

A friendly breakfast

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David B. Goldstein

EATING AND ETHICS IN
SHAKESPEARE'S ENGLAND

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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 power-

ful 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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