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## **Review of Robert Appelbaum Aguecheek's Beef, Belch's Hiccup, and Other Gastronomic Interjections: Literature, Culture, and Food Among the Early Moderns (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006)**

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*Review of Aguecheek's Beef, Belch's Hiccup, and other Gastronomic Interjections: Literature, Culture, and Food Among the Early Moderns* by Robert Appelbaum, University of Chicago Press, 2006, 375 pages, ISBN9780226021263, Cloth \$32.50 ISBN.

Review by Joan Fitzpatrick (Loughborough University, UK)

(Reviewer's bio: Joan Fitzpatrick teaches English at Loughborough University, UK. Her third book, on *Shakespeare and Food*, was published by Ashgate in 2007. She is currently working on an Athlone dictionary on Shakespeare and the language of food and a critical edition of three early modern dietaries for the Revels Companion Library series published by Manchester University Press).

The span of Robert Applebaum's scholarly yet accessible book is from about 1450 to the early eighteenth century and its content is truly eclectic, incorporating, amongst other subjects, regimens of health, classical texts, Shakespeare, cookbooks, and Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost* as well as early-modern recipes. Throughout, Applebaum keeps his eye on what the social historian Norbert Elias has termed "the civilizing process", a process inextricably tied to fashion--usually led by the French--but as Applebaum points out in the preface, references to food, though often about something else (politics, religion, sex) are invariably also about food.

Chapter one begins with two small but important references to food in two Shakespeare plays: Andrew Aguecheek's "I am a great eater of beef, and I believe that does harm to my wit" (*Twelfth Night*, 1.3.83-84) and Hamlet's "The funeral baked meats / Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables" (1.2.179-180). Applebaum argues that the basis for Aguecheek's comment can be found in a book written by the Italian physician Guglielmo Grataroli translated into English as *A Direction for the Health of Magistrates and Studentes* (1574) where it is claimed that beef harms the mind. Although hot English stomachs were thought better suited to digesting a cold and gross meat like beef, part of the wit of Sir Andrew's remark is that by Shakespeare's time beef was not considered as good as it once was and the English knight thus fails in his ambition to be a man of fashion. The second part of this chapter includes a recipe for 'baked meats': "a savory, spicy meat pie, containing a whole joint of meat inside, cooked in what was known as a 'coffin'" (p. 17). The pies would have been served within about a week of preparation and thus Hamlet's joke is that only a speedy marriage would make it possible to serve pies originally prepared for the funeral. Applebaum detects in the dish an "image of interment and disinterment and of revisiting the dead" (p. 20) and whilst the dish itself suggests thrift, as Hamlet himself points out to Horatio, it also reminds us of cannibalism.

Chapter two is focused on early-modern dietary literature, also known, and referred to here, as regimens. The vogue for these prose texts, which told the reader what was good to eat and why, began in 1528 with Thomas Paynel's English commentary on the medieval *Regimen Sanitatis Salerni*. Three original and hugely influential regimens were Thomas Moulton's *This is the Mirror or Glass of Health* (ca. 1531), Thomas Elyot's *Castle of Health* (1539), and Andrew Boorde's *Dietary of Health*, which Applebaum dates to 1640 but which was actually first published much earlier, in 1547. This chapter explores "the rational art of eating that the regimens preached" (p. 42) and resistance to them, as practiced, for example, by Montaigne

who Applebaum argues resembles Andrew Aguecheek as "a man who follows his appetite, without regard to the science of authorities" (p43).

In chapter three discussion shifts to the eclectic nature of early recipe books, such as the first printed collection called *De honesta voluptate et valetudine* by the Italian Bartholomew Platina that was both a regimen and list of recipes. As Applebaum points out, Michel Foucault alerted us to the problematic nature of our notions of authorship and this is especially true of the recipe genre, for which ownership of specific instructions for a particular dish are impossible to trace. Platina's book seems especially modern in its love of good food and the claims of how it can benefit health, yet there remains the nagging voice of the spoilsport that is typical of the regimen: having given wonderful recipes for his reader to try, Platina warns that some should not eat them! The influence of the Roman Apicius upon Platina and others is what makes cookery a distinctly literary discipline in which art "could be assimilated to the latest notions of civility, of politeness and wit, of refinement and excellence" (p. 87). Part four of this chapter is focussed on the menu and the preface in early modern cookbooks: whilst the former provides the context for serving a formal meal, "a context bespeaking early modern notions of affluence, deference, exclusivity, as well as pleasure" (p. 94), the prefatory material focuses on "the larger question of what values the reader will assent to in purchasing, reading, or using the book" (p. 98). The prefatory rhetoric of what might be the first cookbook for women, John Partridge's *Treasurie of Commodious Conceits*, set the fashion by suggesting that the author was releasing previously secret and valuable material.

In chapter four Applebaum is concerned with dreams and desires and he begins with the fantasy of transcendent abundance in the mythical Land of Cockaigne. Common in the medieval period, one of the earliest depictions of the myth can be found in Boccaccio's *Decameron* where the land is known as Bengodi, a "comic, mythic land of satisfied desires" coupled with "a full-fledged medieval utopia" (p. 123). It was, of course, the real experience of hunger in the medieval period that motivated this myth of plenty and although hunger was no less relevant for the early moderns, moralism becomes a feature of their utopias: they present a land without hunger but there is no longer a preoccupation with the food that will be consumed. In his analysis of Thomas More's *Utopia* and related works Applebaum notes the emphasis not on eating but on work, distribution and ceremony, on production over consumption.

Chapter five presents the opposite, and indeed corollary of, desire: regret. Applebaum considers ancient views of the Golden Age, a legendary time of plenty and peace, first in Horace and Seneca and then in the Christian dietary asceticism of communion and fasting. Returning to Milton's paradise, Applebaum presents an ingenious argument for what he terms the "double nature" of the forbidden fruit: it begins as an apple--recognised by the early moderns and Milton as a "cordial" fruit--but clearly becomes a peach--the words "nectar" and "ambrosial", used in *Paradise Lost*, are inapplicable to the apple. Chapter six brings us back to Shakespeare and again a small but important moment in one of his plays: the noise that we are to suppose is made by Sir Toby Belch in *Twelfth Night* just before he says "A plague o' these pickled herring!" (1.5.116-117). Is it a belch, a fart, or a hiccup? Applebaum decides it is probably a belch and although it is "a heroic gesture . . . defiant of the niceties of courteously restrained, which is to say, repressed behaviour" (p. 203) it

was probably less offensive to the early moderns than we find it today since intolerance toward the passing of wind in public, and especially at the dinner table, only emerges in the late seventeenth century. This chapter also contains an engrossing discussion of herring as a remarkably ambivalent foodstuff: at once sign of wealth and poverty, gluttony and abstinence, an "icon of lenten fare" (p. 212) yet denounced by medical writers who, like Sir Toby, found it difficult to digest.

The cannibalism suggested by the baked meats in *Hamlet* leads us, in chapter seven, to Jean de Léry's visit to Brazil, as recounted in his *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil* (1578) Léry had hopes of establishing a reformed community amongst the Tupinamba Indians whom he claimed practiced ritual cannibalism. He quarreled with Nicolas Durand de Villegagnon, the founder of the colony, over religious matters including transubstantiation; on his return voyage to France those on board almost starved to death and cannibalism was for a time a considered option, which irony was apparently lost on Léry. Also discussed here is Richard Ligon's *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (1657). Ligon, an English trader in slaves and sugar took delight in travel and pride in his knowledge of how to cook fish. His book is not merely a list of what is available on the island but an account of "how it is cultivated, gathered and prepared" and "an explication of the art of the colony--or better, of the colony as a work of art"( p. 275).

Concluding with Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Rousseau's *Émile*, Applebaum notes that the former is not about mere survival "it is about what it means to survive, and then go beyond survival and live life in full man-hood" (p. 288). At least, that's how Rousseau responded to the novel, and that was what he recommended to his fictional pupil Émile: there were lessons to learn about the nature of need, and the personal and social arrangements deployed to accommodate it" (p. 289). It is typical of the inquisitiveness and humour evident throughout this book that Applebaum should consider the kind of dinner described by early modern writers and wonder how it would have been served. He concludes that he probably wouldn't have been invited since he is descended from peasants. Alas, that is likely true for most of us but this is the kind of book that makes us wonder what it would have been like all the same.