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Wall, Wendy. Recipes for Thought: Knowledge and Taste in the Early Modern English Kitchen

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Wall, Wendy.

Recipes for Thought: Knowledge and Taste in the Early Modern English Kitchen.

Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. Pp. xii, 312. ISBN 978-0-8122-4758-9 (hardcover) US\$69.95.

Wendy Wall's incisive and sweeping study of culinary and medical recipes in England from 1570 through the mid-eighteenth century arrives during a propitious moment in the study of the intellectual character of early modern receipts. After perhaps two decades of serious research in the field, we are at a point where it is time to take stock of our knowledge and of the evidence available to shape it. Where do we find early modern culinary and medicinal recipes? What are their generic characteristics? And most importantly for Wall, what epistemological insights do we glean from studying them?

Admittedly, I do not think the goal of Wall's treatise is to take stock of the field. *Recipes for Thought* presents itself not as a reference work, or as a summation of current research, but as an original argument. Wall's rare achievement is that she has accomplished both. The volume stands both as a nuanced and in many ways fresh account of how Renaissance recipes function as knowledge, and as an invaluable gathering together in one place of nearly all the major scholars and ideas at work in the field. Further, Wall's extensive work in the archives yields a plethora of examples from many of the most important and striking printed and manuscript recipe books of the period, and is a good place to begin for a reader wondering what they will find between the pages of these challenging texts.

While informed by copious research into how recipes shed light on the histories of food and cooking, social, economic, and racial identity, and nation-building (some of it by Wall herself), Wall's new volume focuses squarely upon what she calls "the *intellectual* components involved in the creation, exchange, and use of a type of writing that we now consider distinctly unlearned" (1). In chapters devoted to "taste acts," pleasure, literacy, time, and experiment, Wall plumbs the archive to show that early English receipt books operate as "an understudied representational framework" (21) that top-down accounts of English culture rarely perceive.

Wall's first chapter focuses upon the history of the printed English cookbook. Given the poor reputation of English cookery, it may come as

a surprise that England was the first European country to develop printed cookbooks as a popular genre. Wall brings together several strands of scholarship to show the arc and complexity of the cookbook's development from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century, focusing on the ways in which cookbooks both helped shape and responded to questions of taste, discernment, and consumption throughout the period. Wall's space-based analysis is guided by the master trope of the "closet," a new architectural form in the period. A discussion of the relationship between closet and kitchen gives way in a coda to considering the changing definition of "taste" in the eighteenth century and its implications for the history of cookery writing.

The book's second chapter expands upon Wall's own ground-breaking work on Hugh Plat's 1602 recipe book *Delights for Ladies*, one of the first to connect explicitly the pleasures of sex and cooking in a book directed at female audiences (*Staging Domesticity*, 42–53). Wall discusses the ways in which another recipe master trope, "conceit," connects various kinds of pleasure throughout English Renaissance culture, including eating, cooking, performing, reading, writing, sex, and other forms of play. Its clever and nuanced argument elegantly complements that of the next chapter, "Literacies," which considers the use of letterforms in manuscript recipe books from a wide variety of perspectives. Expertly linking early modern "recipes" for proper handwriting, ink recipes, letterforms as a decorative element in cooking and baking, marginal doodles alongside receipts, and handwriting experiments in the recipes themselves, Wall poses a subtle but unmistakable challenge to current notions of what literacy means in the context of recipe culture.

Chapter 4, "Temporalities," considers questions of preserving, seasoning, and remembering—concerns that bedeviled both female heads of household and literary writers. Fittingly, Wall reminds us of her consummate skill as a reader of literary texts by framing the chapter through an analysis of preservation in Shakespeare's *All's Well that Ends Well*. Other literary works, such as Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and Ben Jonson's "Inviting a Friend to Supper," do yeoman service throughout the book, demonstrating the shared philosophical concerns of literature and recipes. This is fitting in a world where, as Wall writes, "humans and edibles shared a structural place, as things in need of survival and duration" (174). The final chapter, "Knowledge," performs a useful summary of research regarding the connections between recipe writing and the development of modern science, while bringing to bear a range of

new evidence from manuscript recipe books that have rarely been discussed by scholars. “The recipe archive,” Wall concludes, “helps us keep firmly in view the representational, textual, and linguistic character of knowledge production” (250). *Recipes for Thought* does exactly that. The book is a signal accomplishment that will prove as useful in the years to come as the recipes it analyzes proved to an earlier age.

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Zarri, Gabriella.

Figure di donne in età moderna. Modelli e storie.

Storia e letteratura, Raccolta di studi e testi 298. Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2017. Pp. xvi, 276. ISBN 978-8-8637-2995-5 (paperback) €38.

Gabriella Zarri’s book examines the construction of exemplary models of female behaviour in the Renaissance. She opens with a discussion of the thorny and still unresolved question on the status of women in the Renaissance and then follows with considerations on the important role of religious orders in the creation of behavioural models for women, both lay and religious. In the case of upper-class lay women, the major characteristics of “model” women included a good education, the ability to govern the household or the state, and a profound sense of faith. If they entered a convent, upper-class women were constrained by the rule of closure, especially in the wake of the Observant reforms in the Franciscan and Dominican orders, but still maintained close links with their female counterparts in the secular world, and especially at court. As a result, Observant convents became renowned for their culture. Middle- and lower-class religious women generally did not have the dowry necessary to enter a convent, so they became tertiaries and were not bound by the rule of enclosure (at least not until 1566 when Pope Pius V imposed closure on tertiaries, as well).

In her second chapter, Zarri analyzes four women who come to represent four very different types of early modern women: the wife of an exiled man, the dispossessed woman, the martyr, and the witch. The first type is here represented by Bartolomea degli Obizzi (d. 1426), whose husband Antonio degli Alberti (d.