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eastern Canadians have more in common with those in the northeastern United States than they do with their western Canadian counterparts.

In the end, Penfold’s book uses the donut as a lens through which to explore the link between cultural meaning and economic structures, exposing the influences of one on the other. With its digestible story, comprehensive citations and index, as well as insights into the scholarly landscape, The Donut will become a favorite on the reference shelf as well as on the bedside table.

— Nathalie Cooke, McGill University

The Devil’s Food Dictionary: A Pioneering Culinary Reference Work Consisting Entirely of Lies
Barry Foy. Illustrations by John Boesche.
Seattle: Frogchart Press, 2008
ix + 255 pp. $17.95 (paper)

For anyone who has ever written a book of any kind on food, be prepared to be lambasted herein. Lambaste—to baste a lamb (or succulent food writer) within inches of its life, to comedic effect—is one of the few culinary terms Barry Foy has missed in his Devil’s Food Dictionary. The precise technical term for Foy’s brand of comedic wit must be parody, but it goes far beyond that. As the author states on his Web site: “The market for food books appears, at last, to have begun devouring itself. Nearly every topic worth writing about has been written about, and the well of reliable, interesting information on food, once thought inexhaustible, is beginning to run dry. In circumstances such as these, author Barry Foy believes that an honorable writer has nowhere to go but sideways, into the realm of lies, misleading claims, and baseless speculation.”

Indeed, the book’s subtitle is A Pioneering Culinary Reference Work Consisting Entirely of Lies. Beginning each entry with a patent falsehood, the author strings out definitions to their logical, though absurd, conclusions. The effect is to ridicule—through bathos, pun, irony, and nearly every trick in the book—the Very Serious food reference works with which we are now thoroughly familiar. Take, for example, this entry for poisson: “Poisson. The French word for FISH. Its resemblance to the English word poison is not mere coincidence: Due to a congenital enzyme deficiency common in France, even a single bite of fish could prove fatal to most citizens of that country” (p.167).

The book clearly draws its inspiration from Ambrose Bierce’s classic lampoon, The Devil’s Dictionary, but is, perhaps, less trenchant and sour. The author does have a few bones to pick, and at times he teeters on a very fine line of being offensive toward, for example, fat people, nutritionists, people with food allergies, Latino kitchen workers, and Americans in general. But it is all in such good spirit, and so perversely hilarious, that we cannot help forgiving him some pet peeves. Not only food writers are deflated, but also foodies, food scientists, the food industry, and eaters of all stripes. For instance, Foy defines a gourmet as “a person who prides himself on his gastronomic sophistication and will go to almost any expense to satisfy his discerning TASTES. The authentic gourmet is so demanding that he will eat parts of a pig or cow usually reserved for pet FOOD” (p.100). We are also told that we should be careful not to make the common mistake of referring to the CIA by its initials alone, lest someone think we are referring to the Culinary Institute of Armenia.

Food historians, especially, will appreciate Foy’s wry twists on the kinds of common misconceptions once rampant in this field. North America’s first European visitors walked to this continent on a bridge made of codfish and gradually ate it out from beneath themselves. Marco Polo, being tall and thin, was the inspiration for long strands of pasta invented in China, dubbed macaroni. Saffron is not “threadlike” but made of actual threads plucked from a crimson rope that stretches across the pilgrim route to Santiago de Compostela.

Other entries are both sublime and ridiculous. “Dill: An aromatic plant whose dainty green fronds are similar in appearance to FENNEL. However, soaking them in BRINE triggered an enzymatic reaction that swells the fronds to the size of CUCUMBERS. These are known as ‘dill PICKLES’” (p.72).

For more, you will just have to buy this book, keep it by your bedside, bring it to work to alleviate moments of boredom, and share snippets with your friends. It is among the funniest satires I have ever read, period.

— Ken Albala, University of the Pacific

Drink: A Cultural History of Alcohol
Lain Gately
560 pp. Illustrations. $30.00 (cloth)

It is no simple tale, that of the life and times of alcohol. Because alcohol is interwoven into so many aspects of human existence—religion, creativity, politics, morality,