

**Joan Fitzpatrick**, *Food in Shakespeare: early modern dietaries and the plays*, Literary and Scientific Cultures of Early Modernity, Aldershot and Burlington, VT, Ashgate, 2007, pp. ix, 166, £45.00, \$89.95 (hardback 978-0-7546-5547-3).

There are five ways to commit gluttony: eating too soon, eating too expensively, eating too much, eating too eagerly, and eating too daintily. Food is socially and morally controlled; in the early modern period it was explicitly tied to medical advice. Good governance of the body was necessary for the health of the body and the soul.

Joan Fitzpatrick's book does exactly what it says in the title: it explores the uses of food and feeding in Shakespeare's plays alongside materials found in contemporary dietaries. Dietaries, or regimen, were amongst the vernacular medical works printed in early modern England. They set out how to maintain health and heal disease through the maintenance or restitution of the correct balance of the four humours. In Shakespeare's plays food and feeding signal the character of the glutton or the ascetic and the rank of the poor and the noble. Fitzpatrick argues that Shakespeare uses food to engage with debates about cosmopolitanism, expanding international trade, religion and philosophy.

She begins with a reading of Sir John Oldcastle and normative notions about gluttony and abstinence. Chapter 2, focusing on Celtic, alien feeding, cleverly explains apparently strange passages in *Macbeth*. For instance, "double, double, toil and trouble" echoes a process of making "double" beer. The Bard's vegetarian sympathies are neatly, if somewhat implausibly, set out in chapter 3. Chapter 4 associates famine, abstinence and contemporary concerns about dearth and foreigners. Chapter 5 posits the notion of "profane consumption" to describe cannibalism, the ultimate "exotic" consumption in terms of the religious and philosophical concerns that Shakespeare expresses through food in his later plays. Throughout, Fitzpatrick gestures towards contemporary sensibilities

about whether certain foods seem ordinary or alien to the modern reader; diet now, as then, is medically and morally freighted.

Within its own terms, Fitzpatrick's careful scholarship generates novel readings, solidly grounded in contemporary evidence. Historians of medicine would like to see dietaries situated within broader generic conventions of vernacular medical works and longer-term considerations of the shifting emphasis from medical advice to medical cures. Historians of the body will wonder why Mikhail Bakhtin is absent, and whether the analysis would have been richer if, with a few exceptions, food had not been so clearly partitioned from sex and excrement. Is something missing when a discussion of cannibalism omits to mention Mary Douglas? Economic and social historians will appreciate the note about the association between the theatre and food trades, and would like more analysis about food as a commodity and the place of domestic medicine in the emergent age of consumption. Dietaries provide a key to the terms in the play, and through them Fitzpatrick contributes some fresh and clever readings. A more adventurous and less controlled study could have asked why displeased theatre-goers throw food and why Chronos was not a vegetarian.

**Lauren Kassell**,  
University of Cambridge

**Louise Hill Curth**, *English almanacs, astrology and popular medicine: 1550–1700*, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 2007, pp. xi, 283, £55.00 (hardback 978-0-7190-6928-4).

Until very recently, scholarly examinations of almanacs within the contexts of early modern print culture and medicine had been largely absent from the existing historiography. Fortunately, this has now begun to change. Louise Hill Curth's 2007 work is one such contribution. It examines English almanacs as a distinct genre of print literature, situating it within the wider

contexts of astrology and medicine from the mid-sixteenth through the seventeenth century. Curth's story is one that is characterized much more by continuity than change for the 150-year period under investigation.

Challenging previous assumptions regarding the ephemeral nature of early modern almanacs, Curth underscores the fact that they have been a vastly under-utilized source, professing that they represent "the first form of English mass media" (p. 52). She convincingly argues that almanacs have several intrinsic advantages over other types of more widely referenced materials, such as printed books and handbills. These include: sizeable print-runs and wide distribution; regularly featured advertisements; greater longevity (arising from the fact that almanacs were designed to be used for one year).

Curth demonstrates that the content of almanacs often targeted specific audiences on the basis of factors such as geographical location, educational background, and economic status. Regardless, astrological content was consistently present within all these works, while three-quarters contained material of a medical character. This encompassed preventative and "remedial" (that is, therapeutic) medicines of both a non-commercial and a commercial nature for humans and animals alike. Curth asserts that the inclusion of such information within the pages of almanacs suggests that it was perceived as important to readers.

Although the medical and scientific "advances" of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have been well referenced within the existing scholarship, Curth finds little evidence of these changes within her study. Indeed, one of her main tenets is that almanacs "remained firmly based on Galenic-astrological beliefs and practices" throughout the period, thereby contributing to "the continuing popularity and longevity of traditional, orthodox medical practices and beliefs" (p. 28). For example, she argues that the popularity of astrological physick persisted throughout the period, demonstrating "no sign of becoming obsolete" (p. 131). In terms of non-commercial medical

advice, almanacs primarily relied upon readily available and "organic ingredients, with very little evidence of Paracelsian or 'chymical' ingredients" (p. 178).

Although Curth's arguments relating to the medical information within early modern almanacs tend to emphasize continuity, she readily acknowledges that changes did indeed transpire during this period. Curth argues that the most evident transformation occurred during the second half of the seventeenth century with the "growth of advertisements for medical services and proprietary medicines" (p. 233). This trend accompanied the rising demand for various types of consumer goods that was well under way by this point and "foreshadowed the consumer 'revolution' and medical materialism" in the following century (p. 233).

The final chapter pertaining to the care and medical treatment of animals is a particularly useful addition, especially as this topic has not yet received due attention from scholars. Curth argues that while human and animal medicine shared the same Galenic underpinnings—and thus similar types of diagnoses and treatments—they differed in terms of the specific ingredients and how these were used in remedies. For instance, medicine for animals often consisted of less expensive and more easily accessible ingredients in comparison to human remedies.

Curth's study is a timely and welcome addition to the historiography of early modern English medicine. It presents readers with a richer and more complex picture of the various purposes and usages of almanacs—not least of which were astrological and medical—than has been available until now. Curth's careful consideration of questions involving continuity and change (as well as similarity and difference) reminds us that such avenues of investigation are often not simply useful but necessary in order to achieve a better understanding of the practice and dissemination of popular medicine during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

**Wendy D Churchill,**

University of New Brunswick, Fredericton