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Goldstein, David B. Eating and Ethics in Shakespeare's England

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by Claude La Charité in “Le problème du genre dans *Les Comptes amoureux* de Jeanne Flore: l’ambivalence du terme ‘compte’” (*Actualité de Jeanne Flore*, ed. Diane Desrosiers-Bonin, Eliane Viennot and Regine Reynolds-Cornell [Paris: 2004], 209–25), she fails to replicate it in English; the same linguistic manipulation of “account” would have been possible. The translation of the few poems in the text by Marta Rijn Finch, who also explains her translating strategies in the introduction, is successful in terms of conveying the original’s varied patterns of rhyme and metre, although as Pope long ago said, these can be a hard task master; inevitably, meaning is at times sacrificed for form.

In 1542, the *Comptes amoureux* made a significant contribution to the debate surrounding the “woman question”; four-and-a-half centuries later, Peebles has extended its significance to a much wider reading public. At a time when critical attention is increasingly being focused on female authorship and on print culture, her edition and eminently readable translation make this text available for the first time to scholars outside the field of sixteenth-century French literature, for which we must be grateful.

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Goldstein, David B.

Eating and Ethics in Shakespeare’s England.

Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. 280. ISBN 978-1-1070-3906-3 (hardcover) \$99.

An analysis of Annibale Carracci’s painting *The Bean Eater* (1580–90) begins David B. Goldstein’s *Eating and Ethics in Shakespeare’s England*. It encapsulates the terms of the book’s broadest argument. The painting, which depicts a solitary peasant about to scoop into his mouth a spoonful of beans, would seem, as Goldstein observes, “the epitome of the individual diner.” But other figures, of course, are present, and the peasant knows it: he catches our eye, “peers suspiciously out at us from underneath the brim of his hat,” and “rests” a “meaty hand” “protectively on a hunk of Bolognese bread,” signaling to us that we would do well not to reach across the table (and so into the canvas) for it (1). This encounter, which is repeated with each viewing, permits Goldstein

to argue against scholarly accounts that explore “the role of individual choice and consumption” in English Renaissance discourses of eating, and instead to examine “the ways in which the act of sharing food helps build, demarcate, and destroy relationships—between eater and eaten, between self and other, and among different groups” (3). “Commensality,” which first entered print in English in 1611, is Goldstein’s preferred term for such “communal aspects of eating” (4), and, as his book demonstrates, it always encodes “a relational ethics” (15). Anthropology, philosophy, and sociology all inform Goldstein’s thinking; he knows that food’s “relationality—the way in which it both constitutes and confirms relationships among people, the earth, and divinity”—is a “transhistorical truth” (8). Goldstein’s aim, then, is to particularize this truth: he vivifies for his readers an especially fraught—and generative because fraught—moment in this long history of food and eating. In “Shakespeare’s England,” by which he means the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Goldstein thus locates “a new paradigm for philosophies of eating [...] that begins in the early modern mouth” (26). As individual chapters detail, the stakes of the transactions associated with this oral threshold are weightier than the contents of that spoonful of beans. What, Goldstein asks, are the ethical repercussions of eating food that’s been interdicted? And how do the recording, sharing, and following of recipes embed a culinary practitioner in a larger social network and also oblige her to that network? Individual chapters elaborate richly detailed responses to these questions.

Chapters 1 and 2 of *Eating and Ethics in Shakespeare’s England* explore the fraying effects of cannibalism—the ingestion of the human being as “the body edible” (31)—on the social fabric of commensality. In perceptive readings of Shakespeare’s drama, Goldstein demonstrates that discourses of so-called New World cannibalism inform the scene in which Lavinia and her father butcher her rapists in *Titus Andronicus*, and that the “whole world of [*The Merchant of Venice*] is potentially consumable,” which “means that its *characters* are also potentially edible, and therefore vulnerable” (67; Goldstein’s emphasis). Since, as Goldstein outlines, *Merchant* pivots on a number of biblical dietary strictures (79–80, 83–88), it is fitting that chapter 3 shifts to debates about Eucharistic theology that are central to the Protestant martyr Anne Askew’s *Examinations* and to John Bale’s textual “*amplification*” of her inquest (106; Goldstein’s emphasis). In such texts, according to Goldstein, “we find powerful evocations of the notion that Protestant eating is of necessity both powerfully embodied and

powerfully commensal—that is, that the act of eating requires a community in order to make individual sense” (100). The final chapters of *Eating and Ethics in Shakespeare’s England* further revise a standard narrative about Protestant individualism. They explore the social dynamics of Ann, Lady Fanshawe’s manuscript collection of recipes and Milton’s depiction of the prelapsarian commensality shared among Adam, Eve, and Raphael in *Paradise Lost*. Goldstein’s analysis of Milton, especially his discussion of Eve’s labour as a chef “whose particular genius [...] resides in the gift of *separating* tastes rather than blending them” (190; Goldstein’s emphasis), are exciting for future ecocritical investigations of Edenic discourses in the seventeenth century.

Reading *Eating and Ethics in Shakespeare’s England* also got me thinking about my eating habits. I perused the book in six courses. I found that I picked it up after having finished lunch or, more typically, I paired my engagements with it with a meal or an afternoon snack—a blender full of strawberry smoothie, two glasses of white wine, a grilled cheese sandwich, and a juicy peach. By this logic, *Eating and Ethics in Shakespeare’s England* proves a comestible; its status as one food item among many on the menu confirms the commonplace about reading-as-consuming a text that Goldstein emphasizes (140). What surprised me most about my experiences of consuming (food with) Goldstein’s satisfying book was the degree to which I did not feel as if I were performing this activity in isolation. Goldstein showed me, for instance, that implementing our household recipe for smoothies is a thoroughly social process. He also reminded me that reading texts about eating food functions as an act of commensality. *Eating and Ethics in Shakespeare’s England* is thus a repast (26) or a table (209) around which scholars, whom Goldstein has conjured by means of generous citation, commune and disagree; Goldstein hosts this conversation with elegance and grace. Although a latecomer to this dinner party, I was no mere eavesdropper, huddled in a corner, biting into a dessert peach. Rather, I felt invited to contribute to this conversation about the ethics of eating and to concur with, learn from, and argue over the ideas of Goldstein and his interlocutors. This review is a more formal record of having broken bread with the guests at this scholarly gathering. Books, especially Goldstein’s, prove “good to eat with” (140), in that phrase’s many senses.

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