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Elizabeth Spiller
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, espiller2@unl.edu

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Spiller, Elizabeth, "Review of *Aguecheek's Beef, Belch's Hiccup, and Other Gastronomic Interjections: Literature, Culture, and Food among the Early Moderns* by Robert Appelbaum" (2010). *Faculty Publications -- Department of English*. 211.
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Modern Philology May 2010, Volume 107, Issue 4, pp. E101 - E104
https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdfplus/10.1086/651364

BOOK REVIEW

Aguecheek's Beef, Belch's Hiccup, and Other Gastronomic Interjections: Literature, Culture, and Food among the Early Moderns. *Robert Appelbaum.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. Pp. xxi+375.

Histories of food have traditionally emerged out of the fields of structural anthropology, ethnology, and historical sociology. More recent scholarship has emphasized the idea of foodways, those networks by which foods are produced, prepared, and consumed within different food communities. Rather than seeing rituals of culture in food, such scholarship has instead sought to understand food in terms of a circulation of physical resources and values that involves questions of economics, ecology, biology, and ethnobotany. The first approach has tended, broadly speaking, to produce scholarship that is concerned with the ritual, symbolic, and social qualities to our acts of sustenance. The second, by contrast, has tended to be concerned with the physical and material character of those acts. Robert Appelbaum's *Aguecheek's Beef, Belch's Hiccup, and Other Gastronomical Interjections* seeks to integrate the alternatives implied by these two approaches. For Appelbaum, food exists precisely at the border between the symbolic and the material. Indeed, it is not simply that food is never just food. Instead, he argues, "although the materiality of life—the basis of human life in the human need for physical *things*—would seem to predominate in our relation with food, materiality, in fact, is endlessly consumed by the world of symbols" (9).

Pursuing what he elsewhere identifies as a "postmodern" approach to food studies, Appelbaum explores the remarkable and often rich range of discourses of food that defined the historically transitional culture of early modern Europe.[1] Each of Appelbaum's chapters takes up different,

1. Robert Appelbaum, "Review Essay: Newe Bookes of Cookerie," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 1 (2001): 129.

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and sometimes unexpected, categories of early modern food writing. Discussions of early modern recipe books and health regimes (with advice about cooking eggs or avoiding melons) thus stand alongside a remarkable chapter on travel narratives (with harrowing accounts of hunger and cannibalism). Appelbaum also ranges confidently through more strictly literary representations of food in the works of such writers as Shakespeare, Thomas More, Rabelais, and Milton. For Appelbaum, these different texts allow us access to a history of foods, tastes, sensations, and appetites. Theoretically, these texts become compelling to the extent that they are "interjections," "eruptions of language that command attention" (34), that mediate the divide between the material and the symbolic to make possible those tastes and appetites.

Appelbaum opens with a set of paired readings of *Twelfth Night* and *Hamlet* that is designed to tease out how the consumption of food—which Appelbaum stresses was understood to consist in various internal forms of concocting, corrupting, and transforming—involves being at some kind of boundary. In the case of *Twelfth Night,* that boundary is principally a geographic and cultural one. Beginning with Sir Andrew Aguecheek's admission to Sir Toby Belch that he is a "great eater of beef" and that this "does great harm to my wit," Appelbaum explores how foods such as beef helped create national and cultural identity.[2] This discussion, which emphasizes Sir Andrew's disavowal of accepted food knowledge, provides a particularly good example of why Appelbaum wants to move beyond the potential limitations of the closed and culturally conservative "foodways" model of food studies (10–11). With *Hamlet,* Appelbaum offers a trenchant unpacking of how the baked funeral meats that "did coldly furnish forth" (1.2.180) Gertrude and Claudius's wedding banquet vexes the more fundamental human boundary between the living and the dead. The funeral meats—cold, baked pies of meats, cut off the bone, cooked, reassembled, and preserved within pastry "coffins"—become "an image of interment and disinterment," a concoction that perfectly registers the pervasive corruption of Claudius's Denmark (19).

In chapter 2, Appelbaum turns his attention to the health regimes that flourished in early modern Europe and that were arguably even "more important to the culture of eating than the recipes in cookbooks" (34). The broader intellectual background here will be familiar to readers of Ken Albala's magisterial study of the hundreds of dietaries that emerged out of the Galenic revival of the late fifteenth and early

2. William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night,* in *The Norton Shakespeare,* ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, Katharine Eisaman Maus, and Andrew Gurr (New York: Norton, 1997), 1.3.72–73; hereafter cited parenthetically.

sixteenth centuries.[3] Appelbaum's attention to the boundary between the physical and the symbolic produces what is arguably the crispest and most philosophically satisfying account of the Galenic body that I know. The elements, humors, and complexions of the Galenic body should not, Appelbaum stresses, be understood as components. They are not so much material substances in themselves as they are "material allocations of fundamental 'qualities' or 'powers'" (45). The Galenism of the dietaries thus explains how bodies (and foods, for that matter) behave, what they tend to or are driven to, and indeed, how they are, in the most fundamental sense, animated.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to a study of "the cookbook as literature" (66). Because the modern cookbook does not appear until after 1651, Appelbaum looks at receipt books, menus, housewifery texts, and what he refers to as "popular science" texts (106). For Appelbaum, recipes should be understood as textual records of corporeal sensations. Indeed, "the recipes themselves often function less as inventions sprung from the mind of a creator than as momentary codifications of sensual experience that afterward *take on* the appearance of original inventions" (69). Appelbaum thus wants to insist that recipes, once printed, are both fixed and duplicable (by printing presses and readers) (68). That is, print first instantiates the material and the ephemeral and then allows for the re-embodiment of that physical reality by later readers. While compelling and consistent with Appelbaum's larger theoretical interests, this model probably describes eighteenth- and nineteenth-century recipe books, true cookbooks, better than it does sixteenth- and seventeenth-century ones. More fundamentally, this perspective also leads Appelbaum to fail to recognize how recipe books emerge out of the maker's knowledge and mechanical arts traditions of the sixteenth century and develop alongside iatrochemistry and experimentalism of the seventeenth. In this instance, Appelbaum does not adhere to his own recognition that books of cookery are distinct from practices of cooking (86): recipe books may capture sensations but they are also "inventions" insofar as they represent a different but parallel tract to the experimental natural philosophy of the seventeenth century.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on what Appelbaum identifies as the food of wishes and regret. In the first of these, he looks at how the medieval fantasies of the Land of Cockaigne, which reveled in the bounty of food, are rewritten by Renaissance writers (More, Rabelais, Tommaso Campanella, Joseph Hall) as part of the social and civil utopia of humanism. In the second, Appelbaum turns to the fall of Adam and Eve as the great

3. Ken Albala, *Eating Right in the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

story of culinary regret. His discussion takes in Ovid, George Sandys, Guillaume du Bartas, Luther, and Tasso, but the centerpiece here is a brilliant reading of Milton's account of the fall. Milton's belief in monism, the identity of matter and spirit as a single substance, makes his work a perfect conclusion to Appelbaum's arguments. What did Eve eat? Appelbaum tackles this textual crux by explaining that the Vulgate translation of the Hebrew *tappuach* as the Latin *malum* suggested three possibilities: the *malum Punicum* (the apple of Punic, or pomegranate); the *malum Persicum* (the Persian apple, or peach); or the *Pyrus malum* (the modern apple) (194). Milton was cognizant of these traditions when he imagined his version of the forbidden fruit: for his Eve, the fruit of the tree of knowledge is an apple before the fall but becomes a peach after it (198). The changes in how we see Eve's apple, Appelbaum suggests, foreground both Milton's monism and his sense that monism is a reality that we can no longer perceive in the fallen world.

Whereas chapters 4 and 5 are concerned with the literary and aesthetic topoi that defined fulfillment and loss, satiety and starvation, for the European imagination, the closing chapters look at how those topoi were realized in the New World. Chapter 7, in particular, graphically brackets the Renaissance with Jean de Léry's account of cannibalism in *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil* (1578) and Richard Ligon's description of sugar factories in *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (1657). Appelbaum's readings here are rich and close: he provides a particularly strong narrative of how theological debates over the Real Presence in the Eucharist informed European understandings of cannibalism in the New World. Throughout, Appelbaum emphasizes the inherent duality of food. On the one hand, the New World "is made of things to eat" (259), and yet this strange new land was also a place of "alimentary despair" (258).

In this vast and often elegant survey, *Aguecheek's Beef* offers readers an introduction to the varied textures of early modern culinary life. Its subject is food, but its appeal encompasses the aspects and qualities of the human condition that food itself brought to early modern Europe. The egg, the apple, baked meats, and "chickens hunter style" all make their appearances here (83), but *Aguecheek's Beef* is not a culinary archaeology that would unearth the history of food in material terms. Insofar as it is through the texts, languages, and discourses of food that we apprehend this material reality, Appelbaum confirms his suggestion that food is itself a kind of language that crosses from the material to the meaningful.

Elizabeth Spiller
Florida State University