



Teaching and Learning Guide for: Reading Early Modern Food

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Further Reading

My review article on early modern food surveyed the most important publications on the topic but it has occurred to me since writing the review that I might have included more references to general histories of food. Ideas about food and diet did not suddenly emerge or change in the early modern period and suddenly stop or change after it, even if we could agree as critics to which years the term 'early modern' ought to apply. With this in mind I would recommend Maguelonne Toussaint-Samat's recently expanded and updated edition of *A History of Food* (Toussaint-Samat, 2009). This work, first published in French in 1987, is useful for its wide historical and geographical range, extending back to the ancients and forward beyond the early moderns. Significant attention is given to the early moderns but considering what went before and came after allows us to perceive both parallels with and breaks from the past. The chapter on oil provides a good example of the book's scope, considering ancient records referring to olive-oil, its dietary history, its use in legend and symbolism, how it was made, and sections on other important oils consumed. The book contains a useful select bibliography of English-language works on food compiled by the food scholar Darra Goldstein, founding editor of the food journal *Gastronomica* (see Useful Links).

I would also urge anyone interested in early modern food to pay specific attention to the medieval period and a good start would be the collection *Food in Medieval England: Diet and Nutrition* (Woolgar et al., 2006). Essay of particular interest include D. J. Stone's 'The Consumption of Field Crops in Late Medieval England', C. C. Dyer's 'Gardens and Garden Produce in the Later Middle Ages', C. M. Woolgar's 'Meat and Dairy Products in Late Medieval England', D. Serjeantson and C. M. Woolgar's 'Fish Consumption in Medieval England', C. M. Woolgar's 'Group Diets in Late Medieval England' and C. C. Dyer's 'Seasonal Patterns in Food Consumption in the Later Middle Ages'.

I mentioned some of the criticism that has been produced on early modern dietaries in my review and I would strongly advise reading the dietaries themselves, specifically Andrew Boorde's *Compendious Regiment*, Thomas Elyot's *Castle of Health*, and William Bullein's *Government of Health*. These are currently available via Early English Books Online (EEBO, see Useful Links) and I am editing a modern spelling edition of these three texts for the Revels Companion Library Series, Manchester University Press, which will be published in 2012. As the dietaries make clear, the early moderns were interested in how food could be used as a way to ensure good health and avoid disease and with this in mind I would encourage readers to become more familiar with writings about

medical practice in the period; a good place to start is Roy Porter's short work *Disease, medicine and society in England 1550–1860* (1987).

The links between food, illness and morality, evident in the dietaries, might also be further explored in Francine Prose's concise study *Gluttony*, which considers historical and literary engagements with the condition, and might lead the reader to tackle the more comprehensive book by Roy Porter and George Rousseau *Gout: The patrician malady* (Porter and Rousseau, 1998). Why and how our ancestors ate is explored by Martin Jones in his fascinating work of archaeological research *Feast: Why Humans Share Food* (Jones, 2007) and readers might also want to expand upon their knowledge of the peculiar practice of early modern medicinal cannibalism by reading Louise Noble's essay '“And Make Two Pasties of Your Shameful Heads”: Medicinal Cannibalism and Healing the Body Politic in *Titus Andronicus*' (2003).

Useful Links

Subscription only databases

Early English Books Online (EEBO): <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>

Food journals

<http://www.gastronomica.org>

<http://www.foodhistorynews.com/>

Websites on culinary history

<http://www.historicfood.com/>

<http://www.culinaryhistoriansboston.com/about.htm>

<http://www.culinaryhistoriansny.org/>

Syllabi

I would like to see a course on food in the early modern period that included the critical material mentioned in my review and the further reading mentioned above. Primary texts might include drama with a clear focus on the preparation and consumption of food and the effects of eating food or being prevented from eating it, for example, Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* (a play that contains reference to the dangers of the choleric eating broiled meat as well as the use of hunger in the 'taming' of Katherine) and Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, where pork is prepared and consumed and other foods are mentioned. Shakespeare's gluttonous knight, Sir John Falstaff, would probably have to be included and thus the two plays in which he appears, *Henry IV* Parts One and Two would be on the reading list. Edmund Spenser's depiction of the figures of Gluttony and the cannibalistic Lust in Books 1 and 4 of *The Faerie Queene* might also be useful here. In the interests of expanding the focus and considering the impact of medieval ideas in the early modern period it might be worthwhile considering the study of some Chaucer, specifically the description of Roger the Cook in the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*. Also worth considering is the relatively late play by Richard Brome *The Asparagus Garden* (pub.1640), which highlights the aphrodisiacal signification of this vegetable in the period. Such a course on food in the early modern period might also include texts that could be regarded as providing a theoretical underpinning to the study of food, so the dietaries mentioned above would be examined, perhaps early modern cookery books such as Hannah Woolley's *The Queen-Like Closet*, herbals such as that by John Gerard, and eclectic

advice manuals on preparing and cooking food such as Gervase Markham's *The English Housewife*. One might also consider using Galen's *Art of Physic*, the 1652 English translation by Nicholas Culpepper, and Church of England *Homilies Against Gluttony and Fasting* (all available via EEBO).

Works Cited in 'Further Reading'

- Jones, Martin. *Feast: Why Humans Share Food*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Noble, Louise. '“And Make Two Pasties of Your Shameful Heads”: Medicinal Cannibalism and Healing the Body Politic in *Titus Andronicus*'. *English Literary History* 70 (2003): 677–708.
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- Woolgar, C. M., D. Serjeantson and T. Waldron, eds. *Food in Medieval England: Diet and Nutrition*. Medieval History and Archaeology. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.