagiography. But together these chefs provide a mass of delightful modern recipes to attract and challenge anyone.

Being of a certain age, having attended a school where boys never learnt cooking, and coming from a culture where preparing food was emphatically 'women's work', cookery books played a critical part in my first fumbling attempts to liberate myself from the wilderness of bad British cooking.

First among these pedagogic giants was **The Constance Spry Cookery Book** (Pan). Comprehensive - it really does tell you how to boil an egg as well as how to jug a hare - and with a chatty yet

lucid style it is hard to better.

**The Cookery Year** (Reader's Digest), is also a must in this 'anchor class'. It can be a great source of inspiration when you get all-a-dither about what the principal ingredient of the main course should be. Month-by-month **The Cookery Year** tells you what is in season. You need never again experience the maddening frustration of getting to the shops only to find that half of your ingredients for that evening's dinner are not available at all or only at a price which suggests that they have been flown into the country on Concorde.

But more pleasurable by far are the greater tomes of the French 'nouvelle' chefs such as Michel Guérard's **Cuisine Gourmand** (Papermac £7.95), the Roux Brothers **New Classic Cuisine** (Macdonald £14.50), Mosimann's **Cuisine Naturelle** (Macdonald £14.50), or Jean and Pierre Troisgros' **The Nouvelle Cuisine** (Papermac £5.95). Their cooking is healthier and definitely different. Superb ingredients, unusual combinations and the relative simplicity of

their approach mark them out. Home-made stocks and home-made vegetable-based liaisons are obvious cases in point. In these days of stock cubes and ready-made everything, this style of cooking does not save time or money. But the results are definitely worth the effort.

In their own restaurants these chefs are shockingly, prohibitively expensive. By publishing they bring some of the most creative of contemporary French cooking within the reach of far more people. One hesitates before describing their literary products in an overly democratic vocabulary, but equally it would be wrong to think it was 'truffles with everything'.

For accompaniment The Roux Brothers' **New Classic Cuisine** (Macdonald £14.50), often helpfully suggests two wines (one cheaper, one dearer) which they consider to be suitable companions for their different fare. After all, why spend effort preparing a wonderful meal only to swill down a plonk that takes the moisture off the roof of your mouth or makes everything

taste of tannin? If you want to get into this side of things more seriously an excellent way to start is with Hugh Johnson's **World Atlas of Wine** Mitchell Beazley £22.50), and, if funds allow, the **Wine Companion** (Mitchell Beazley £15.95).

Baring one's soul about one's private pleasures can be a risky business in 'this great movement of ours'. However for those comrades who believe that such sybaritic indulgences can lead only to fecklessness, moral turpitude or to cancelling subscriptions to the *Morning Star*, I conclude by recommending **Portrait of a Chef** by Helen Morris (Oxford University Press £1.95). This provides a fascinating insight into early Victorian society but also illustrates much of the grossness of the classical French cooking against which 'nouvelle cuisine' was later to rebel. The book also describes the life of a gifted chef who not only had a genius for invention but was also a passionate social reformer. My own self-image to a tee! ●

John Carr

## Cover Stories

Nothing begets interesting activity in the magazine market so much as hard times. When the going is good magazines can coast along; when it's not the choice is often between slowly but inexorably sinking or swimming with new currents. If **Spare Rib** has had to replot its course in order to stay in the swim, the emergence of **Everywoman** and **Women's Review** is the mark of the new. As their covers well indicate.

**Spare Rib's** old style covers were less meant to please or grab attention than to convey the appropriate seriousness and 'correctness' of a certain feminist politics. They were marked off as *other* than women's glossies. **Spare Rib's** new style covers lean more on a mass market tradition. Glossy and in full colour there's sometimes a note of fun and humour, without the covers

having lost their feminist trace. Thus October's issue offered a moustachioed air hostess (the unadorned air image is from the British Airways 'supergirl' ad), and asked: 'Are airlines going unisex?'

For some feminists this foregrounding of design and playing around with the visual vocabulary of popular culture (with all the risks that entails of endorsing that of which one is critical) means that feminism is selling out. My own view is rather that such a ploy culturally transforms in a way that the old strategy could not. More to the point it sells, even though, as **Women's Review's** recent financial troubles reveal, the feminist press is hardly secure.

Troubles however, have not been a feminist prerogative. In its bid for survival **Working Woman** has been tossed from owner to owner. Even the giant of publishers, IPC, has been stemming its losses:

**Honey** has finally been given the chop, and with the staples - the weeklies - showing falling circulations, editors have been moved along. After six years at **Woman's Own** Iris Burton has been replaced by Bridget Rowe, whose background is the tabloids as well as women's magazines.

Such a pedigree has brought the odd shock to **Woman's Own**, not least a very unusual cover. 'Rape' was brandished in large red capitals and accompanied a small image of a woman, seated, covering her face with her hand: 'The report every woman must read and no man can ignore' (May 10).

The cover signals a shift. On the one hand the feminist press is now more ready to explore the trickier elements of femininity. On the other feminist ideas have been assimilated into more mainstream publishing.

Having engaged in those arguments **Woman's Own**



could not, without compromise, carry the more usual cover image - the mask image of a young, attractive, white woman with her 'come-on' gaze. For is she not, after all, a close cousin of the page three pin-up?

But the cover also highlighted that if one front of the battle around representation and male violence is to challenge tabloid imagery, another is to check the conventional cover image of women's magazines. When that array of pouts and smiles is no longer the dominant visual vocabulary on the magazine stand, then might we have got somewhere? ●

Janice Winship

Photo: Abel Lages



## Nuclear Alert

'But campaigners don't have time to read books' I thought, even as I agreed to carry out a Christmas review of nuclear books for *Marxism Today*. Trying vainly to remember the last book I had actually read from cover to cover, I noted down the key criteria a busy campaigner uses to assess good books: must have a good index and be well referenced; must be easy to flick through in order to pick out key passages and quotes; must have big print in order to be read easily on trains; must be short; must have thick enough paper to allow the use of highlighting pens without blurring the other

## Woman Can Fly

Unread theoretical books bought in 1986 accuse me from my shelves. And in my Scottish, feminist socialist guilt (a heavy combination!), I buy more, and add to the guilt.

It's been a year with more than its share of work, so reading has been an escape and a relaxation. It has also been a year with more than its share of 'existential' moments, involving grief and facing the necessity of choice.

For sheer nerve-tingling pleasure, I re-read *Angela Carter's* inventively irreverent, **Nights at the Circus**, (*Picador*, £3.50). Fevvers, her heroine, takes us on a journey between the 19th and 20th centuries, away from the world of male certainties, into fantastic other (im)possible worlds, full of danger and joy. Its style, like the story, twists and turns

side of the paper. Having laid down this exhaustive literary obstacle course, which the Booker Prize committee would do well to take note of, my final list of books would happily fit inside an *MT* carrier bag.

No review would be complete without a book on Chernobyl. Despite rumours of a whole series of books from the major publishing houses, only one so far has appeared. **The Worst Accident in the World** (*Observer/Pan Books* £2.99), was brought out so quickly after the accident that publishers' normal six to 12-month schedules appear faintly ridiculous. The book is rather disjointed, and factually inaccurate in several places, but it captures the tension and confusion of those first two weeks. Before history is rewritten and Chernobyl becomes, like Three Mile Island, an 'incident' rather than an 'accident' according to the industry, buy it.

My favourite book is also one of the shortest. **Going Critical - An Unofficial History of British Nuclear Power** by *Walt Patterson*, (*Paladin* £2.95), is

and leaps until we are breathless and cheering out loud. A woman can fly.

Camped under an unlikely spreading fig tree in Corsica, I mused on *Sylvia Plath's* likening of figs to choices in **The Bell Jar**. 'I wanted each and every one of them, but choosing one meant losing all the rest, and as I sat there, unable to decide, the figs began to wrinkle and go black, and one by one, they plopped to the ground at my feet'.

But mostly, under the fig tree, I talked to my friends Mario and Orietta. Orietta is the sole representative of Democrazia Proletaria on the Florence district council; pressure enough, without also being a woman in Italian politics. While she lived on a diet of 'gialli' - translations of conventional English crime thrillers - I escaped into **She Came Too Late**, (*Women's Press* £3.95 pbk), *Mary Wing's* 'lavender' pastiche of the 'gialli'. Its central theme - the womens' move-

a superb black comedy of the last 35 years of nuclear power in Britain. From the weapons' programme in the 1950s, to the Sizewell Inquiry, and with full accounts of our obsession with plutonium and reprocessing, *Walt Patterson* uses official documents and records to make his point.

**Red Alert** by *Judith Cook*. (*New English Library* £8.95), is a comprehensive if rather heavy-going account of the many dangers of nuclear power. It covers a huge area but is marred a little by reliance upon secondary rather than primary sources of information. **Atomic Crossroads - before and after Sizewell** by *John Valentine* (*Merlin Books* £5.95), is a book concerned with many things apart from just Sizewell. Its description of the sorry debacle of Dungeness B, (some 16 years late for commissioning - yet with official pronouncements every year still optimistically suggesting next year as a start-up date), is reason enough to buy it.

Everyone dealing with the media and MP's needs good reference books. **World Re-**

**sources 1986** (*World Resources Institute*, £12.00), and the **Gaia Atlas of Planet Management** (*Pan Books*, £9.95), are my favourites.

The Worldwatch Institute continue to produce three to four excellent reports on the state of the world every year. **Decommissioning: Nuclear Power's Missing Link** by *Cynthia Pollock* (*Worldwatch Paper* 69, £2.50), covers a less well-known aspect of nuclear power. The costs (up to £300m per reactor) and problems of taking old nuclear reactors apart are well documented and referenced.

Nuclear power is, of course, not just about technology, but about politics too. **How Nuclear Decisions Are Made** edited by *Sheila McLean*. (*Macmillan* £6.95), is a summary of the Oxford Research Group's work on the people who make such decisions, in this case decisions concerning nuclear weapons. It is a vital book if you want to understand why Trident and the PWR were chosen as technological options. Somewhat depressing, but an essential read. ●

*Stuart Boyle*

ment under threat from the new Right - is skilfully and subversively portrayed. The plot is neither here nor there - my copy had 40 pages missing and I didn't miss a thing.

Coming to terms with one's own past is the theme of **Other Women** (*Penguin* £2.95 pbk) by *Lisa Alther*. I loved **Kinflicks** (*Penguin* £3.95 pbk) in 1976 and I half expected to be disappointed in her latest novel. I wasn't.

But the most helpful book I read in 1986 was **A Reckoning** (*Women's Press* £3.95 pbk), *May Sarton's* story of a woman's approaching death, at 60, from cancer. It offers some startling insights. *Laura* says, 'Dying is the most interesting thing I've ever done... when there are limits, it's easier to handle some things... I live in the present... it's quite a relief.' The last few pages describing her death in the presence of *Ella*, the friend of her youth and one of the most real connections of her life,

had me sobbing at 80mph on a sleepless sleeper somewhere between London and Glasgow. When someone close, and close in years, dies, it's a reminder that this life is not a rehearsal for the real thing.

I have had to unlearn the results of a Scottish education this past year. I've discovered the pleasure of poetry. *Sylvia Plath's Selected Poems* (*Faber* £2.95 pbk) have helped, as have *Douglas Dunn's Elegies* (*Faber* £3.95 pbk) which I read in one sitting. And there's the promise of much future pleasure in the poetry of *Emily Dickinson*. *Orietta*, whose English is worse than my Italian, recommended her. In any language, her absolute accuracy, precise connections and cool irony, fair take the breath away; they can surely change the way you see the world: 'Because I could not stop for death he kindly stopped for me'. ●

*Jean Barr*