

Narin Hassan, Tamara S. Wagner, eds. *Consuming Culture in the Long Nineteenth Century: Narratives of Consumption, 1700-1900*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007. xvii + 290 pp. \$70.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7391-1207-6.



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The Culture of Food in History and Literature: An Interdisciplinary Buffet

In contemporary academic discourse, the word “consumption” can be used to refer to any number of material interactions. It is rare to see scholars taking the term so literally, however, as Tamara Wagner and Narin Hassan and their collaborators do in this volume on the consumption of culture. Perhaps a better way to understand this term, however, would be as the cultures of food consumption, preparation, display, and digestion, mostly in literature, but in the historical record as well. Wagner and Hassan have taken an interesting topic of conversation (the relative absence of breakfast in the daily routines of literary characters) and produced a volume that analyzes these various aspects of consumption, while providing several methodological approaches to an understudied area of research.

This work consists of a preface and seventeen articles, with eighteen different scholars in addition to the two editors represented. All of the articles are relatively brief—between twelve and eighteen pages—and the majority of them is concerned with authors and literary works, primarily from nineteenth-century Britain and the United States. The editors’ focus on literary criticism means

that the few articles utilizing historical, philosophical, and even musicological approaches seem, at times, somewhat irrelevant to the general concept of the compilation. Even more out of place are those articles that do not fit in with the wider focus on the nineteenth century, including Jim Chevalier’s article on the development of breakfast practices in seventeenth-century France and Ilias Chrissochoidis’ article on the girth and genius of G. F. Handel (the eighteenth-century Hanoverian/English composer).

Only two articles on specifically German topics are included, although a handful of others that have some relation to German history and literature. One of the former is Christine Rinne’s article on the preparation and presentation of meals by female domestic employees in late-nineteenth-century Germany. She uses servant newspapers (*Dienstbotenzeitungen*) as well as literary works by contemporary authors Ernst Georgy, Clara Viebig, and Gerhart Hauptmann, and the domestic manuals written by Henriette Davidis and Emy Gordon, to lay out the daily routine of maidservants shopping, cooking, and serving their masters’ food, as well as their occa-

sional opportunities to consume for themselves. Rinne's work has the potential to be exceptionally useful for historians of everyday life, labor, and migration. J. D. Mininger and Jason Michael Peck's article on Immanuel Kant's tendency to discuss his intellectual output in gastrointestinal metaphors might also be of interest to German specialists or anyone else familiar with Kant's work. Most interesting (and unforgettable) is the way in which the authors draw out Kant's comparison of "reason" to a laxative, meant to purge a confused, foggy intellect. They also analyze Kant's ideas on a "proper diet" that could best provide for both physical and mental or intellectual health.

Among the pieces that may interest German specialists for comparative purposes are Adele Wessel's analysis of "touristic consumption" in the context of the 1888 and 1893 World Fairs, in Melbourne and Chicago. In particular, she focuses on the importance of the World Fairs in promoting new, industrialized forms of food consump-

tion, the home economics movement, and the branding of particular food products. Articles by Ron Broglio and James Gregory contrast the typically English identification with roast beef and cattle culture with the caricature of the eccentric, progressive, and faddish vegetarian in Victorian literature. It might be possible to find German analogues to this conflation of food-related practices, national identity, and somewhat threatening dissent.

As mentioned above, few of the included articles deal directly with German topics. However, many of these essays suggest possible methodological approaches to looking at the centrality of food to culture that would be relevant to German literature and history, which seems to be a largely untapped area of study. Perhaps there are researchers waiting to take up this challenge; for them, this volume might be a useful resource. For almost anyone else, however, this work is a collection of interesting perspectives and fascinating topics, enjoyable to read but ultimately an academic luxury.

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