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THIS WEEK

British foodies today may believe they have never had it so good. Michelin-starred chefs abound in the capital and throughout the country, exotic ingredients are available to all, while the cookbook is the most reliable of all bestsellers. It is a far cry from jokes about boiled cabbage and the English equivalent of “bon appétit” being “good luck”. But, as Bee Wilson explains, there has been a “golden age” of British cooking before: “the most creative phase in the history of British cooking . . . when exciting new ingredients such as apricots (first cultivated in Henry VIII’s garden in 1542) combined with unprecedented kitchen artistry” was under the Tudors and Stuarts. James I and VI was so addicted to strawberries that he dispensed with all formalities when digging in.

Many who saw Mike Leigh’s recent film about Turner thought that the depiction of John Ruskin (pictured) as a lisping ninny did him a disservice. This week, two reviews redress the balance: Lindsay Duguid discusses a book of “lost” Ruskin daguerreotypes, which came to light at an auction in Penrith. She finds, among other things, that “it is a revelation to see pre-tourist Venice”. In Arts, Clive Wilmer reviews an exhibition of Ruskin’s collection of Turner watercolours of the city at the Fitzwilliam Museum, arguing that they show how “Ruskin has shaped the collection to his own reading of Turner”. Ruskin thought that the painter seemed to have “seen everything, remembered everything, spiritualized everything”, and at one point owned as many as 300 of Turner’s works from which to make such observations.



In Commentary, Stephen Bernard makes the case for Jacob Tonson the younger, nephew of the man remembered as the publisher of *Paradise Lost*. The younger Tonson, Bernard shows, has been unfairly overshadowed by his uncle, and deserves to take his place as a fellow creator of “the English literary canon”. Two later stalwarts of that canon have been brought together in a combined biography, Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley, mother and daughter, which Frances Wilson finds “a strong idea, brought off to good effect”.

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