

Nora Ephron

The Food Establishment: Life in the Land of the Rising Soufflé (Or Is It the Rising Meringue?)

As the writer of Hollywood hits including *Silkwood* (1983), *Heartburn* (1986), *When Harry Met Sally* (1989), *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993), and *You've Got Mail* (1998), the more recent of which she also produced and directed, Nora Ephron (b. 1941) has become a celebrity in her own right; if not universally famous, she is at the very least someone who ought to have no trouble getting a good table. Here, though—in a delightful report from her first book, *Wallflower at the Orgy* (1970)—Ephron stands back and watches, bemused, as the outsized egos of “the Food Establishment” vie for preeminence in a field grown increasingly fractious as well as increasingly influential. James Beard, Julia Child, Craig Claiborne, Michael Field, M.F.K. Fisher, Waverley Root: examples of their justly celebrated food writing are included elsewhere in this anthology. Ephron, with her keen sense of the comic, fills in some of the backstory.

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One day, I awoke having had my first in a long series of food anxiety dreams (the way it goes is this: there are eight people coming to dinner in twenty minutes, and I am in an utter panic because I have forgotten to buy the food, plan the menu, set the table, clean the house, and the supermarket is closed). I knew that I had become a victim of the dreaded food obsession syndrome and would have to do something about it. This article is what I did.

Incidentally, I anticipated that my interviews on this would be sublime gourmet experiences, with each of my subjects forcing little goodies down my throat. But no. All I got from over twenty interviews were two raw potatoes that were guaranteed by their owner (who kept them in a special burlap bag on her terrace) to be the only potatoes worth eating in all the world. Perhaps they were. I don't know, though; they tasted exactly like the other potatoes I've had in my life.

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You might have thought they'd have been polite enough not to mention it at all. Or that they'd wait at least until they got through the reception line

before starting to discuss it. Or that they'd hold off at least until after they had tasted the food—four tables of it, spread about the four corners of the Four Seasons—and gotten drinks in hand. But people in the Food Establishment are not noted for their manners or their patience, particularly when there is fresh gossip. And none of them had come to the party because of the food.

They had come, most of them, because they were associated with the Time-Life Cookbooks, a massive, high-budget venture that has managed to involve nearly everyone who is anyone in the food world. Julia Child was a consultant on the first book. And James Beard had signed on to another. And Paula Peck, who bakes. And Nika Hazelton, who reviews cookbooks for the *New York Times Book Review*. And M.F.K. Fisher, usually of *The New Yorker*. And Waverley Root of Paris, France. And Pierre Franey, the former chef of Le Pavillon who is now head chef at Howard Johnson's. And in charge of it all, Michael Field, the birdlike, bespectacled, frenzied gourmet cook and cookbook writer, who stood in the reception line where everyone was beginning to discuss it. Michael was a wreck. A wreck, a wreck, a wreck, as he himself might have put it. Just that morning, the very morning of the party, Craig Claiborne of the *New York Times*, who had told the Time-Life people he would not be a consultant for their cookbooks even if they paid him a hundred thousand dollars, had ripped the first Time-Life cookbook to shreds and tatters. *Merde alors*, as Craig himself might have put it, how that man did rip that book to shreds and tatters. He said that the recipes, which were supposed to represent the best of French provincial cooking, were not even provincial. He said that everyone connected with the venture ought to be ashamed of himself. He was rumored to be going about town telling everyone that the picture of the soufflé on the front of the cookbook was not even a soufflé—it was a meringue! *Merde alors!* He attacked Julia Child, the hitherto unknockable. He referred to Field, who runs a cooking school and is author of two cookbooks, merely as a “former piano player.” Not that Field wasn't a former piano player. But actually identifying him as one—well! “As far as Craig and I are concerned,” Field was saying as the reception line went on, “the gauntlet is down.” And worst of all—or at least it seemed worst of all that day—Craig had chosen the day of the party for his review. Poor Michael. How simply frightful! How humiliating! How delightful! “Why did he have

to do it today?" moaned Field to Claiborne's close friend, chef Pierre Franey. "Why? Why? Why?"

Why indeed?

The theories ranged from Gothic to Byzantine. Those given to the historical perspective said that Craig had never had much respect for Michael, and they traced the beginnings of the rift back to 1965, when Claiborne had gone to a restaurant Field was running in East Hampton and given it *one* measly star. Perhaps, said some. But why include Julia in the blast? Craig had done that, came the reply, because he had never liked Michael and wanted to tell Julia to get out of Field's den of thieves. Perhaps, said still others. But mightn't he also have done it because his friend Franey had signed on as a consultant to the *Time-Life Cookbook of Haute Cuisine* just a few weeks before, and Craig wanted to tell *him* to get out of that den of thieves? Perhaps, said others. But it might be even more complicated. Perhaps Craig had done it because he was furious at Michael Field's terrible review in the *New York Review of Books* of Gloria Bley Miller's *The Thousand Recipe Chinese Cookbook*, which Craig had praised in the *Times*.

Now, while all this was becoming more and more arcane, there were a few who secretly believed that Craig had done the deed because the *Time-Life* cookbook was as awful as he thought it was. But most of those people were not in the Food Establishment. Things in the Food Establishment are rarely explained that simply. They are never what they seem. People who seem to be friends are not. People who admire each other call each other Old Lemonface and Cranky Craig behind backs. People who tell you they love Julia Child will add in the next breath that of course her husband is a Republican and her orange Bavarian cream recipe just doesn't work. People who tell you Craig Claiborne is a genius will insist he had little or nothing to do with the *New York Times Cookbook*, which bears his name. People will tell you that Michael Field is delightful but that some people do not take success quite as well as they might. People who claim that Dione Lucas is the most brilliant food technician of all time further claim that when she puts everything together it comes out tasting bland. People who love Paula Peck will go on to tell you—but let one of *them* tell you. "I love Paula," one of them is saying, "but *no* one, absolutely *no* one understands what it is between Paula and monosodium glutamate."

Bitchy? Gossipy? Devious?

"It's a world of self-generating hysteria," says Nika Hazelton. And those who say the food world is no more ingrown than the theater world and the music world are wrong. The food world is smaller. Much more self-involved. And people in the theater and in music are part of a culture that has been popularly accepted for centuries; people in the food world are riding the crest of a trend that began less than twenty years ago.

In the beginning, just about the time the Food Establishment began to earn money and fight with each other and review each other's books and say nasty things about each other's recipes and feel rotten about each other's good fortune, just about that time, there came curry. Some think it was beef Stroganoff, but in fact, beef Stroganoff had nothing to do with it. It began with curry. Curry with fifteen little condiments and Major Grey's mango chutney. The year of the curry is an elusive one to pinpoint, but this much is clear: it was before the year of quiche Lorraine, the year of paella, the year of vitello tonnato, the year of boeuf Bourguignon, the year of blanquette de veau, and the year of beef Wellington. It was before Michael stopped playing the piano, before Julia opened L'Ecole des Trois Gourmandes, and before Craig had left his job as a bartender in Nyack, New York. It was the beginning, and in the beginning there was James Beard and there was curry and that was about all.

Historical explanations of the rise of the Food Establishment do not usually begin with curry. They begin with the standard background on the gourmet explosion—background that includes the traveling fighting men of World War Two, the postwar travel boom, and the shortage of domestic help, all of which are said to have combined to drive the housewives of America into the kitchen.

This background is well and good, but it leaves out the curry development. In the 1950s, suddenly, no one knew quite why or how, everyone began to serve curry. Dinner parties in fashionable homes featured curried lobster. Dinner parties in middle-income homes featured curried chicken. Dinner parties in frozen-food compartments featured curried rice. And with the arrival of curry, the first fashionable international food, food acquired a chic, a gloss of snobbery it had hitherto possessed only in certain upper-income groups. Hostesses were expected to know that iceberg lettuce was *déclassé* and tuna-fish casseroles

de trop. Lancers sparkling rosé and Manischewitz were replaced on the table by Bordeaux. Overnight rumaki had a fling and became a cliché.

The American hostess, content serving frozen spinach for her family, learned to make a spinach soufflé for her guests. Publication of cookbooks tripled, quadrupled, quintupled; the first cookbook-of-the-month club, the Cookbook Guild, flourished. At the same time, American industry realized that certain members of the food world—like James Beard, whose name began to have a certain celebrity—could help make foods popular. The French's mustard people turned to Beard. The can-opener people turned to Poppy Cannon. Pan American Airways turned to Myra Waldo. The Potato Council turned to Helen McCully. The Northwest Pear Association and the Poultry and Egg Board and the Bourbon Institute besieged food editors for more recipes containing their products. Cookbook authors were retained; at sizable fees, to think of new ways to cook with bananas. Or scallions. Or peanut butter. "You know," one of them would say, looking up from a dinner made during the peanut-butter period, "it would never have occurred to me to put peanut butter on lamb, but actually, it's rather nice."

Before long, American men and women were cooking along with Julia Child, subscribing to the Shallot-of-the-Month Club, and learning to mince garlic instead of pushing it through a press. Cheeses, herbs, and spices that had formerly been available only in Bloomingdale's delicacy department cropped up around New York, and then around the country. Food became, for dinner-party conversations in the sixties, what abstract expressionism had been in the fifties. And liberated men and women who used to brag that sex was their greatest pleasure began to suspect that food might be pulling ahead in the ultimate taste test.

Generally speaking, the Food Establishment—which is not to be confused with the Restaurant Establishment, the Chef Establishment, the Food-Industry Establishment, the Gourmet Establishment, or the Wine Establishment—consists of those people who write about food or restaurants on a regular basis, either in books, magazines, or certain newspapers, and thus have the power to start trends and, in some cases, begin and end careers. Most of them earn additional money through lecture tours, cooking schools, and consultancies for restaurants and industry. A few appear on radio and television.

The typical member of the Food Establishment lives in Greenwich Village, buys his vegetables at Balducci's, his bread at the Zito bakery, and his cheese at Bloomingdale's. He dines at the Coach House. He is given to telling you, apropos of nothing, how many soufflés he has been known to make in a short period of time. He is driven mad by a refrain he hears several times a week: "I'd love to have you for dinner," it goes, "but I'd be afraid to cook for you." He insists that there is no such thing as an original recipe; the important thing, he says, is point of view. He lists as one of his favorite cookbooks the original *Joy of Cooking* by Irma Rombauer, and adds that he wouldn't be caught dead using the revised edition currently on the market. His cookbook library runs to several hundred volumes. He gossips a good deal about his colleagues, about what they are cooking, writing, and eating, and whom they are talking to; about everything, in fact, except the one thing everyone else in the universe gossips about—who is sleeping with whom. In any case, he claims that he really does not spend much time with other members of the Food Establishment, though he does bump into them occasionally at Sunday lunch at Jim Beard's or at one of the publishing parties he is obligated to attend. His publisher, if he is lucky, is Alfred A. Knopf.

He takes himself and food very very seriously. He has been known to debate for hours such subjects as whether nectarines are peaches or plums, and whether the vegetables that Michael Field, Julia Child, and James Beard had one night at La Caravelle and said were canned were in fact canned. He roundly condemns anyone who writes more than one cookbook a year. He squarely condemns anyone who writes a cookbook containing untested recipes. Colleagues who break the rules and succeed are hailed almost as if they had happened on a new galaxy. "Paula Peck," he will say, in hushed tones of awe, "broke the rules in puff paste." If the Food Establishmentarian makes a breakthrough in cooking methods—no matter how minor and superfluous it may seem—he will celebrate. "I have just made a completely and utterly revolutionary discovery," said Poppy Cannon triumphantly one day. "I have just developed a new way of cooking asparagus."

There are two wings to the Food Establishment, each in mortal combat with the other. On the one side are the revolutionaries—as they like to think of themselves—the home economists and writers and magazine editors who are industry-minded and primarily concerned with the needs of the average

housewife. Their virtues are performance, availability of product, and less work for mother; their concern is with improving American food. "There is an awe about Frenchness in food which is terribly precious and has kept American food from being as good as it could be," says Poppy Cannon, the leader of the revolutionaries. "People think French cooking is cooking it up. All this kowtowing to so-called French food has really been a hindrance rather than a help." The revolutionaries pride themselves on discovering short cuts and developing convenience foods; they justify the compromises they make and the loss of taste that results by insisting that their recipes, while unquestionably not as good as the originals, are probably a good deal better than what the American housewife would prepare if left to her own devices. When revolutionaries get together, they talk about the technical aspects of food: how to ripen a tomato, for example; and whether the extra volume provided by beating eggs with a wire whisk justifies not using the more convenient electric beater.

On the other side are the purists or traditionalists, who see themselves as the last holdouts for haute cuisine. Their virtue is taste; their concern primarily French food. They are almost missionary-like, championing the cause of great food against the rising tide of the TV dinner, clamoring for better palates as they watch the children of America raised on a steady diet of Spaghetti Os. Their contempt for the revolutionaries is eloquent: "These people, these home economists," said Michael Field distastefully, "—they skim the iridescent froth off the gourmet department, and it comes out tasting like hell." When purists meet, they discuss each other; very occasionally, they talk about food: whether one ought to put orange peel into boeuf Bourguignon, for example, and why lamb tastes better rare.

Although the purists do not reach the massive market available to the revolutionaries, they are virtually celebrities. Their names conjure up a sense of style and taste; their appearance at a benefit can mean thousands of dollars for hospitals, charities, and politicians. The Big Four of the Food Establishment are all purists—James Beard, Julia Child, Michael Field, and Craig Claiborne.

Claiborne, a Mississippi-born man who speaks softly, wears half-glasses, and has a cherubic reddish face that resembles a Georgia peach, is probably the most powerful man in the Food Establishment. From his position as

food editor of the *New York Times*, he has been able to bring down at least one restaurant (Claude Philippe's Pavillon), crowd customers into others, and play a critical part in developing new food tastes. He has singlehandedly revived sorrel and cilantro, and, if he could have his way, he would singlehandedly stamp out iceberg lettuce and garlic powder. To his dismay, he played a large part in bringing about the year of beef Wellington. "I hate the stuff," he says.

In his thirties, after too many unhappy years in public relations and the armed forces, Claiborne entered the Lausanne Hotel School to study cooking. On his return—and after a brief fling bartending—he began to write for *Gourmet* magazine and work for Ann Seranne's public-relations firm, handling such products as the Waring Blender and Fluffo the Golden Shortening. In 1957 he was hired by the *Times*, and he unabashedly admits that his job has been a dream come true. He loves it, almost as much as he loves eating, though not nearly as much as he loves cooking.

Claiborne is happiest in his Techbuilt house in Springs, East Hampton, which overlooks an herb garden, an oversized swimming pool, and Gardiner's Bay. There, he, his next-door neighbor Pierre Franey—whom he calls "my arm and my dear friend"—and a number of other chefs go fishing, swap recipes, and whip up meals for fifty guests at a time. The menus are logged into a small leatherbound notebook in which Claiborne records every meal he eats throughout the year. During the winter, Claiborne lives in Greenwich Village. His breakfasts often consist of Sara Lee frozen croissants. His other daily meals are taken in restaurants, and he discusses them as if he were serving penance. "That," he says firmly, "is the thing I like least about my job."

Six years ago Claiborne began visiting New York restaurants incognito and reviewing them on a star system in the *Friday Times*; since that time, he has become the most envied, admired, and cursed man in the food world. Restaurant owners decry his Francophilia and can barely control their tempers while discussing his prejudice against large-management corporations and in favor of tiny, ethnic restaurants. His nit-picking constantly irritates. Among some of the more famous nits: his censure of a Pavillon waiter who allowed his pencil to peek out; his disapproval of the salt and pepper shakers at L'Étoile, and this remark about Lutèce: "One could wish that the

owner, Monsieur Surmain, would dress in a more reserved and elegant style to better match his surroundings."

Surmain, a debonair man who wears stylish striped shirts, sputters when Claiborne's name is mentioned. "He said in a restaurant of this sort I should wear a tuxedo," said Surmain. "What a bitchy thing. He wants me to act like a headwaiter."

The slings and arrows of outrage fly at Claiborne—and not only from restaurateurs. Carping about Craig is practically a parlor game in the food world. Everything he writes is pored over for its true significance. It is suggested, for example, that the reason Craig criticized proprietor Stuart Levin's clothes in his recent review of Le Pavillon had to do with the fact that Levin fawned over him during his two visits to the restaurant. It is suggested that the reason Craig praised the clothes of Charles Masson of Grenouille in the same review had to do with the fact that Masson ignores Craig entirely too much. It is suggested that Craig is not a nice person; and a story is offered to support the thesis, all about the time he reviewed a new restaurant owned by a friend after the friend begged him to wait a few weeks. His criticisms, it is said, drove the friend to drink.

But the fact of the matter is that Craig Claiborne does what he does better than anyone else. He is a delight to read. And the very things that make him superb as a food critic—his integrity and his utter incorruptibility—are what make his colleagues loathe him.

"Everyone thinks about Craig too much," says cookbook author and consultant Mimi Sheraton. "The truth is that he is his own man and there is no way to be a friend of his. He is the only writer who is really honest. Whether or not he's reliable, whether or not you like him, he is honest. I know *Cue* isn't—I used to write for them. *Gourmet* isn't. And Michael Field is just writing for Craig Claiborne."

Whenever members of the Food Establishment tire of discussing Craig they move on to discuss Craig's feuds—though in all fairness, it must be said that Claiborne is usually the less active party to the feuds. The feud currently absorbing the Food Establishment is between Claiborne and Michael Field. Field, who burst into stardom in the Food Establishment after a career as half of the piano team of Appleton & Field, is an energetic, amusing, frenetic man whose recent rise and subsequent candor have won him few

friends in the food world. Those who are not his admirers have taken to passing around the shocking tidbit—untrue—that Field had not been to Europe until 1967, when he visited Julia Child in Provence.

"Essentially," says Field, "the whole Food Establishment is a mindless one, inarticulate and not very cultivated. These idiots who attack me are furious because they think I just fell into it. Well, let me tell you, I used to make forty soufflés in one day and throw them out, just to find the right recipe."

Shortly after his first cookbook was published, Field began reviewing cookbooks for the *New York Review of Books*, a plum assignment. One of his first articles, an attack on *The Fannie Farmer Cookbook* which centered on its fondue recipe, set off a fracas that produced a furious series of argumentative letters, in themselves a hilarious inadvertent parody of letters to highbrow magazines. Recently, he reviewed *The Thousand Recipe Chinese Cookbook*—a volume that was voted winner of the R. T. French (mustard) Tastemaker Award (chosen by one hundred newspaper food editors and roughly analogous in meaning to landing on the Best Dressed List). In his attack on Gloria Bley Miller's book, he wrote: "It would be interesting to know why, for example, Mrs. Miller's recipe for hot mustard requires the cook to bring one cup of water to a boil and then allow it to cool before adding one half cup of dry mustard? Surely Mrs. Miller must be aware that drinking and cooking water in China was boiled because it was often contaminated. . . ."

Mrs. Miller wrote in reply: "I can only suggest to Mr. Field . . . that he immerse his typewriter immediately in boiling water. There are many types of virulence in the world, and 'boiling the water first' is one of the best ways to disinfect anything."

The feud between Field and Claiborne had been simmering for several years, but Claiborne's review of the Time-Life cookbook turned it up to full boil. "He has a perfect right to dislike the book," said Field. "But his attack went far beyond that, into personalities." A few months after the review was published, Field counterpunched, with an article in *McCall's* entitled "New York's Ten Most Overrated Restaurants." It is in almost total opposition to Claiborne's *Guide to New York Restaurants*; in fact, reading Field's piece without having Claiborne's book alongside is a little like reading *Finnegans Wake* without the key.

For his part, Claiborne would just as soon not discuss Field—"Don't get me started," he said. And his attitude toward the Time-Life series has mellowed somewhat: he has finally consented to write the text of the *Time-Life Cookbook of Haute Cuisine* along with Franey. But some time ago, when asked, he was only too glad to defend his review. "Helen McCully (food editor of *House Beautiful*) said to me, 'How could you be so mean to Michael?'" he recalled. "I don't give a good God damn about Michael." His face turned deep red, his fists clenched, he stood to pace the room. "The misinformation! The inaccuracies in that book! I made a stack of notes thicker than the book itself on the errors in it. It's shameful."

Claiborne was so furious about the book, in fact, that he managed to intensify what was, until then, a one-sided feud between James Beard and himself. Beard, a genial, large, round man who receives guests in his Tenth Street house while seated, Buddha-like, on a large pouf, had been carrying on a mild tiff with Claiborne for some time. Just before the first Time-Life cookbook was published, the two men appeared together on the David Susskind Show, and in the course of the program, Beard held up the book and plugged it on the air. Afterward, Claiborne wrote a letter to Susskind, with carbon copy to Beard, saying that if he had known he was going to appear on the same show with the Time-Life cookbook, he never would have consented to go on.

(That Julia Child has managed thus far to remain above the internecine struggles of the food world probably has more to do with the fact that she lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts, well away from it all, than with her charming personality.)

The success of the Time-Life cookbook series is guaranteed, Claiborne's review notwithstanding. Offered by mail order to subscribers who care not one whit whether the soufflé on the cover is actually a meringue, the series rapidly signed up five hundred thousand takers—for all eighteen books! (The *New York Times Cookbook*, itself a blockbuster, has sold only two hundred thousand copies.) "The books, whatever their limits, are of enormous quality," says Field. "Every recipe works and is honestly conceived." Yet a number of those intimately connected with the books have complained about the limits Field parenthetically refers to, and most particularly about the technique of group journalism that has produced the books: apparently,

the text, recipes, and photographs of some of the cookbooks have been done independently of each other.

"It's a joke," said Nika Hazelton, who is writing the text for the *Time-Life German Cookbook*. "First there is the writer—me, in this case, but I have nothing to do with the recipes or illustrations. Then there is the photographic staff, which takes recipes from old cookbooks, changes them a little, and photographs them. Then there is the kitchen, under Michael Field's supervision. I think Michael knows about French and Italian food, but he doesn't know quite as much about other cookery. The cook is John Clancy, a former cook in a short-order house who once worked for Jim Beard. I'm the only person connected with the project who knows languages besides French. There is a consultant who hasn't been in Germany for thirty years. My researcher's background is spending three years with the Morgan Bank. It's hilarious. I'm doing it only for the money."

The money that is available to members of the Food Establishment is not quite as much as they would have you think, but it is definitely enough to keep every last one of them in truffles. James Beard—who commands the highest fees and, though a purist, has the most ties with industry—recently turned down a hundred-thousand-dollar offer to endorse Aunt Jemima mixes because he didn't believe in their products. Retainers offered lesser stars are considerably smaller, but there are many jobs, and they suffice. Nevertheless, the impression persists that there are not enough jobs to go around. And because everyone in the food world is free-lancing and concerned with putting as many eggs into his basket as possible, it happens that every time someone gets a job, the rest feel that they have lost one.

Which brings us to the case of Myra Waldo. An attractive, chic woman who lives on upper Fifth Avenue, Miss Waldo published her first cookbook in 1954, and since then she has been responsible for forty-two others. Forty-two cookbooks! In addition, she does four radio spots a day for WCBS, is roving editor of *Family Circle* magazine, is retained by Pan American Airways, and recently landed the late Clementine Paddleford's job as food editor of *This Week* magazine. Myra Waldo has never been a favorite in the Food Establishment: she is far too successful. Furthermore, although she once made forty-eight soufflés over a July Fourth weekend, she is not a truly serious cook. (To a visitor who wanted a recipe for a dinner party, she suggested

duck in a sauce made of frozen orange juice, Melba sauce, red wine, cognac, lemon juice, and a can of Franco-American beef gravy.) For years it has been rumored that Miss Waldo produces as many cookbooks as she does because she clips recipes and pastes them right onto her manuscript pages, or because she has a gigantic staff—charges she denies. But when she landed the *This Week* job, one that nearly everyone else in the Food Establishment had applied for, the gang decided that too much was too much. Shortly afterward, she went to the Cookbook Guild party, and no one except James Beard even said hello to her.

Said Beard: "You could barely move around at that party for fear someone would bite you in the back."

How much longer life in the Food Establishment—with its back-biting, lip-smacking, and pocket-jingling—will go on is hard to tell. There are some who believe the gourmet explosion that began it all is here to stay and that fine cooking is on the increase. "Of course it will last," said Poppy Cannon, "just in the way sculpture will last. We need it. It is a basic art. We ought to have a National Academy of the Arts to represent the art of cooking."

Others are less sure. They claim that the food of the future will be quite different: precooked, reconstituted, and frozen dishes with portion control. "The old cuisine is gone for good and dying out," says Mrs. Hazelton. "Ultimately, cooking will be like an indoor sport, just like making lace and handiwork."

Whatever happens, the Food Establishment at this moment has the power to change the way America eats. And in fact, about all it is doing is showing how to make a better piecrust and fill a bigger breadbox.

"What fascinates me," says Mimi Sheraton, "is that the more interest there is in gourmet food, the more terrible food is for sale in the markets. You can't buy an unwaxed cucumber in this country, the bread thing everyone knows about, we buy overtenderized meat and frozen chicken. You can't buy a really fresh egg because they've all been washed in hot water so the shells will be clean. And the influence of color photography on food! Oil is brushed on to make it glow. When we make a stew, the meat won't sit on top, so we have to prop it up with oatmeal. Some poor clod makes it at home and it's like buying a dress a model has posed in with the back pinned closed. As a result, food is marketed and grown for the purpose of appearances. We

are really the last generation who even has a vague memory of what food is supposed to taste like.

"There have been three revolutionary changes in the food world in past years," Miss Sheraton continued. "The pressure groups have succeeded in changing the labeling of foods, they've succeeded in cutting down the amounts of pesticides used on foods, and they've changed the oversized packages used by the cereal and cracker people. To me, it's interesting that not one of these stories began with a food writer. Where are they, these food writers? They're off wondering about the boeuf en daube and whether the quiche was authentic."

Yes, that's exactly where they are. "Isn't it all a little too precious?" asks Restaurant Associates president Joseph Baum. "It's so elegant and *recherché*, it's like overbreeding a collie." But, after all, someone has to worry about the boeuf en daube and whether the quiche was authentic—right? And there is so much more to do. So many soufflés to test and throw out. So many ways of cooking asparagus to discover. So many patés to concoct. And so many things to talk about. Myra's new book. The record Poppy is making. Why Craig finally signed on to Time-Life Cookbooks. Michael's latest article. So much more to do. So many things to talk about. . . .