

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

**CONSIDER THE OMELETTE, the egg dish that reveals as it conceals. A gentle French fold pocketing chopped**

*fines herbes.*

The ubiquitous diner special, redolent of America itself: overstuffed and slightly overcooked. Where there are eggs, there is the promise of an omelette: frittata, egg foo yung, omurice; Spanish tortillas, Filipino tortangs, Indian poros. A most memoiristic food, the omelette, a uniquely eggy handprint. “Everything always comes back to the omelette,” Jessie Ware writes in her food memoir—or “foodoir,” as she hesitantly calls it—titled **“Omelette: Food, Love, Chaos and Other Conversations” (Hodder & Stoughton, 146 pages, \$ 19.99)**.

Ms. Ware is an English electro-pop chanteuse-turned-chart-topping podcaster who co-hosts “Table Manners” alongside her mother, Lennie. The podcast, in which the duo chats, cooks and chews with British celebs, started, Ms. Ware writes, “out of a love for my Jewish heritage” and her family’s lively, lavish dinners.

Those meals form the basis of their co-authored cookbook, also titled **“Table Manners” (Ebury, 287 pages, \$39.95)**. These are recipes to build dinner parties around: roasted pickled carrots topped with ricotta and arugula, Greek meatballs simmered in ouzo, chocolate mousse tart.

In “Omelette,” Ms. Ware tells of jet-set jaunts to Rio and Skopelos, of hangover-inducing parties with name-droppable guest lists— David Beckham, various Spice Girls —but her writing is sharpest, most savory when she focuses on her family’s well-worn recipes, such as her Grandma Gaga’s “version of a cup of tea” (fried, matzo-crust ed gefilte fish) Lennie’s lamb Bolognese, developed during the mad-cow alarm of the 1990s, and Lennie’s omnipresent omelette, requested by her husband as a last meal before he moved out of the family home. “If there is a crisis,” Ms. Ware writes, “there is the offer of an omelette.”



program. At NYU, she helped publicize how the Cattlemen’s Association squashed the Agriculture Department’s proposed food-pyramid guide to healthy eating. Much to her chagrin, a revised pyramid released in 1992 recommended two to three servings of meat a day.

In 2002 Ms. Nestle parlayed her experiences into “Food Politics,” a watershed book that traced how the food industry sacrifices peoples’ health for profit. The book made Ms.

Nestle a hero among food-focused activists and earned the ire of sugar and beef lobbies, as well as culinarians. While dining at the home of Julia Child, the American doyenne of overindulgence— who referred to Ms. Nestle and her ilk as “nutritional terrorists”—Child plopped a mammoth slice of beef on her guest’s plate with the words, “Now, there’s nothing like a good piece of meat, is there?”

Michael Twitty’s **“Koshersoul: The Faith and Food Journey of an African American Jew” (Amistad, 371 pages, \$28.99)** offers a political food memoir of a different sort. The second in a proposed trilogy that began with the two-time James Beard Award-winning “The Cooking Gene” (2017), “Koshersoul” explores the intersectionality of food, faith and race. For Mr. Twitty, koshersoul is synonymous with “Black-Jewish joy.”

It’s “another word for kinfolk,” a way to unite the shared histories and experiences of diasporic, nomadic peoples who have sought liberation through self-determination and community, as well as “knowledge, mysticism, and spiritual power.”

Unlike Ms. Ware, Marion Nestle grew up “not particularly adventurous or curious about food.” Her memoir, **“Slow Cooked: An Unexpected Life in Food Politics” (California, 278 pages, \$ 29.95)** , provides an insider’s account of food-policy reform and politics over the past half century.

Born in Brooklyn, N.Y., to impoverished, first-generation, Communist Party-committed nonobservant Jewish parents, Ms. Nestle “didn’t understand that there was anything to be curious about.” But a curiosity gradually developed in fits and frustrations, she admits. After earning a doctorate in molecular biology from the University of California, Berkeley, getting married and having two kids, then spending five years teaching at Brandeis University, Ms. Nestle experienced a “nutrition epiphany” in 1975. Following Frances Moore Lappé’s bestselling “Diet for a Small Planet” (1971), she discovered that nutrition offered a trendy way to introduce undergraduates to the basics of biology while connecting contemporary social, economic and political issues. Her interest piqued, she earned a master’s in public health before joining the Department of Health and Human Services as a nutrition-policy adviser—a stint she calls “my two years in federal prison.” Charged with editing the government’s 1988 “Surgeon General’s Report on Nutrition and Health,” she butted heads with Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, who refused to recommend eating less meat, dairy and sugar. “If your cholesterol is okay and you think your genes are good,” Koop said at the time, “why should you sit on a hill the rest of your life and eat yogurt?”

Ms. Nestle soon returned to academia as the chair of New York University’s Department of Home Economics and Nutrition, which she helped transform into the nation’s leading food-studies

Mr. Twitty says he uses food to locate himself “somewhere in a spectrum that doesn’t always make room for anomalies like me.”

He’s an openly gay Orthodox convert in what is traditionally an anti-queer community who was the only instructor of color at his Hebrew school, where he taught for a decade, and a congregant at a Maryland synagogue once housed on the former plantation grounds that inspired Harriet Beecher Stowe’s “Uncle Tom’s Cabin.” His untraditional Seder plate features a chicken bone in place of the lamb shank, collard greens representing the bitter herbs, hot pepper substituting for horseradish, and hoecake for matzo.

“We are complicated people,” Mr. Twitty writes of those he winkingly calls the “Chocolate Chosen,” his fellow koshersoulniks who are lovingly profiled throughout. There’s Solomon Franco, “our Kunta Kinte,” who was arrested in 17th-century Boston for traveling on the Sunday Sabbath—not the Sabbath he honored. There are the generations of black domestic cooks who prepared Shabbat meals for Southern kosher families. And then there’s Shais Rishon, a Brooklyn-based, black Orthodox rabbi. “The most important thing about us Black Jews is not how we got here or why we’re here,” Rabbi Rishon affirms. “It’s that we ask Jewish questions and make Jewish decisions, and live Jewish lives.”

Dozens of soulful kosher recipes are included: collard-green kreplach, black-eyed pea hummus, matzo-meal fried chicken, yam kugel. Cooking, Mr. Twitty writes, “is a form of wrestling . . . and of learning” for black, Jewish and koshersoul peoples. But Mr.

Twitty’s memoir reveals that wrestling with one’s food is for all readers and eaters, no matter one’s chosen faith or foodways.

—Mr. Fertel is the author, most recently, of “Brown Pelican.”

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