Eating the Forbidden Fruit: Pottery and Protestant Theology in Early Modern England

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Abstract

This article offers insight into Protestant attitudes towards food by exploring seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English delftware dishes and chargers decorated with the biblical motif of the Temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It investigates the biblical story and doctrinal assumptions that underpinned this iconography and considers how objects decorated with it illuminate the ethics of eating in the godly household and reformed culture. Analyzing a range of visual variations on this theme, it approaches this species of Christian materiality as a form of embodied theology. Such pottery encouraged spectators to recognize the interconnections between sexual temptation and the sensual temptation presented by gluttony and to engage in spiritual and moral reflection. Probing the nexus between piety and bodily pleasure, the article also seeks to complicate traditional stereotypes about puritan asceticism.

Keywords

Adam and Eve – delftware – eating – food – sex – pottery – temptation – theology

Introduction

The tin-glazed earthenware dish reproduced in Fig. 1 is decorated with an image that was ubiquitous in early modern England: the Temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Created by the Pickleherring pottery in 1635,

FIGURE 1 Adam and Eve charger (Pickleherring pottery, London, 1635): © Victoria and Albert Museum, London, C.26-1931.

it shows the first man and women standing alongside the Tree of Knowledge.¹ Entwined around its trunk is the evil serpent who has just seduced Eve into plucking and tasting the forbidden fruit it bears. In turn her own persuasions

¹ Victoria and Albert Museum, London [hereafter V&A], C.26-1931 (charger, Pickleherring pottery, London, 1635).

have led Adam to disobey God's instructions. The fig leaves that cover their privy parts suggest that the scene with which we are presented follows their startling and shameful realization that they are stark naked. This is the moment of lost innocence immediately after the Fall but before the expulsion of the couple from the Paradise in which they had been placed by their loving Creator. The object and its iconography are emblematic of the moral and spiritual dangers of eating. They locate food and associated taboos at the very heart of Christian culture.

Hundreds of large plates or chargers of this kind survive in museums and private collections. English tin glazed earthenware was a species of ceramic that borrowed techniques developed by Dutch craftsmen, who in turn modified the methods pioneered by the manufacturers of Italian maiolica. The beginnings of the Delftware industry in England date to the late sixteenth century, but it particularly flourished and peaked between 1660 and 1730.² Early specimens of the Adam and Eve genre were high quality artifacts that probably originated as personal commissions; later, less accomplished examples were mass-produced in small-scale factories in London and Bristol for purchase off the shelf. Their declining cost assured the steady dissemination of these items downwards from the gentry to the middling sort of people. The proliferation of tableware bearing this motif reflects the extent to which it became absorbed into a burgeoning culture of consumption in which the lines between the utilitarian and the decorative were blurred. It is also an index of the market for such objects within the godly household. The status of the home as a microcosm of the church and as a nursery of piety was strongly reinforced by the Reformation. As the work of Andrew Morrall, David Gaimster and Tara Hamling has demonstrated, domestic interiors were a canvas on which the devout gave expression to their religious and social identities. Like other fixtures, furniture, and fittings, earthenware dishes and vessels displayed and employed during the midday meal served as a crucial medium for moral instruction and social conditioning.³

2 For accounts of the industry, see Michael Archer, *Delftware: The Tin-glazed Earthenware of the British Isles: A Catalogue of the Collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London, 1997), 13-28; Anthony Ray, *English Delftware Pottery in the Robert Hall Warren Collection, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford* (London, 1968), 33-81.

3 Andrew Morrall, "Protestant Pots: Morality and Social Ritual in the Early Modern Home," *Journal of Design History* 15 (2002): 263-273; David Gaimster, "Pots, Prints and Propaganda: Changing Mentalities in the Domestic Sphere 1480-1580," in *The Archaeology of Reformation 1480-1580*, ed. David Gaimster and Roberta Gilchrist (Leeds, 2003), 122-144; Tara Hamling, *Decorating the "Godly" Household: Religious Art in Post-Reformation Britain* (New Haven, 2010); Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson, *A Day at Home in Early Modern England* (New Haven, 2017), 133-139.

Adam and Eve chargers provide an opportunity to probe the connections between faith, food, and material culture in early modern England. This article seeks to investigate the relationship between this distinctive class of pottery and central tenets of Protestant doctrine. It examines the cultural and ideological context in which these objects were made and circulated and the issues of discourse and practice that shaped and colored their perception and use. By teasing out the tensions and ambiguities in the messages they carried, it also invites historians to reassess some long-settled assumptions about reformed religion and sensual indulgence. It responds to calls for a fuller investigation of “how matter and meaning are dynamically entwined” in the gastronomic realm and of the dispositions that comestibles and the domestic objects integral to their presentation and ingestion inculcated in those who consumed them.⁴ And it reinforces Christopher Kissane’s recent observation that focusing on food offers “a distinctive perspective on the tumultuous religious changes that defined European life in the two centuries” following Martin Luther’s challenge to the papacy in 1517.⁵

In early modern England, the Temptation of Adam and Eve was an immensely pervasive and popular pictorial theme. Protestants scarcely had a monopoly on this topic, which was the subject of much medieval art and which continued to be represented by the Tridentine Catholic Church in a myriad of media. Nevertheless, the Reformation invested this foundational story from Genesis 3 with fresh importance and new inflections. Linguistically transposed from the original Hebrew and Greek into English, these and other biblical passages underwent a process of domestication, as Naomi Tadmor has shown.⁶ The Fall had particular prominence in the social universe created by this process. Contemporaries were fascinated by the sobering tale of how their “first parents” had succumbed to Satan’s wiles and by its severe consequences: the cursing of the earth with thorns and briars that made cultivation difficult, Adam’s sentence to lifelong manual labor and the pangs and tribulations of childbirth inflicted upon Eve and her sex. Some biblical commentators argued that this also marked the end of the vegetarian regime that had prevailed in

4 Emma-Jayne Abbots, “Introduction,” in “Food Stuffs: Materialities, Meanings, and Embodied Encounters,” special issue *Gastronomica* 16, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 1–4, quotation at 1; Michael Dietler, “Introduction: Embodied Material Culture,” *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 20 (2005): 3–5; idem, “Feasting and Fasting,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Ritual and Religion*, ed. Timothy Insoll (Oxford, 2011), 179–194.

5 Christopher Kissane, *Food, Religion and Communities in Early Modern Europe* (London, 2018), 187.

6 Naomi Tadmor, *The Social Universe of the English Bible: Scripture, Society and Culture in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2010).

Paradise and its replacement by a meat diet.⁷ In the Bishop's, Geneva, and King James versions, the critical text describing these dramatic events is peppered with the word "eat." "Of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shal not *eat* of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die"; "God doth know that in the day ye *eat* thereof," says the sly reptile, "your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." "Hast thou *eaten* of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not *eat*?" God asks Adam and Eve angrily. Sheepishly, they admit that, beguiled by the serpent, they did indeed *eat*.⁸

This episode occupied a critical place in the deeply pessimistic anthropology that was one of the hallmarks of Protestant theology. Following in the footsteps of Augustine, the magisterial reformers insisted that therein lay the roots of human depravity. Adam and Eve passed this hereditary disease to their posterity via sexual intercourse. Their descendants were likewise doomed to carry the corruption of original sin down the generations: conceived and born in iniquity, in turn they transmitted it to their offspring in an inexorable chain that led to their spiritual damnation. The flipside of this depressing doctrine was the observation that the heinous offence committed in Eden paradoxically had a happy consequence: it had led the Lord to send his only Son to die on the Cross in a supreme act of redemptive self-sacrifice. In the grand scheme of Christian history, the Fall was thus a fortunate event. Typologically linked with the Crucifixion, it underlined the reformed precept that salvation came about through the free gift of divine grace. Against this backdrop, the image that adorned so many delftware dishes and chargers in early modern England carried dual connotations. Conveying the message of Romans 5: 19 ("as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous"), it was a symbol of hope as well as a token of the inescapability of original sin. It encapsulated the lessons laid out in the official homily on the "Misery of all mankynde" and constantly alluded to in the Protestant liturgy.⁹

Together with other key episodes in the Old Testament, the Temptation of Adam and Eve systematically infiltrated the domain of the early modern home. Second only to Abraham and the Sacrifice of Isaac, it found its way onto elaborate plasterwork ceilings in the country houses of the nobility and gentry

7 See Philip C. Almond, *Adam and Eve in Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge, 1999), incl. 23-25, 118-123, 199 on vegetarianism; Kathleen M. Crowther, *Adam and Eve in the Protestant Reformation* (Cambridge, 2010).

8 Genesis 3 (King James Version), my italics.

9 See *Certaine sermons appoynted by the Quenes Maiesty, to be declared and read* (London, 1563), sigs C2r-D2r.

and wooden panels made for merchants and tradesmen, but also onto murals painted on the walls of humbler farmhouses and cottages.¹⁰ It also appeared on furniture and domestic accessories, from lace mats, pillowslips, samplers, and tapestries, to chairs, chests, overmantels, bedheads, and hangings.¹¹ The presence of this iconic image on objects that originated as marriage gifts and were intimately linked with the site of conjugal relations highlights the role that this primal story played in disseminating Protestant teaching about the institution of wedlock. Reflecting the tendency to interpret the serpent's seduction of Eve as a metaphor for sexual temptation, they functioned as warnings of the perils of lust even as they underlined that matrimony was divinely ordained as a framework for the holy duty of procreation. Sometimes incorporating the initials of the couple, they served as deeply personal alerts to the risks that intercourse posed to the immortal soul.¹²

Many Adam and Eve chargers likewise carry letters and dates. The same motif can also occasionally be found on mugs, caudle cups, posset pots, cutlery, and damask napkins.¹³ In the godly households in which such tableware and linen were displayed and used the act of eating was closely connected with recollection of the disobedience of "our great-grandparents" Adam and Eve, who, by eating the apple forbidden them in Paradise, had drawn down divine wrath upon the human race at large. In a culture seeped in Scripture, it was also entangled with anxieties about another kind of bodily temptation: the carnal desire of men and women to copulate with each other. A polysemous concept in early modern culture, temptation was understood as both a hindrance and a spur to piety. The baits and snares that the devil left to entrap men and women lay on tables as well as beds.

The high survival rate of these earthenware platters is partly a function of the fact that these items associated with the consumption of food became family heirlooms. The comparatively pristine state of many specimens, without

10 See Hamling, *Decorating the "Godly" Household*, 128, 130, 152-153, 159, 170-174, 180, 182, 186-188, 202-205, 260-261, 231, 233, 243.

11 Eggs include Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge [hereafter FM], T.1-2011 (sampler); V&A, T.115-1928 (pillowslip); V&A, T. 17-1909 (lace panel); FM, T.3-1938 (whitework sampler). See also Andrew Morrall, "Regaining Eden: Representations of Nature in Seventeenth-Century English Embroidery," in *English Embroidery from The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1580-1700: 'Twixt Art and Nature*, eds. Andrew Morrall and Melinda Watt (New Haven, 2008), 79-97.

12 See Fig. 1. See Catherine Belsey, *Shakespeare and the Loss of Eden: The Construction of Family Values in Early Modern Culture* (Basingstoke, 1999), 55-83; Hamling, *Decorating the "Godly" Household*, 204.

13 See, eg, BM, 1895, 0720.1 (mug, Southward, 1655); V&A, 2142-1855 (spoon, Germany, 1676) and T.276-1927 (damask napkin, English, c. 1600-1650).

significant chips, cracks, or other signs of wear, may also reflect their status as objects intended for display on dressers, cupboards, and sideboards rather than use on the table. Possession of such items was a recognized mark of social aspiration and they sometimes appear on mantelpieces in paintings of Dutch interiors.¹⁴ The dishes on which food is presented in group portraits of families saying grace are usually made of pewter, but it is possible that decorated ceramic platters were put to use on special occasions such as celebratory banquets marking christenings and marriages.¹⁵

With Andrew Morrall, we should see these Protestant pots as “tools for provoking active rumination.” Like mugs and jugs encrusted with “inscriptional wisdom,” they are examples of what Juliet Fleming calls “speaking crockery,” didactic devices designed to compel those who saw and touched them to meditate on humanity’s innate vulnerability to sin.¹⁶ Akin to the luxury silver-gilt dessert bowls and plates that revealed biblical scenes once the sweet treats and delicacies they contained had been eaten, and the edifying verses that adorned the reverse of trenchers, they provide “a timely reminder of the need to moderate excess with spiritual reflection.”¹⁷ They ensured that the pleasure people took in eating was combined with due contemplation of the danger of gluttony. As the puritan divine William Perkins exhorted his readers, “Be very carefull and circumspect in taking thy foode, bridle thine appetite, take heede thou doest not exceede measure.”¹⁸ It was necessary to be perpetually on guard against the devil’s determination to allure one to evil through the medium of food. Sobriety in this sphere was the inseparable twin of chastity. An indulgent diet was widely thought to promote lust.¹⁹ Protestantism may have repudiated

14 For one such painting, see “A Dutch Interior with a Woman Looking out of a Window and a Boy Training a Dog to Sit” (1800-1899), National Trust Collections, accessed 11 September 2019, <http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/121609>. Some dishes have holes bored through their foot rings, for suspension by means of a string.

15 See Wayne Franits, “The Family Saying Grace: A Theme in Dutch Art of the Seventeenth Century,” *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art*, 16, no. 1 (1986): 36-49. An English example, which bears out the observation, is the 1567 “Portrait of William Brooke, 10th Lord Cobham and his family,” at Longleat House, accessed 11 September 2019, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:William_Brooke_Baron_Cobham_and_his_family,_dated_1567.jpg.

16 Andrew Morrall, “Inscriptional Wisdom and the Domestic Arts in Early Modern Northern Europe,” in *Sonderdruck aus Formelhaftigkeit in Text und Bild*, ed. Natalia Filatkina, Birgit Ulrike Münch, and Ane Kleine-Engel (Wiesbaden, 2012), 121-138, at 133; Juliet Fleming, *Graffiti and the Writing Arts of Early Modern England* (London, 2001), 145-158, at 151.

17 Hamling, *Decorating the “Godly” Household*, 203.

18 William Perkins, *The Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience* (Cambridge, 1606), 551.

19 See Joan Fitzpatrick, “Body and Soul,” in *A Cultural History of Food in the Renaissance*, ed. Ken Albala (London, 2012), 151-170.

the popish asceticism of traditional fasting, but it devised modes of bodily restraint and abstinence of its own.²⁰

It is telling that Philip Stubbes' popular diatribe against contemporary vice, *The anatomie of abuses* (1583) invoked the Fall in its denunciation of greed: "Our Father Adam with all of his of-spring (to the end of ye world) was condemned to hel-fire, for taking one apple to satisfie his glotonous desire withall."²¹ To eat from or in the presence of such images was not only to be taught the importance of restraint in the use of things indifferent; it was also to be presented with a physical embodiment of core tenets of Protestant theology for which it served as a visual shorthand. Pottery decorated with the double portrait of Adam and Eve underlined the point that eating itself was a route to damnation and a test of faith. Remembering the central events in the soteriological drama that began in the Garden of Eden and culminated with Christ's death had a sensual and haptic dimension. If, as has been conjectured, these dishes were sometimes used as platters for fruit, the very food stuffs they bore strengthened the parallel between consuming them and the historic crime of eating the apple in Paradise. The painted rim of one particularly fine specimen in the British Museum, in which the couple appears in conjunction with pairs of animals (elephants, squirrels, deer, dogs, pigs, and unicorns) is even encircled with a garland of ripe fruit, a reminder of the God's bountiful provision of humanity's need for bodily sustenance (Fig. 2).²² Revealingly, the arms of the worshipful Company of Fruiterers featured the same scene: its motto was *arbor vitae Christus, fructus per fidem gustamus* ("Christ is the tree of life, whose fruit we taste by faith").²³

Eating and drinking were deeply implicated in "the spiritualisation of the household."²⁴ As Abigail Brundin, Deborah Howard, and Mary Laven's important work on the sacred home in Renaissance Italy has shown, this was not merely a Protestant phenomenon, but it did take distinctive forms in reformed

20 See Ken Albala, "The Ideology of Fasting in the Reformation Era," in *Food and Faith in Christian Culture*, ed. Ken Albala and Trudy Eden (New York, 2011), 41-57; Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford, 2013), 195-199, 341-344.

21 Phillip Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses* (London, 1583), sig. J2r.

22 BM, 1887,0210.138 (dish, England, 1630-50). For this item, see Aileen Dawson, *English and Irish Delftware 1570-1840* (London, 2010), 98-99.

23 Malcolm McTaggart, "English Delft Adam and Eve Chargers: Their Earliest Dating and Derivation," *The Connoisseur Year Book* (1959): 58-63, at 58; Arthur William Gould, *History of the Worshipful Company of Fruiterers of the City of London* ([n.p.], 1612), 60-62.

24 Christopher Hill, "The Spiritualization of the Household," in *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (London, 1964), 443-481; Alexandra Walsham, "Holy Families: The Spiritualisation of the Early Modern Household Revisited," in *Religion and the Household*, ed. John Doran, Charlotte Methuen, and Alexandra Walsham, *Studies in Church History* 50 (Woodbridge, 2014), 122-160.

FIGURE 2 Adam and Eve charger, [England or Netherlands?], c. 1630-1650: © The British Museum, London, 1887,0210.138.

Europe.²⁵ The daily routine of dining acquired a quasi-religious quality, which was reinforced by the practice of saying graces and thanksgivings at table. These prayers dwelt on the perils of bestial and “swinish” filthiness and stressed that food and drink had no intrinsic power to nourish without the Lord’s blessing. They drew explicit parallels between the physical and spiritual processes of digestion and sustenance.²⁶ William Gouge’s bestselling guide to *Domesticall Duties*, for instance, called upon parents to instruct their children “by resembling the spirituall food of their soules, to that corporall food, whereby their bodies are nourished.”²⁷ Conflating eating with hearing, Edward Dering urged the reading of some portion of “Gods holie worde our spirituall foode” before and during the meal.²⁸

25 Abigail Brundin, Deborah Howard, and Mary Laven, *The Sacred Home in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford, 2018).

26 See Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, 381-389.

27 William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (London, 1622), 540.

28 Edward Dering, *Godly Private Praiers for Houshoulders* (London, 1581), sig. D4r-v.

This was a reformed commonplace rooted in a renewed emphasis on the Bible as “the heavenly meate” and “bread of life.” An Edwardian homily encouraged evangelicals to “chewe the cudde [of the Scriptures], that we maie have the swete jeuse, spirituall effecte, mary, hony, kynnell, taste, comforte, & consolation of them.”²⁹ The preface to the Geneva version spoke of them as the “only food and nourishment of our soules.”³⁰ Taking further inspiration from Psalm 34: 8 (“O taste and see that the Lord is good”), Protestants thought of faith as a form of degustation. This “alimentary discourse” held particular significance for a religious culture committed to the universal distribution of God’s word.³¹ Deuteronomy 8: 3 told that “man doth not live by bread onely,” but food and the vessels in which it was served were envisaged as conduits to spiritual insight. Recited regularly in public and private, the Lord’s Prayer implored “Give us our daily bread,” pairing this with “Forgive us our trespasses” and “Lead us not into Temptation.”

Caroline Walker Bynum’s comment that the Eucharist “hovered in the background of any banquet” applies to post-Reformation no less than late medieval Catholic Europe.³² Ordinary mealtimes were colored by their association with this sacrament, which successfully carved out a niche for itself in Protestant devotion.³³ Remodeled by the reformers as a memorial rather than a miracle and extended to the laity in both kinds, its status as a symbolic re-enactment of the Last Supper made it a natural template for the Christian commensality of the family at home.³⁴ As Perkins wrote, “beholde him at thy table in meate and drinke, which is as it were a lively sermon and a daily pledge of the mercie of God in Christ.”³⁵ By this means, the midday meal was made to approximate to a “holy event.”³⁶ By implication, to eat and drink unworthily was as dangerous in a domestic setting as it was in a church. The stylized household that Thomas Becon described in his *Christmas Bankette* of 1542 had dishes inscribed with the

29 See *Certaine sermons*, sigs A3v-B4v, at B4v.

30 *The Bible and Holy Scriptures, Conteyned in the Old and Newe Testament* (Geneva, 1560), sig. *** 4r.

31 See Daniel Cheely, “Opening the Book of Marwood: English Catholics and their Bibles in Early Modern Europe,” (PhD Diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2015), ch. 5 (“Digesting the Scriptures”).

32 Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, 1987), 3.

33 See Arnold Hunt, “The Lord’s Supper in Early Modern England,” *Past and Present* 161 (1998): 39–83.

34 See Morrall, “Protestant Pots,” 268–269.

35 William Perkins, *A Declaration of the True Manner of Knowing Christ Crucified* (Cambridge, 1596), 37.

36 Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, 389.

words “He that eteth my flesh, & drinketh my bloud, he dwelleth in me, and I in him.”³⁷ Everyday dinners thereby became things done “in remembraunce that Christ died for thee,” to evoke the resonant words of the Eucharistic liturgy.³⁸ A similar penumbra of biblical and Christian resonances encircled the material culture connected with the display and consumption of food.

With this in mind, it is time to take a closer look at the iconography of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century earthenware dishes and chargers decorated with the motif of Adam and Eve. Its prototype can be found in prints and engravings created by Albrecht Dürer, Crispin van de Passe, and others, which provided patterns for the illustrations and genealogies prepared for insertion in English bibles (Fig. 3).³⁹ This imagery crossed confessional boundaries and was not intrinsically Protestant, but it operated within an environment in which it acquired particular theological connotations. Potters modified these pictorial schemes for transfer onto plates and platters. Forms of vernacular translation themselves, such objects both absorbed and projected the preoccupations of the society that engendered them.

Chiefly dating from between c. 1635 and 1750, the majority of surviving examples of Adam and Eve chargers in the Fitzwilliam, British, and Victoria and Albert Museums are tin-glazed. Some carry creative flourishes and novel twists. One lead-glazed example produced by the well-known craftsman Thomas Toft between c. 1670 and 1685, for instance, features a wyvern (a bipedal dragon synonymous with a venomous viper) and a winged cherubim gravitating in the spare space surrounding the mythical couple and guarding the Tree of Life.⁴⁰ An unusual piece of late seventeenth-century delftware includes a plump devil sitting at the base of the trunk, reinforcing the menacing threat presented by the snake that sits coiled around its branches above (Fig. 4).⁴¹ This incubus-like

37 Thomas Becon, *A Christmas Bankette Garnyshed with many Pleasaunt and Deynty Disshes* (London, 1542), sig. B2r.

38 Brian Cummings, ed., *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662* (Oxford, 2011), 137.

39 For the prints that provided a model, see McTaggart, “English Delft Adam and Eve Chargers.” For Dürer’s Adam and Eve, see BM 1895,0915.299 and E, 4.176.+; for Crispin van de Passe’s, see BM 1873,0809.702. John Speed, *The Genealogies of Holy Scriptures* (London, 1611). For the relevant bible illustrations, see *The Holy Bible containing the Old Testament, and the New* (KJV; Edinburgh, 1633; RSTC 2311a); *The Holy Bible containing the Bookes of the Old & New* (Cambridge, [1659]; Wing B2255); *The Holy Bible in Sculpture, or, the Historys Mentioned in the Old and New Testament Lively Represented in Copper Cutts* (Oxford, 1683; Wing B2330A).

40 FM, C.1623-1928 (charger, Thomas Toft, c. 1670-85).

41 FM, C. 182-1932 (charger, unidentified London pottery, c. 1670-1690). This was previously supposed to be a modern imitation but is now considered contemporary.

FIGURE 3 The Temptation of Adam and Eve: The Holy Bible in Sculpture, or, the Historys Mentioned in the Old and New Testament Lively Represented in Copper Cutts (Oxford, 1683; Wing B2330A). By permission of the Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, Gibson 115 (1), engraving no. 2.

FIGURE 4 Adam and Eve charger, unidentified London pottery, c. 1670-1690: © The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, C. 182-1932.

figure is suggestive of the demonological undercurrents swirling beneath the surface of this imagery. Witchcraft was another crime rooted in rebellion and sexual lust, which also both fostered and exploited anxieties about food and

nourishment. In English culture, this found expression in the familiars who reputedly sucked blood from the witch via teats in a parody of breastfeeding.⁴²

Most, however, reflect the progressive simplification of the standard motif of the Temptation that accompanied their mass production. They replicate an image whose very familiarity reinforced contemporary ideas about the Fall. These include the controverted question of who bore most responsibility for it: Adam or Eve. This was much debated by biblical commentators, with some blaming the latter as the source of all the trouble, and others suggesting that the former was more culpable, because he should have restrained his wife, a member of the weaker sex, from being seduced by the serpent.⁴³ In keeping with John Calvin's gloss on Genesis 3:6, the Geneva version insisted that both were equally at fault: Adam had not just been misled by the "alluring entisements" of Eve, but had allowed himself to be led astray by "the flattering speeches of the devell." For some Protestants, it was an act of mutual disobedience that had precipitated eternal punishment.⁴⁴ The designs on these plates lent support to these competing points of view. In some both figures hold an apple signifying their dual role; in others Eve is seen taking it from the mouth of the serpent and persuading her husband to follow her lead, reinforcing the misogyny this biblical story had long served to support.⁴⁵ Some snakes appear to have feminine features, hinting at the tradition of depicting the serpent in the guise of a woman.

Interestingly, like the prints from which they derive, the images on these chargers and dishes collapse several temporal moments into one. This is less a strip cartoon of the successive events between the Temptation and Fall than a composite emblem of them all. Adam and Eve are not depicted biting into the forbidden fruit; instead, the spectator is presented with the consequences of doing so. This is especially graphic in the case of a 1648 charger now in the

42 See Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany* (New Haven, 2004), esp. chs 2-3; Jonathan B. Durrant, *Witchcraft, Gender and Society in Early Modern Germany* (Leiden, 2007), ch. 4. On familiars, see James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in England 1550-1750* (London, 1996), 71-74.

43 See Almond, *Adam and Eve*, 195-196.

44 John Calvin, *A Commentarie upon Genesis*, trans. Thomas Thymme (London, 1578), 92. For further discussion of this, see Morrall, "Regaining Eden," 84; Christine Peters, *Patterns of Piety: Women, Gender and Religion in Late Medieval and Reformation England* (Cambridge, 2003), 294-313.

45 For examples of Adam and Eve both holding the apple, see FM, C. 1623-1928 (charger, Limekiln pottery, Bristol [?], c. 1735-1745). For examples with Eve holding the apple, see FM, C. 1401-1928 (charger, Pickleherring pottery, London 1640); C. 1405-1928 (charger, Rotherhithe pottery, c. 1650), V&A, C.26-1931 (charger, Pickleherring pottery, London, 1635).

FIGURE 5 Adam and Eve charger, Southwark, 1648: © The British Museum, London, 1938,0314.109.CR.

British Museum. It illustrates God's outburst in response to Adam and Eve's transgression: a speech bubble emanating from the anthropomorphic sun enclosed within a bolster of clouds cries "ADAM: ADAM: WHARE ART THOU?" (Fig. 5).⁴⁶ Perhaps the clearest indication that the moment captured follows rather than precedes the Fall is the fact that the eyes of the couple have in almost every case been opened to their nakedness. Their shame is symbolized by the leaves that cover their genitals, or, in the case of Eve, the long flowing tresses of hair that hide her vaginal area. Sometimes the former sprout at an awkward angle from the Tree of Life itself, in a manner that is slightly unorthodox and at odds with the text of Scripture, which specifies that the "aprons" they sewed together were made from the leaves of a fig tree.⁴⁷ Others resemble

46 BM, 1938, 0314.109.CR (charger, 1648). See Dawson, *English and Irish Delftware*, 96-97.

47 See FM, C. 1438-1928 (charger, unidentified London pottery, c. 1680-1690); C. 1411-1928 (charger, unidentified London pottery, c. 1660-1680); C. 1412-1928 (charger, unidentified London pottery, c. 1670-1690); C. 182-1932 (charger, unidentified London pottery, c. 1670-1690);

paddles, palms, three-leaf clovers, and even makeshift breeches and tutus (Fig. 6).⁴⁸ The artistic dilemma of depicting full frontal nudity may account for these features, but in a climate in which speculation about precisely when Adam and Eve had become aware of their nakedness was rife it seems likely that they were intended to signify their postlapsarian condition. Together with the foliage the couple employed as a first feeble attempt at clothing, their state of flagrant undress is an uncomfortable reminder of the enduring consequences of the fact that the first man and woman had succumbed to Satan. Seeing these figures uncovered was a sign of the disgrace by which all human beings were contaminated and a fillip to contrition. It was a token of their lost innocence.

It is worth commenting that the subject matter of this biblical story provided an excuse for depicting figures that in other contexts could have appeared rather erotic.⁴⁹ Might they have served to titillate as well as to teach lessons regarding the dangers of fornication and gluttony? The sensations of temptation they provoked underlined the connections between an excessive desire for food and immoderate indulgence in sexual intercourse.⁵⁰ These are pieces of Protestant pottery that were not entirely free of moral ambiguity. They challenge our presuppositions about what is ethically improving. We need to see them in relation to recent reassessments of the nexus between eating and sex.⁵¹ In her study of aphrodisiacs Jennifer Evans has demonstrated that enjoyment of the conjugal act was regarded as compatible with the divine duty of procreation and that consuming certain foods was a remedy and response to problems in the realm of fertility and reproduction. People ate mustard, parsnips,

C. 1627-1928 (charger, Brislington pottery, Bristol, c. 1680-1700); C. 1612-1928 (charger, Brislington pottery, Bristol, c. 1705-1720); C. 1616-1928 (charger, Norfolk House pottery, c. 1705-1720); C. 1614-1928 (charger, Norfolk House pottery, c. 1702-1720); C. 1615-1928 (charger, Norfolk House pottery, c. 1705-1720); C. 1617-1928 (charger, Norfolk House pottery, c. 1705-1730); C. 1613-1928 (charger, Norfolk House pottery, c. 1705-1730). This common form of visual heterodoxy appears to be a result of the simplification of the Durer print, in which the leaf grows from a second tree to the left of Adam.

48 See FM, C. 1622-1928 (charger, Brislington pottery, Bristol, c. 1680-1700); C. 1618-1928 (charger, unidentified Bristol pottery, c. 1725-1735); C. 1629-1928 (charger, unidentified Bristol pottery, c. 1720-1740); C. 1623-1928 (charger, Limekiln Lane pottery, c. 1735-1745); C. 1621-1928 (charger, Limekiln Lane pottery, c. 1730-1740); C. 1619-1928 (charger, Norfolk House pottery, Lambeth [?], c. 1705-1730).

49 See the similar observations in Hamling, *Decorating the "Godly" Household*, 135; Victoria Avery, Melissa Calaresu and Mary Laven eds., *Treasured Possessions: From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (London, 2015), 244.

50 For taste as "sensual portal" to lust, see Juliann Vitullo, "Taste and Temptation in Early Modern Italy," *The Senses and Society*, 5 (2010): 106-118, esp. 107.

51 For a thought-provoking discussion, see Elspeth Probyn, *Carnal Appetites: Food, Sex, Identities* (London, 2000), esp. 59-77.

FIGURE 6 Adam and Eve charger, Brislington pottery, Bristol, c. 1725-1735: © The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, C. 1618-1928.

artichokes, oysters, and other items in order to provoke lust, but also to offset the difficulties they experienced in carrying out God's will and conceiving children. Sensual pleasure was medicinal and therapeutic.⁵²

⁵² Jennifer Evans, *Aphrodisiacs, Fertility and Medicine in Early Modern England* (London, 2014), esp. 87-130.

FIGURE 7 Fecundity dish, Pickleherring pottery, 1638: © The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, C. 1398-1928.

In this respect, Adam and Eve plates have something in common with the class of dishes bearing Italianate figures emblematic of fecundity (Fig. 7).⁵³ Derived from a French design, these too were popular marriage gifts which embodied the values of a society in which engendering many children was regarded as a mark of godliness. Heaped with the fruits of Mother Nature and the Lord's Creation for a domestic feast, these too served as symbols of God's magnanimity and mercy and reminders of the need to give thanks for the blessings he bestowed in the guise of ample food and plentiful offspring. They were celebrations of healthy marital sexuality.

Such objects also reinforce revisionist work that is correcting lingering assumptions about the Reformation as an enemy of the senses. Revising the inherited picture of Protestantism as an austere, abstract, and bibliocentric

53 For examples, see FM, C. 1398-1928 (dish, Pickleherring pottery, 1638); C. 1410-1928 (dish, Pickleherring pottery, c. 1650-1665); C. 1434-1928 (dish, Southwark, 1675); BM, 1938, 0519.1 (dish, London, c. 1640); BM, 1855, 1201.115 (dish, Southwark, 1659). The final item, dating from 1659, is inscribed C/IE, and may have been made to mark the marriage of John and Elizabeth Campion at St Peter le Poor in Aldgate that year: Dawson, *English and Irish Delftware*, 116-117.

religion, Matthew Milner, Alec Ryrie, and others have underlined its affective qualities in both theory and practice.⁵⁴ Eating the word of God was more than a figure or metaphor; it was a description of the intense interior and sensory experiences vouchsafed to true believers. The arts of tasting, smelling and touching played a critical part in reformed piety alongside seeing and hearing. Conventional polarities that position sensuality in opposition to spirituality similarly need rethinking. By stimulating forbidden feelings, might domestic objects decorated with these iconographies have helped Protestants to confront and discipline their bodily appetites? In short, the moral ambivalence of Adam and Eve chargers may have been integral to their function.

More speculatively, acknowledging the multivalency of such artifacts invites their comparison with seventeenth-century ceramics that sit elsewhere on the spectrum between edification and entertainment, utility and ornamentation. Probably made in the 1640s, the sauce boat reproduced in Fig. 8 takes the shape of a bath.⁵⁵ Inside it reclines a nymph or Pomona, holding a cornucopia of fruit in her right arm and an ewer from which water flows to create a pool around her feet. This colorful vessel mimics the humorous tableware created by the French potter Bernard Palissy or one of his followers, including the Gondola Cup, at the bottom of which Bacchus and Ceres lie clasped together as lovers.⁵⁶ Seeing the naked figure revealed as the contents were drunk or poured out must have been a source of delight. The tactility of this object adds a further layer of pleasure and provocation. In this case too titillation may have been mingled with disapproval. The frisson such items created was akin to that stimulated by tankards and mugs that bore risqué inscriptions such as “DRINKE: UP YOUR DRINKE/ & SEE MY CONNY” and were painted with a rabbit (or coney) inside. Here the play on words revolves around the colloquial term for the vagina or vulva, which was itself widely used to refer to sexual intercourse.⁵⁷

In the end, our instinct to contrast didactic pots with ostensibly decadent ones such as these may tell us more about our inherited values than it does about early modern priorities. It may attest, paradoxically, both to the lingering

54 Matthew Milner, *The Senses and the English Reformation* (Farnham, 2011); Wietse de Boer and Christine Göttler, ed., *Religion and the Senses in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden, 2013); Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, part I, in *Sensing the Sacred in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, ed. Robin MacDonald, Emilie K. M. Murphy, and Elizabeth Swann (London, 2018).

55 FM, C. 1420-1928 (sauce boat, unidentified Southwark pottery, c. 1640-1650). See the very similar “Gondola” cup in the V&A: C.2310-1910 (Fontainebleau, c. 1620-1625).

56 See Frank Britton, “Bernard Palissy and London Delftware,” *English Ceramic Circle Transactions*, 14, part 2 (1991): 169-176; Robin Hildyard, *European Ceramics* (London, 1999), 25.

57 Dawson, *English and Irish Delftware*, 112.

FIGURE 8 Sauce boat, unidentified Southwark pottery, c. 1640-1650: © The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, C.1420-1928.

legacy of puritanism and to the persistence of misguided assumptions about the incompatibility of sensuality and scripturalism. If we set aside the stereotypes of prurience and asceticism that still cling to Protestantism like barnacles and recognize the capacity of its adherents to reconcile earthly pleasures

with their religious convictions, we may reach a deeper understanding of the culture of food.⁵⁸ We may learn more the ways in which, both as concept and thing, it “constantly shifts registers: from the sacred to the everyday, from metaphor to materiality,” and from the mundane to the cosmological, and back again.⁵⁹ As this article has endeavored to demonstrate, Adam and Eve chargers had the potential to operate as forms of embodied Protestant theology. In the domain of the godly household, they could serve as a touchstone for the reformed teachings about sin and salvation, rebellion and redemption that suffused the society by which they were created and used. They underscore the observation that in early modern England temptation was culinary and sexual at the same time.

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58 See the recent work of Lyndal Roper, *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet* (London, 2016), esp. 273–306, and Susan Karant-Nunn, “The Mitigated Fall of Humankind: Martin Luther’s Reconciliation with the Body,” in *Cultures of Lutheranism: Reformation Repertoires in Early Modern Germany*, ed. Kat Hill, Past and Present Supplement 12 (2017), 51–66.

59 Probyn, *Eating Sex*, 63; Philip P. Arnold, “Religious Dimensions of Food: An Introduction,” *Journal of Ritual Studies* 14 (2000): 4–5.