Smoke and Mirrors? Montreal Smoked Meat and the Creation of Tradition

Alan Nash

My interest in the topic of Montreal smoked meat is not a surprising one; indeed, to those who know me, it would seem surprising if I were not interested in it. I live a short block away from Schwartz's – arguably the most famous smoked meat restaurant in Montreal – and at least once a week, upon leaving the house to go to work, I am greeted with the smell of beef brisket being prepared in Schwartz's legendary smoke-house. It is a smell that not only piques my appetite but also my curiosity, because – when I get to work – I am conducting research into the changing world of Montreal's restaurants since the 1950s and I am made all too conscious of the questions that Schwartz's poses for such research.

Simply put, these force us to ask how it is that a product – smoked meat – that was once the preserve of a small minority of the community, the city's Jewish population, has not only become embraced by a much wider cross-section of Montreal's populace, but also how the food of one small segment of that city has come to be propelled to such an 'iconic' status that it has now become seen by almost anyone you care to ask as representative of that entire city to outsiders and tourists alike.

Montreal smoked meat

What exactly is Montreal smoked meat? How exactly is it different from its great rival, New York pastrami? It is helpful to begin an answer to these vexed questions by turning first to Harold McGee's classic *On Food and Cooking*, where he observes that 'the preservation of meat from biological spoilage has been a major challenge throughout history'. The four basic methods of drying, salting, smoking and fermentation have been developed, and, in McGee's words, 'out of these crude methods to starve off spoilage have come some of our most complex and interesting foods' (McGee 2004, 172).

Sadly, smoked meat is not among these foods (he prefers the dry-cured hams and fermented sausages), but it is a nevertheless a product that exemplifies some of the challenges of meat preservation. Indeed, because smoking only affects the surface of the meat, it is a process that has long been used in conjunction with salting and drying – 'a happy conjunction', McGee notes, since salted meats are eventually prone to going rancid (McGee 2004, 175).

In more specific terms, the actual origins of the smoked meat business in Montreal itself appears to owe its origins to Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe who, in the

late nineteenth century, brought with them a familiarity with the meat known variously as *pastrama* in Armenian, *pastirma* in Turkish, *pastram* in Romanian and *pastrami* in Yiddish (Shephard 2000, 74). Referred to as 'smoked meat' in Montreal, it was a product 'which can be differentiated from pastrami or corned beef by its higher ratio of fat and spice, which connoisseurs will attest accounts for its superior taste' (Brownstein 2006, 17). Certainly, today's American pastrami differs from Montreal smoked meat. According to Josephine Bacon, pastrami is made from superior cuts of beef and usually dry-rubbed with a mixture of spices and then refrigerated for up to ten days before smoking (Bacon 2004, 240) – a series of distinct differences when compared with smoked meat preparation, as we shall see.

According to expert opinion, there are two basic ways of making smoked meat. Eiran Harris, perhaps *the* historian of Montreal smoked meat, describes the more traditional process, or 'dry cure', in the following steps. (1) Following kosher practice (in which the only acceptable meat from permitted animals is that untainted by blood), the preferred cuts of meat were taken from the forequarters of the animal, usually a steer. Fattier cuts (known as 'the plate') were used for pastrami; the brisket was used for Montreal-style smoked meat. (2) The briskets were rubbed with salt and spices. (3) The briskets were then put into wooden barrels, where they soaked in their own juices, for between 12 to 20 days. (4) Hung from racks, the briskets were placed in a smoke-house where they were cooked for six to nine hours. According to Harris, 'this form of cooking caused a 25 per cent loss in volume, but resulted in the unique quality and flavour of Montreal-style smoked meat' (Harris 2009).

Evidently, this process was not fast enough for some. 'Eventually the American need for speed was applied to smoked meats' – and the so-called 'wet cure', in which the soaking period was reduced to as little as four days, was developed (Harris 2009).

According to Harris, Montreal-style smoked meat has always been prepared using the older-fashioned 'dry cure', although even its producers could not resist the addition of another American modification, heated smoked meat. This results when the cooked briskets are steamed for three hours before being sliced and served – a step that replaced the 25 per cent of volume that the brisket had lost in cooking, added to the meat's flavour and added to its tenderness.

Schwartz's smoked meat

Any investigation of Montreal smoked meat must also be the story of how the reputation of one small restaurant founded in 1928, Schwartz's Hebrew Delicatessen, has developed to such an extent that this one establishment is now seen as an encapsulation of the entire phenomenon within its rather spartan 61-seater deli. Debates about the best smoked meat in Montreal are hard to settle, but no one doubts that the secret of Schwartz's success must lie in a heady combination of its ability to serve top-quality smoked meat, and the publicity that has come to surround both the food and the place. As one recent authority on marketing has observed on the basis of a case-study of Schwartz's success:

> It is highly unlikely that anyone present in the restaurant has just walked in by chance. They have all, in one way or another, been drawn here by Schwartz's continuity between what it promises and what it delivers. … The reputation survives because one's experience of Schwartz's lives up to the good things people have to say about it.
>
> (Cesvert, 2009, 31–32)

And should anyone wonder what 'good things' people have said, the most famous accolades can be seen not only on the restaurant walls but repeated to such an extent in tourist guides, websites and newspaper columns that, long bereft of their original sources, they have come to have a currency of their own. According to Cesvert (2009, 31–32), the most quotable include: 'A Beef on Rye to Freeze to Death For' (*The Financial Times)*; 'The best place in the Milky Way to sample smoked meat sandwiches!' (*Time Magazine*); 'When you're in Montreal, you must go to Schwartz's' (*The New York Times*); and, last but by no means least, 'A Montreal legend for 75 years. So what's the big deal? It's the *viande fumée* that overwhelms two slices of rye' (*The National Geographic*). Small wonder, perhaps, that the restaurant is the focus of a 90-minute documentary video (Elson and Lazar 2007) and the subject of a theatre production to open in Montreal's Centaur Theatre in January 2011 entitled *Schwartz: The Musical.*

If mere words are not enough, those patient enough to endure the weekend line-ups to get inside Schwartz's can be treated to the sight of celebrities such as Harvey Keitel adding mustard to his order of 'a medium and fries', and (to quote the deli's own website) other luminaries such as Angelina Jolie, Celine Dion and most of the Rolling Stones.

As *the* place for *the* food, the epicentre of smoked meat in the city, there is thus no doubt in the minds of many that Schwartz's *is* Montreal. It is an elision of place and food at which geographers who study 'the love of place' and advertising gurus who work up 'place branding' schemes can only marvel.

Smoked meat and place: the theory of 'iconic foods'

An initial perusal of the academic literature suggests that restaurant scholars have not greatly concerned themselves with questions that surround the processes by which one specific group's ethnic cuisine has come to dominate a place. Indeed, scholars who have examined the rise of what have been called 'ethnic restaurants' have had to face the enormous burgeoning of both sheer number and type of ethnic cuisines that have occurred in North American cities in general and in Montreal in particular since the 1950s (Lemasson 2009, 326–332; Nash 2009). In developing theories to account for this, they have leaned instead on explanations of a heightened ethnic diversity in people's eating habits – perhaps because of increasing immigration or the rise of a fashion for eating 'the other' – rather than the apparent *focusing* of such habits upon the cuisine of one group that the rise of institutions such as Schwartz's appears to represent.

Ironically perhaps, if we turn to scholars of ethnic cuisines themselves, we see the general tendency for such ethnic foods is to be abandoned by their own ethnic groups – except for festive occasions and religious events – rather than supported in ever greater numbers. Thus, commenting on the experiences of East European Jews once they settled in the United States, Haskia Diner remarks that although they emigrated primarily in response to economic conditions and anti-Jewish violence in Europe, it was 'an act best understood as a search not just for bread, but for meat and fish, noodles and soups and all the sweet stuffs that the less well-off got only at sacred time' (Diner 2001, 176). As Sidney Mintz has remarked in the moving preface to his book *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom*, 'the rural poor of Eastern Europe were chronically starved for animal protein' (Mintz 1996, xvi). In other words, poor immigrants to North America would have found it bizarre that their heritage cuisines would again be popular even within their own ranks.

Perhaps the best statement of the quandary we face in accounting for the wider popularity of a particular ethnic cuisine comes from Jennifer Berg's 2009 study of the evolution of what she has termed New York City's Jewish 'food icons'. Noting that an icon is a tangible sign of something bigger, Berg argues that 'when consumed or even just imagined, a specific iconic food immediately suggests links to specific places' (Berg 2003, 243–244; 2009, 253).

Applying this concept in the opening pages of her account, Berg remarks that not only is New York represented by a very few 'iconic foods', but that these products themselves have come from only one immigrant group. As she found through a year of asking New Yorkers about the foods they most associated with that city, most reported simple foods such as bagels, deli, cheesecake, knishes, Nathan's hot dogs, egg creams and pizza – all 'simple, inexpensive foods' that 'originated from one immigrant group and became popular during the same era'; 'all foods that today serve as icons and cultural markers for New York' (Berg 2009, 252–3).

To ask why particular foods have become iconic, for whom they are iconic and how iconic food status is achieved are questions that Berg suggests have to be approached historically. Thus, with the exception of pizza, all of the foods that Berg lists as iconic originated as simple, everyday foods in eastern and central Europe, from where they were brought into New York during the period of mass migration between 1880 and 1920. Only once in New York are these foods then taken up and popularized by the city's Jewish immigrants. From the 1920s to the 1950s, New York's Jews sought neither to identify themselves with nor distance themselves from these foods (a period Berg calls one of 'symbolic passive acceptance'). However, between approximately 1950 and 1970, when many Jews were leaving New York for more prosperous accommodations beyond its confines, 'the seemingly benign foods eaten during the tenement days' found themselves rejected as part of the abandonment of that former lifestyle. The final phase of this chronology sees both these trends reverse as large numbers of the Jewish community return to live in the big city and, in a wave of nostalgia, come to embrace the foods of their grandparents.

According to Berg's reading of the story, the fame of New York's iconic foods is somewhat simpler to explain when it comes to the much wider world of the city's non-Jewish community. Thus, 'as the production and consumption of egg creams, bagels, deli, cheesecake, knishes, and hot dogs increased across ethnic groups during the twentieth century they became accepted as non-specific New York fare'. Acculturation and assimilation clearly occurred as minority groups took on the mores of the majority, but there was clearly also a two-way flow between such groups and immigrant foods also, it seems, held their own attractions for that wider group. One of the main appeals was the cheapness of such fare, and Berg argues 'New Yorkers subconsciously adopted simple and inexpensive immigrant foods as their own, transforming them along the way from fast, reasonably priced food to New York City icons' (Berg 2009, 254). Interestingly, the majority of these iconic foods are now associated with restaurants and, in this respect, it is worth noting the comment by a recent historian of the hamburger that 'dishes don't become iconic by being served at the dinner table … Totems exist in the public place' (Ozersky 2008, 15).

Reflecting upon the wider significance of iconic foods, Berg opines that

> all these foods … are inextricably linked to New York. They possess iconic status in the twenty-first century in part because they represent New York City's mythical success story. Once scorned food from early-twentieth-century immigrant groups, they now symbolize the city's embracing of immigrants and the social mobility of the underclasses. New Yorkers need not consume these foods regularly to appreciate their value as a symbolic representation of their identity.
>
> (Berg 2009, 254)

As can be seen from quotations such as these, her remarks so clearly resonate with the situation of smoked meat in Montreal that there can be little doubt that our discussion of smoked meat must draw upon both her concept of iconic foods and her approach to its evolution in its particular setting of Montreal.

A history of Montreal smoked meat

The history of smoked meat in Montreal is a tale full of legends and half truths. We are fortunate, however, to have available Lara Rabinovitch's 2009 interview with Eiran Harris, the Archivist Emeritus of the Jewish Public Library in Montreal and a long-time scholar of the subject (Harris 2009).

According to Harris, the most likely pioneer of Jewish-style smoked meat production in the city was neither 'Old Man Kravitz or Old Man Wiseman' as popular opinion believed, but Aaron Sanft, an individual who had emigrated to Montreal and established the city's first kosher butcher's shop in 1884. Sometime over the next decade – when his store placed the earliest-known advertisement in Montreal for the product – Sanft introduced the city to a type of smoked meat prepared in his homeland of Romania.

Interestingly, delicatessen-restaurants serving smoked meat in Montreal do not predate 1908 when Hyman Rees (an immigrant from Lithuania) opened the British-American Delicatessen Store on St Lawrence Boulevard (to give The Main its more formal name). By 1921, there were as many as 19 delicatessens in Montreal, according to statistics Eiran Harris derived from *Lovell's Montreal Directory*, and that number continued to increase to 35 by 1926, before apparently levelling off by 1932 at a figure of 45 – a total that would remain relatively constant, according to Harris, 'for many years' thereafter (Harris 2009). By 1951, according to my own research using the city's classified telephone directories (*The Yellow Pages*), some decline had set in because only a maximum of 21 restaurants can be categorized as Jewish in that year (Nash 2009, 18).

Among those numbers are included several delicatessens that were later to become important Montreal institutions in their own right. One of the most well-known was Bens Delicatessen – traditionally written without an apostrophe – a business that the owner, Benjamin Kravitz, sometimes claimed he had started as early as 1908 (Weintraub 1996, 133; King 2000, 127; Brownstein 2006, 19). However, according to the more sober evidence of the city's street directories, this could not have occurred until at least 1912, at the earliest – the year that Kravitz established his wife, Fanny, in a fruit and candy store at 1208 St Lawrence Boulevard (Harris 2009).

Certainly, whatever the verity of Kravitz' precise recollections, there is no doubt that he had a talent for spotting prime locations, and in many ways his choices can be seen as important reasons for, first, the development of smoked meat's popularity outside of the Jewish community and, second, its subsequent rise to 'iconic food' status. Located in the heart of Montreal's garment district, and immediately adjacent to an eight-storey block of clothing manufacturers, his store was soon able to cater to the workers' demands for something substantial for lunch by producing (at his wife's suggestion) the type of smoked meat he knew from his native Lithuania.

The parallels with the development of iconic foods in New York are telling. As was shown in the previous section, one of the important factors in the early success of such foods was their ability to appeal to wider communities, an appeal made much more attractive by the cheapness of the food product. In this way, to re-word Berg's observation quoted above: Montrealers 'subconsciously adopted simple and inexpensive immigrant foods as their own, transforming them along the way from fast, reasonably priced food to … icons' (Berg 2009, 254).

By 1929, in an additional step that would propel smoked meat far beyond its original client community, Bens moved again to an address downtown. Despite the Depression, which caused a number of the delicatessens on St Lawrence Boulevard to close, Bens' new location was one that enabled it to prosper by meeting the demands of the city's nearby nightclubs and theatres and the restaurant became the haunt of performers such as Paul Whiteman and Red Skelton when they were in town. Bens was even able to provide free smoked meat sandwiches to the unemployed during this period. In his memoir of life in Montreal in the 1940s and 1950s, William Weintraub

notes that Bens was a favourite for late-night dining since it was open for 23 hours a day (the remaining hour was for cleaning) and was 'a pioneer in fast food'. He adds

> Its smoked meat sandwiches were much appreciated by show-business people, after the show, and some of them would even take briskets of Bens smoked meat back to New York, to show pastrami eaters down there what the real thing tasted like.
>
> (Weintraub 1996, 133)

The restaurant expanded several times in the 1950s and, despite Benjamin Kravitz's demise in 1956 and his wife's death in 1968, continued under their three sons' ownership until the business closed in 2006 and the site was redeveloped as a hotel and apartments.

Schwartz's – now the best-known of all Montreal smoked meat restaurants – was a relative latecomer on the scene. Established as the Montreal Hebrew Delicatessen at 3877 St Lawrence Boulevard by Reuben Schwartz on the very last day of 1927, the store was almost immediately a victim of Schwartz's gambling habits and the Depression. However, the combination of a takeover in 1932 (by his friend, the musician Maurice Zbriger) and the reduction of costs (by surrendering the delicatessen's kosher certification, for example) was enough to enable the fledgling business to survive, and Reuben Schwartz continued to run the business as its manager until his death in 1971. It did not hurt that Schwartz, according to Harris, also 'possessed one great asset: the secret recipe for making smoked meats which he brought from Romania'. More recent developments, as we have already reported in a previous section, have seen Schwartz's business succeed to such an extent that, by 2009, according to another recent commentator, it was possible to say 'it is smoked meat that has made Schwartz's arguably the most famous restaurant in all of Canada' (Sax 2009, 196).

The rise of smoked meat to the status of an iconic food in Montreal is, as we have seen, a phenomenon of the last fifty years or so. Thus, a tourist arriving in the city in the early years of the twentieth century would not have heard about smoked meat, or – for that matter – any of its delicatessens. My 1922 Baedeker, for example, recommends only a dozen or so restaurants (mostly the grill-rooms of larger hotels, such as the Ritz-Carlton) and apart from observing that the Jewish population forms about six per cent of the city's population of 607,063, makes no mention of St Lawrence Boulevard or its food as a tourist attraction. Apart from a few brawls in one or two delicatessens, neither does resident *bon vivant* Al Palmer, whose recollections of city life in the 1930s and 1940s concentrate on the city's growing reputation for sin and jazz (Palmer 2009). Even as late as 1955, the American Tourist Association's recommended eateries in Montreal ran only to spaghetti and chop houses (Nash 2009).

However, as we have seen, by the 1950s something is stirring and we have noted Ben Kravitz's prescient re-location of his eponymous delicatessen downtown, from where –

on the basis Weintraub's eye-witness account – we know its smoked meat began to reach a much wider audience and was sought after for its cheapness and quality. However, for delicatessens outside the city core, progress was much slower and we can read the testimony of Schwartz's restaurant staff who recall that they were serving far more steaks than smoked meat orders in that establishment as late as the 1950s (Brownstein 2006).

The year of *Expo' 67*, the World's Fair of 1967 in Montreal, is often considered a watershed in the city's restaurant history, the many pavilions from around the world serving to introduce Montrealers to a wider world of cuisines. While I have not been able to detect the 'Expo effect' in the city's growing number of ethnic restaurants during that period, it is significant that Schwartz's staff do point to that event as marking the beginnings of that restaurant's wider fame (Brownstein 2006; Nash 2009).

As for smoked meat itself, by the mid-1980s its place as a food icon is assured: the official tourist guide to Montreal in 1987 remarking, for example, that the visitor should 'try French bread in Montréal or a bagel: both are reputed to be the best on the continent. So is the smoked meat' (Montreal 1987, 69).

Conclusions

> Before the advent of *poutine* [a mixture of french fries, cheese curds and gravy], smoked meat was probably Montreal's best-known food....
>
> (Trillin 2009, 68)

In this paper, we have been able – all too briefly – to sketch out the history of Montreal smoked meat, its growing popularity and the rise of the most famous institutions that serve this product. Drawing a close parallel with Berg's work on New York, this paper suggests that Montreal smoked meat can clearly be identified as an 'iconic food'. As such, of course, it becomes more than simply food – it becomes part of the identity of a place.

As such, of course, Montreal smoked meat has a significance to a population much larger than merely its regular consumers. As Berg observes, one of the qualities of an iconic food is that it no longer needs to be eaten very often for its devotees to maintain their identification with it. Just as with Benedict Anderson's notion of the 'imagined community' that unites people who although they may never have met each other believe they share some common bond, so 'iconic foods' can become part of the matrix of cultural bonds that can construct social identities in place, maintain them amongst the diasporic communities of those who have left, and can serve as highlights caught in the 'tourist gaze' of those visitors who seek a distinctive experience.

However, before concluding, it is useful to make one further addition to the discussion and that concerns the French historian Pierre Nora's notion of *lieux de mémoire* or 'sites of memory'. While few scholars have so far made use of his ideas

in the context of food studies (Ory 1997), Nora's views of how the public come to articulate memory around certain agreed-upon narratives has been a powerful one with which to come to understand how 'History' becomes re-interpreted through the popular gaze. Put simply, the importance of an event or a person owes far less to the supposed truth of a professional historian's evaluation of its significance than it does to its perceived value in the popular imagination.

In this sense, it could be argued that it is Montreal's agreed-upon story of a tolerance of difference that has allowed ethnic cuisine – rather than indigenous or North American foods – to represent the city, and that this narrative has subsequently enabled one particular type of immigrant food – smoked meat – to be seen as the 'iconic' food eaten in the city. The fact that the majority of Montrealers do not choose to eat smoked meat is not the point – what is important is that this is how Montrealers have agreed that they would wish visitors to eat, and to remember, their city. Parallels are not hard to find: on St Patrick's Day, it is said that everyone in Montreal is Irish. Certainly, just as invented histories rework the past, there is no reason why types of food or cuisine may not similarly serve as *lieux de mémoire* in the creation of a tradition – a 'culinary tradition' readily utilized by place marketers and tourists alike.

Calvin Trillin's observation that smoked meat is currently losing dominance to *poutine* can itself be seen as the latest extension of these symbolic notions in the political sphere, as *poutine* (arguably, representing the food of a nationalist Francophone population, and one literally invented sometime in the 1950s) seeks to supplant smoked meat as the ambassador of the city. In this respect, it is not perhaps without significance that the underlying theme of 2011's *Schwartz: the Musical* is the English-speaking population's difficulties living amongst a French-speaking majority in Montreal. Political considerations aside, the rise of *poutine* clearly illustrates that the concept of iconic food is certainly not a static one.

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Cured, Fermented and Smoked Foods

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The illustration on the back cover is of dried fermented bamboo shoots; taken from the paper by Caroline Rowe.

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Foreword

The 2010 Symposium got off to a merry start on a bright summer evening with welcome drinks in the college garden followed by the presentation by Raymond Blanc of the winners of the Young Chef's Grant, all of whom were already hard at work on the preparations for a stupendous Feast of Cockaigne under the supervision of Tim Kelsey, Head Chef of the College kitchen, and guest-chef Jeremy Lee of The Blueprint Cafe in London's docklands.

The Symposium began in earnest, as always, first thing Saturday morning with a plenary session and opening remarks from our retiring Chair Carolin Young, newly-elected Chair Paul Levy and co-Chair Claudia Roden, with myself, Elisabeth Luard, taking on the role of Director previously filled by Carolin Young who acted as both Chair and Director. Practical business was then followed by the presentation of the Sophie Coe Prize of £1500 to Zona Spray Starks for a remarkable paper on 'Drying and Fermenting in the Arctic: Dictating Women's Roles in Alaska's Inupiat Culture'. Ken Albala received a special commendation for 'Cooking as Research Methodology: Experiments in Renaissance Cuisine'. Symposiasts were then treated to a distinguished appetizer by anthropologist Sidney Mintz, 'The Absent Third: the Place of Fermentation in a Thinkable World Food System', setting the scene for discussion of a subject which, while not immediately obvious when reading the label on the frozen ready-meal, is still deeply embedded in every culinary tradition on the planet. After the coffee-break, symposiasts crowded back into the Lecture Theatre to hear Harold McGee present 'A Chemical Introduction to Cured, Fermented and Smoked Foods'.

After the coffee-break and a chance to inspect the bookstalls, the choice of papers in the Symposium's three venues included the stories of *bacalao*, Afro-American foodways and, courtesy of presenter Renée Valeri, an open-air tasting of *surströmming*, Sweden's famous fermented herrings, a preparation so explosively pungent that travellers are forbidden to carry a tin of it onto a plane. Other subjects discussed in the morning sessions included preserved sausages in the classical world, Roman fish sauces, fermented fish seasonings in Japan and the Mediterranean, fermented taro in Africa and, elsewhere, Korean *kimchi* and food preservation in central Asia and Siberia.

Lunch was an exquisitely fiery Sichuanese feast delivered by Soho's Bar Shu organized by Symposium Trustee Fuchsia Dunlop, just back from researching foodways in central China. Parallel sessions then continued through the afternoon with papers on unidentified fermented foods gathering dust in the Museum of Ethnology in the Netherlands, preserved food in art, Transylvanian charcoal bread, Jewish pickles and their travels from Eastern Europe to the wilds of Canada, dried and fermented foods and the role of women in the culture of the Inupiat nation, the

smoke-cured and fermented milk of Kenya's Samburu, an anthropological study of the use of fermented root-starch, enset, in Ethiopia.

After the tea-break, symposiasts returned to the fray for a study of *tempeh* followed by stinking bean-curd and rotten vegetable-stalks as a delicacy in Shaoxing; alternative sessions tackled bacterial fermentation as an unacknowledged taste-enhancer in historical recipes, fermentation as a useful tool in contemporary food-preparation, sourdough fermentation from the viewpoint of the microbe, and elsewhere symposiasts were treated to the smoky story of American shad-planking, Italy's oil-preserved sausages transferred to Utica in New York and the creation of a smoked-meat tradition in Montreal.

Saturday evening got off to a flying start with Tourism Ireland's specially filmed interviews on the farm with the producers who contributed their expertise (and impeccable materials) to the grand Irish banquet presented by chef Páidric Óg Gallagher of Gallagher's Boxty House with the assistance of Máirtin Mac Con Iomaire, Pauline Danaher and Grace O'Sullivan. The evening was rounded off in her inimitable technicolour style by Alicia Rios' artistic entertainment, 'Pickled Messages for Future Symposiasts'.

Next morning, symposiasts assembled in plenary session to hear Cathy Kaufman, Chair of the American Friends of the Symposium, announce this year's winner of the Cherwell Scholarship: Lara Rabinovitch for her paper on *pastirma*, and listen to Ivan Day's Sunday scene-setter, 'Amnesia in the Smokehouse'. Everyone then made their way to a variety of parallel sessions: the choice included corned beef in Ireland, an archaeologist's view of salt-cured meat in soldiers' diet, and marmalade as medicine as well as preserve; elsewhere discussions revolved around the role of yoghurt in the Turkish kitchen, fermented foods in Nagaland and what and why is 'Boza, Innocuous and Less So'; others unravelled the secrets of ancient Jewish sausages, classical and modern olive-preservation in Greece and the folklore and preparation of Cyprus' cured ham, *hiromeri*.

After a quick coffee-break, fun and games continued with Charles Perry's playlet, 'Wurstenders', with costumes and interjections by the multi-talented Alicia Rios, followed by raffle-prizes and grand auction. But the day's honours undoubtedly go to Ove Fosså and Sven Fosså who, with the assistance of Terje Inderhaug and Pål Drønen, gathered together a consortium of Norwegian small-producers who delivered (via sailboat from Norway to Cardiff) a dramatic array of traditional Norwegian ingredients preserved, as the subject of the Symposium dictated, by salting, fermenting and smoking. The menu included very little that was familiar and much that was both unknown and delicious: mutton ham, smoked reindeer-tongue and several preparations based on wind-dried stockfish, along with unusual crispbreads and cheeses, the whole rounded off with soured cream and cloudberries, a raspberry-like berry native to the Arctic tundra with a flavour of smoky pine-needles.

Thereafter, replete with good food (not to mention miniature bottles of aquavit) symposiasts returned to the lecture theatre for a panel chaired by Harry West on 'Fermentation as a Co-evolutionary Force', 'Artisanship and Control as applied to Farmhouse Cheddar' and 'The Science and Savour of Dry-Fermented Sausages'. The Symposium concluded with an expression of deep gratitude from the whole Board of Trustees to our departing Chair, Carolin Young, followed by a show of hands on the choice of subject for 2013 which, in the event, turned out to be Food and Material Culture which, following on from 2012's Wrapped and Stuffed, gives plenty of time for thought.

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