By Sara Pennell

As some of you may already be aware, I and another contributor to this blog, Michelle DiMeco, have finally seen the publication of the volume *Reading and Writing Recipe Books, 1550-1800* (MUP) in August 2013, almost five years to the day that the inspiring conference on which it is based (and which some of you also attended), took place at the University of Warwick.

Our intention in putting together a collection of essays about the nature of research into early modern, English-language recipe writing, collecting and publishing, was always about enabling a survey of approaches, rather than seeking to co-edit the *dernier cri* in ‘recipe book studies’ (of which more below). That is why we have contributions from fields as different as historical linguistics, historical and experiential archaeology and lived religion, as well as from historians of natural philosophy, medicine and health, food and cuisine, and literary history.

What still impresses me about the range of approaches on display in the collection is just that: the range. While one contributor might use a Hannah Woolley text in this way, another gloss a recipe for a glister just so, and a third unpick the poetic resonances of the recipe form, the possibilities of reading recipes differently, so differently, are wholly manifest across the nearly 300 pages. It bears out the suggestive call to arms by Susan Leonardi in 1989, that recipes have an active cultural relationship with the ‘reading, writing mind’ that we cannot leave to one side when we study them, any more than when we use them.
As readers, you will no doubt curse Michelle and I for our omissions, or engage critically with other contributors’ takes on manuscripts and publications upon which you may have very different views. But what we hope you will engage with most in the collection, is the act of collection: our desire to lay out a shop-stall for the validation of these texts as not simply about ‘who ate what when’ (or what might have treated which condition when) or about enlarging the ‘canon’ of women’s literary participation. Recipes as components of aesthetic trends, recipes as poesie, recipes as life-writing, recipes as routes into domestic religiosity, recipes as processual tools in materialising the ephemeral (kitchen or dining) table, recipes as tokens of regional and individual engagement with prevailing therapeutic, nosological and pharmaceutical knowledges – these are just some of the roles of recipes in early modern Anglophone society, but by no means the only ones.

Although the book is entitled Reading and Writing Recipe Books (which is, we admit, an imperfect title to capture what we think the collection covers), does it represent a clarion call to scholars to recognise the field of ‘recipe book studies’? This co-editor, speaking entirely for herself, is still not convinced that the recipe collection can bear such a weight of genre expectation, and the very process of putting this edited volume together has further cemented that belief. If we go looking for shared characteristics across texts, whether print or manuscript (and surely shared characteristics is what defines a genre), that coherence is difficult to elucidate and illuminate. The recipe collection, as the linguistic contribution to the volume examines, is but a ‘discourse colony’, a gathering of separate recipe text components that can, without disturbing collective meaning or coherence, be rejigged any which way (as many, many instances of borrowings, sharings and outright plagiarism in early modern recipe collections attest). If the components that help to produce those shared characteristics can be so comprehensively reshuffled (and indeed removed), aren’t their shared, generic qualities illusory? Dismantling the recipe collection is formally and methodologically easier than we might first think, when faced with the seemingly enduring leather covers, brass clasps and thick leaves of a hefty MS or a cared-for research library copy of Hannah Glasse (recipe plagiariser par excellence, let us not forget). This publishers and printers of recipe collections also knew and exploited, in their reconfigurations and reconstitutions of recipes in new collections,
new editions, new formats (a process beautifully examined in a chapter on Hannah Woolley in our collection).

What then of ‘recipe studies’? This brings us back to the component text as the unit of analysis. As many previous entries in this blog ably demonstrate, the shape, contents and idiosyncracies of the individual recipe – as in Rebecca Laroche’s and Michelle DiMeo’s work on recipes for oil of swallows, or Sally Osborn’s forthcoming research on diet drinks receipts — especially when tracked across time and space, can reveal more about the contexts of knowledge production, use and circulation, than analysis of whole collections, wherein it is the processes of knowledge circulation and use which have perhaps dominated recipe scholarship to date. Even a single recipe text (Ann Fanshawe’s chocolate, for example) can take us far beyond the recipe collection in which it sits, to the royal courts of Madrid and Lisbon. The recipe text – both as text and as material object — can take us closer, perhaps, to the why of the knowledge formation and circulation that they encode, while the collection is the (documentary and material) tool for understanding the how.

I would like to thank my co-editor, Michelle DiMeo for her infinite patience and support throughout the past five years (and more), from conference inception to dogged pursuit of the publisher and myself in the final months; and our no less patient contributors (you know who you are!), whose excellent contributions I urge you all to read. The book is now available from Manchester University Press, so please order one for your libraries!


3. Margaret J.M. Ezell, 'Cooking the books, or, the three faces of Hannah Woolley', pp. 159-78.
Congratulations! I’m hoping to get it in the mail soon.

Thanks so much, Sara! I couldn’t have said it better myself.

It seems like so long ago that we sent off that final manuscript to MUP, and so much has happened in historical recipe studies since then. In particular, since our conference five years ago, there seems to be a greater interest in using recipes (and recipe books) in literature and history. I’ve recently heard people saying things like “everyone is doing recipes these days”, which is certainly not how we felt in 2007 when we were putting together the CFP for that Warwick Uni conference. Further, the variety of topics and methodologies employed by contributors to this blog never ceases to amaze me. Really, our collection is truly just one tiny cross-section of the scholarly possibilities afforded by these rich texts. I like thinking about the essay collection as being somewhat genre-defying and eclectic much like early modern recipe books themselves!

Thank you, Sara, for expressing your gratitude, but really it is I who should be thanking you! I happened to move countries right when the final manuscript was due, and then I moved to a new state when the proofs were due! I will miss our nights discussing the contributors’ essays over a drink somewhere near Kings Cross. And thanks to all of our talented, punctual, and patient contributors. In the US, the book is being distributed by Palgrave Macmillan.

Pingback: Food Links, 11.09.2013 | Tangerine and Cinnamon

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**Edit the Cookbook.**

The format of each recipe should be consistent, as they are in professional cookbooks, and editors need to ensure the recipes are written clearly so they make sense to the reader. All the other text should be grammatically correct and error free.

You might want professional proofreading help.

**Proofread the Entire Book.**

Recipes have their own proofreading challenges, and proofreading, in general, takes a precise eye. If your group has a budget, again, consider hiring freelance editorial help.

**Create the Index.**