

Jennifer Evans. *Aphrodisiacs, Fertility and Medicine in Early Modern England*. Suffolk and Rochester: Boydell Press, 2014. xvi + 257 pp. \$90.00. Review by CELESTE CHAMBERLAND, ROOSEVELT UNIVERSITY.

As the microcosm of the larger social order in early modern England, the family functioned as a template of stability, a model of normative gender roles, and the foundation of the household economy. As a result, the ability to procreate and protect the legacy of familial patrimony was of great concern to early modern people. In response to prevailing anxieties about infertility, medical writers provided a host of solutions designed to generate lust and ensure conception. As Jennifer Evans contends in *Aphrodisiacs, Fertility, and Medicine in Early Modern England*, frequent references to aphrodisiacs in sixteenth- through eighteenth-century English medical texts not only demonstrate that early modern people understood that lust and procreation were intricately intertwined, but that the desire to enhance fertility was fairly commonplace. By adopting an analytical approach that explores the connections between gender, medical theory, and constructions of normative sexuality, Evans' engaging monograph contributes an important new dimension to existing scholarship in early modern medical history. Whereas many scholars have heretofore dismissed early modern concerns with sexual desire and fertility as peripheral, Evans contends that such issues were shared by a relatively broad segment of the population and that attitudes toward fertility and sexual desire shed much light on the historically specific ways in which gendered bodies and norms of sexual health were constructed. In seeking to expand the conversation about the relationship between context and medical knowledge, Evans urges readers to consider the ways in which norms of reproductive health and sexuality function in culturally specific ways. Rather than assessing early modern aphrodisiacs through the lens of the modern sexual body in which desire and fertility represent distinct concerns, Evans contends that the socially complex ways in which early modern aphrodisiacs functioned can only be fully understood if the intersection of lust and reproduction in Tudor-Stuart England is recognized.

Based on an analysis of extensive source materials, including domestic medical receipt books, handbill advertisements, ballads,

newspapers, and a vast array of printed medical treatises, *Aphrodisiacs, Fertility and Medicine* explores the intersections of humoral medical theory, theological perspectives on marriage, and popular literature from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. Over the course of this time span, Evans' monograph demonstrates that the market for popular and elite aphrodisiacs remained fairly consistent. The flourishing early modern book trade, moreover, created an informed populace that facilitated the widespread dissemination of knowledge about fertility and reproductive health. As a result, until the end of the eighteenth century, aphrodisiacs were fairly common staples of the early modern diet that were regularly grown in gardens and purchased at the market. Evans points out, for example, that based on the humoral association between foods that ostensibly produced heat in the body and sexual desire, frequently prescribed aphrodisiacs included food as common as warm meat, cress, and cinnamon (90). By warming the body, medical writers, such as Jacob Rueff, argued that such remedies would promote lust and increase the chance of conception.

Reflecting broader social anxieties about depopulation, medical and theological attitudes toward barrenness and impotence stressed the importance of enhancing fertility and maintaining reproductive health. Due to the widespread nature of such concerns, medical theorists and practitioners viewed aphrodisiacs and medicines prescribed to enhance fertility as commonplace components of the early modern pharmacopeia. According to Evans, aphrodisiacs belong within the larger taxonomy of early modern medicine, alongside other ordinary medicaments, such as cardiac remedies and cephalic treatments. She contends that medical writers applied the same logic of humoral theory to stimulating sexual pleasure that they applied to other conditions. For that reason, lust and sexual desire were far from taboo, but rather central components of reproductive health within the framework of marriage.

Although the central argument of Evans' study—that lust and fertility were intertwined in the mental and medical landscape of early modern Europe—becomes somewhat repetitive over the course of her analysis, some of the book's related sub-arguments provide important new insight into the connections between ideas of reproductive health and historical constructions of gender. One of the more intriguing

sections of Evans' study, for example, lies in her astute analysis of the development of gendered distinctions in the language used to describe sexual deficiencies and infertility. According to Evans, the development of gender-specific language reflected the growing tendency of anatomists and medical writers to reject the one-sex model that traditionally depicted women's bodies as imperfect variations of the male body. In texts such as John Ball's *The Female Physician* and Nicholas Venette's *Conjugal Love Reveal'd*, for example, there is a clear tendency to ascribe the category of impotence to men and barrenness to women. However, as Evans points out, this dichotomy is somewhat paradoxical, because although male and female procreative roles were clearly delineated, the use of aphrodisiacs was not inherently sexed.

In an era of high infant mortality, reproductive health and anxieties about fertility were exceptionally common. As Jennifer Evans has skillfully asserted, a deeper analysis of the ways in which medical writers and popular practitioners sought to mitigate such concerns yields important insight into the construction of gendered bodies, attitudes toward the family, and medical theory in early modern England. Inasmuch as Evans' study dovetails effectively with existing scholarship on the culturally-specific elements of early modern medicine, it will undoubtedly be of great interest to those seeking to broaden their knowledge and understanding of the emergence of modern attitudes toward sexuality and the ways in which the spread of Cartesian rationalism intersected with and ultimately dismantled the early modern association between lust and procreation.

Sarah F. Williams. *Damnably Practises: Witches, Dangerous Women, and Music in Seventeenth-Century English Broadside Ballads*. Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015. xii + 225 pp. + 12 illus. \$109.95. Review by JULIE D. CAMPBELL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY.

In this examination of ballads focused on witchcraft and female malfeasance, Williams reminds her readers that most English citizens saw, sang, or heard ballads on a daily basis and that this common experience "straddled oral and literate culture, the material and the