A friendly breakfast

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David B. Goldstein

EATING AND ETHICS IN SHAKESPEARE'S ENGLAND 290pp. Cambridge University Press. £65 (US \$99). 978 1 107 03906 3

hakespeare was overwhelmingly negative about food, according to David B. Goldstein. He divides his study of communal eating in early modern England, Eating and Ethics in Shakespeare's England, into two parts, the first focusing on what he terms "cannibal ethics" and the second on "communion and community". He considers eating as an everyday social activity, our culinary obligations to others, and how this relates to early modern notions of selfhood, as well as the significance of the Eucharist in the Examinations of Anne Askew, the Protestant martyr burned at the stake in 1546, seventeenth-century manuscript recipe culture via the aristocratic Anne Fanshawe, and how eating relates to hospitality in Milton's Paradise Lost.

These works span 1547 to 1680 so it is a bit of a stretch to call this a study of "Shake-speare's England". More of a problem is Goldstein's tendency to generalize about Shakespeare and his attitudes to food and eating based on analysis of just two plays. Titus Andronicus is read primarily alongside contemporary reports about cannibalism in the New World and, for Goldstein, The Merchant of Venice is also about cannibalism and what he terms "failures of eating". Goldstein summarily dismisses those plays where eating is convivial, including The Merry Wives of

Windsor and As You Like it (and others he doesn't mention), and ignores dozens of occasions when feasting is pleasurable or an argument is resolved with an invitation to dine, as is the case with Bardolph's "I will bestow a breakfast to make you friends" in Henry V. Detailed readings of particular moments are plausible, for example the literal interpretation of the dish of doves Old Gobbo gives to Bassanio in The Merchant of Venice. but Goldstein is less convincing when he reads traditional motifs and commonplaces as specifically culinary (Portia's "sugar breath", for example, turns her into "dessert", and the coward with a liver "white as milk" might be eaten). What is lacking here is a proper engagement with criticism on the plays: there is an irritating tendency to refer to the "many critics" who have pointed things out or drawn attention to things without any reference to who they are or what they had to say on the subject.

Goldstein builds on previous scholarship on Milton by considering Eve's solitary eating in the context of the meal she and Adam share with the angel Raphael, arguing that part of Raphael's message is to teach them sociability. Of Askew's Examinations, he finds that critics have hitherto underplayed the degree to which Protestant eating focused on community and he challenges the traditional feminist criticism of her first editor John Bale. Rather than overwhelming Askew's views with his lengthy commentary and additional material, Goldstein argues, Bale fully and sensitively engaged with her rhetoric. This is a fair point, although in his analysis of the food-related language used by Bale, Goldstein again unconvincingly takes traditional motifs too literally – for example,

the reference to Anne being "like a lamb" to slaughter transforms her "from human into meat". The chapter on Fanshawe reveals an establishment of social networks among women but Fanshawe herself is less interesting than Goldstein would have us believe, her main role being to keep house for her powerful husband and give birth to numerous children. Does Goldstein repeatedly ask rhetorical questions? Yes, he does and only some get answers here because the rest "can only come through further research". Goldstein wants readers to approach *Eating and Ethics in Shakespeare's England* as they would eating itself, an experience he terms both "pleasurable and uncomfortable, sustaining and unsatisfying". That seems, on the whole, a likely outcome.

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