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### Bassnett, Madeline. *Women, Food Exchange, and Governance in Early Modern England*

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as is clearly indicated in both the text itself and in the modern book from which the source is taken.

Despite its shortcomings, this a very useful book overall. The brilliant first part provides an enjoyable and informative introduction to the subject for English-speaking readers, while the documents in the second part, leaving aside the above-mentioned issues, represent an excellent selection to give the students an overview of the period and its significance. The sources show how Renaissance Florence's extraordinary historical players, such as Cosimo and Piero de' Medici, Lorenzo the Magnificent, and Girolamo Savonarola, were perceived by their contemporaries. The wide range of different kinds of documents, such as chronicles, letters, diaries, and sermons, is ideal for students who want to get a glimpse of what and how fifteenth-century people used to write.

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**Bassnett, Madeline.**

***Women, Food Exchange, and Governance in Early Modern England.***

Early Modern Literature in History. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. Pp. ix, 248. ISBN 978-3-319-40867-5 (hardcover) €88.39.

*Women, Food Exchange, and Governance in Early Modern England* examines a nexus of concerns that scholars are just beginning to explore: women's writing in Renaissance England; the politics of food and agriculture; and the roles of women in household, local, regional, and national governance. Focusing mostly upon the Stuart period, Madeline Bassnett, an associate professor at Western University, shows how these three areas of study are closely related, and how beneficial it is to study them in tandem. The monograph draws together concerns about authorship, selfhood, food, gift-giving, and the performance of authority into a forceful argument for the importance of attending to all these issues. The book makes a lucid case for "illuminat[ing] not only constructions of female subjectivity but also women's relationship to social, religious, and political networks" (6). As such, it both joins an ongoing conversation about

early modern female authorship and pushes that conversation forward into new and suggestive territory.

The book's argument is supple and nuanced. After a sharp introduction, chapter 2, "Providential Gifts and Agricultural Plenty," gives a much-needed account of culinary and agricultural imagery in Mary Sidney Herbert's psalm translations. Bassnett gives a clear rationale for why it is important to study these texts (the Psalms were associated strongly with English Protestant conceptions of national identity, and Sidney Herbert's renditions are of high literary and cultural value), and she demonstrates succinctly how and why Sidney Herbert's versions differ from those of immediate prior translators. She argues that "Sidney Herbert's nationalist 'Englishing' of the Psalms encourages a reading of agriculture in relation to England's contemporary struggles with food supply and leads towards an interpretation of husbandry as a means of reciprocating God's gifts" (25). The analyses might have been strengthened by an explicit discussion of Sidney Herbert's translation methodology: i.e., whether she based her versions on the original Hebrew, on the medieval Latin, on other English translations, or on all three. Without a broader lens, it is hard to know for sure how much Sidney Herbert is tailoring her versions for a specific Protestant public and how much she is working within an established tradition or from a literal biblical source. This is a minor quibble that should not detract from the chapter's main achievement, which is to demonstrate how much Sidney Herbert, a key female arbiter of hospitality and husbandry in the period, transferred those values into a Protestant manual for good governance and subjecthood.

The remaining chapters are uniformly superb. Chapter 3, "The Milk of Wholesome Government," will stand as one of the best essays yet written on the politics of breastfeeding in early modern England. Its reading of the issues at hand is deeply informed, framing breastfeeding in the context of the religious, political, social, and scientific debates that gave it meaning. Bassnett unpacks the complexities of Elizabeth Clinton's fascinating and deceptively simple treatise on the subject in order to demonstrate the flexibility and power of breastfeeding as a trope. Clinton's daughter-in-law, Bridget, becomes the epitome of the "mother who governs her child and her community through literal and spiritual feeding" (68). At the same time, breast milk itself symbolizes a kind of radical locavorism, a politically-charged, "regionally based food and vocation" (68), as well as "an effective expression of [the] body's terroir and

regional governance” (83). The chapter also teaches well, as I discovered in the course of a recent graduate seminar on early modern food and writing.

Chapter 4, “Prayerful Dining,” offers a fresh perspective on the Puritan gentlewoman Margaret Hoby, whose often-discussed diary becomes, in Bassnett’s account, a vibrant intersection of culinary and political issues. A Puritan in largely Catholic northern England, “Hoby understood her responsibilities as an emissary for the ‘true religion’ to be both domestic and political” (105), writes Bassnett. Thus “Dining, for Hoby, is political. As she facilitates the relational dynamics of the table, she also confirms her central contribution to multiple spheres of authority” (106). The final two chapters are devoted to readings of Lady Mary Wroth’s sprawling and challenging prose romance, *Urania*. Here, Bassnett illustrates her importance as a scholar of Wroth, one of the most significant and comparatively understudied writers of the Stuart monarchy. Both chapters produce complementary but distinct avenues of inquiry into this complex text, the first focusing inward on the politics of humanist hospitality in developing what Bassnett terms “the practice of citizenship” (167), and the second looking outward toward the “far-reaching effects of food practices on regional, national, and international affairs” (179).

Taken as a whole, *Women, Food Exchange, and Governance in Early Modern England* establishes its author as a key scholar in its fields. The book is written in an admirably clear and straightforward style. It takes generous account of prior critics, summarizing complex arguments and relying where relevant upon the groundbreaking work of other scholars. But it also frames prior work in new ways and moves the field forward into a discussion of how women writers of the period use the knowledge, experience, and rhetoric of foodways, husbandry, stewardship, and hospitality to articulate notions of governance at every level of English society.

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