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**Christopher E. Forth**, *Fat: A Cultural History of the Stuff of Life* (London: Reaktion Books, 2019), pp. 360, £25, hardback, ISBN: 9781789140620.

What is it about fat that makes people not only disapprove of it, but loathe and disdain it? What makes so many – fat and not-fat alike – experience a visceral disgust toward fat bodies? This question about the relationship between disgust and fatness drives Christopher E. Forth's ambitious new cultural history. Moving all the way from the ancient world to modern times, *Fat: A Cultural History of the Stuff of Life*, rejects the popular narrative that we have moved from an appreciation of fat to an intolerance of it. Instead, he argues that the history of fat in the West is better understood as a narrative of ambivalence and distrust. That ambivalence ultimately gave way to our contemporary state: a general intolerance of fat heightened by our emotional responses to the subject.

Forth's book is not the first cultural history of fatness in the West. Sander L. Gilman and Peter N. Sterns have both tackled the topic with big questions about the ways in which our cultural context has shaped the meanings inscribed on the fat body. Forth builds on this existing scholarship to contribute something wholly new to the literature. Through his investment in the history of emotions, his fascination with the literal substance of fat, and the extraordinary temporal and geographic scope of the book, Forth produces something quite unique.

*Fat* promises to 'think with' fat, which the author means unusually literally. Forth discusses lipids in terms of nutrition, the sensual pleasure they provide, and their value as a heat source. A central argument of the book is how the 'intriguingly problematic substance' of fat has actually provided some of the origins of stereotypes and opinions about fat. The unctuousness of fat, its instability and softness, its slowness, its ability to contaminate, might be tied to the ways in which we so deeply experience emotion about fatness. In these ways, Forth reasons, fat itself has shaped our culture. Rather than taking the more familiar tack that our ideas about fat are a product of culture, he thinks through the ways that ideas might flow from the other direction as well, with cultural ideas about fat being shaped by material, biological fat.

Forth's emphasis on this materiality complements his interest in the emotional history of disgust. He traces anxieties about death and putrefaction to unease about grease and fat, for instance. This disgust could be tempered by the many benefits of fats, from its nutritional value to its relation to luxury to beliefs about its fertility-boosting properties. As Westerners moved past the 'agricultural imagination' and into modernity, however, the disgust firmly outweighed ideas about fat as useful. 'Modernity did not invent stereotypes about fat people,' Forth argues, 'but it surely sharpened them' (p. 179). While he is attuned to early medical discussions of fat from Hippocrates to Maimonides, it was only in the early modern period, he posits, that a medicalisation of fat became a primary way of understanding it.

The author explains this transition not only through urbanisation and socio-economic changes, but also with an argument on race and empire. Since the Ancient Romans, he argues, Westerners have imagined the fat body as the other body. Greeks and Romans adopted a bodily ideal that rejected softness, and Forth argues that this rejection was in part based on a repudiation of 'Asiatic' cultures. The construction of ideas about fatness in relation to the non-Western other intensified as Western empires grew. A growing European disgust with all things dirty infused a growing disgust for fatness as well. Western discourses on fatness tied it to a lack of civilisation and a casting of other cultures as savage and primitive. It was not that Westerners did not also become fat, of course, but

that their 'civilised' cultures so uniformly disapproved of it. Individual white people could become overweight because of heredity or a lack of willpower, but, whatever the reason, it was frowned upon. This contrasted with a colonialist belief that Africans and Indians (among others) were not adequately disgusted by fat and might even still make medicinal use of it or find it sexually appealing.

Forth uses an extraordinary variety of sources, from ancient artefacts to eighteenth-century political cartoons and paintings, and from colonial travelogues to weight loss advice books from the early twentieth century. While one of the greatest strengths of *Fat* is its bold scope, it can occasionally be frustrating. The text moves quickly in order to cover so much ground, and so the documents that Forth highlights are often asked to stand in for decades, if not centuries, of thinking about fat.

In excavating this story of how we have come to modern stereotypes about fatness, the work still to be done is clear. Forth opens up the possibility for that future research with this fascinating and original take on the evolving meanings of fatness in European history that complicates both popular and historical assumptions.

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**María Jesús Santesmases**, *The Circulation of Penicillin in Spain: Health, Wealth and Authority* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. xi + 239, €78, ebook, ISBN: 9783319697185.

María Jesús Santesmases' book proposes a fascinating journey in which she analyses the circulation of penicillin in Spain during the years of the Franco dictatorship and the transition to democracy. This circulation is understood as a transit of penicillin-related knowledge and practices across geographic, political, social, economic, cultural and gender permeable borders. The journey begins after the Civil War (1936–9), when Spain was mired in the worst years of the dictatorship, isolated internationally, and with a population hungry and beset by infectious diseases. The study ends in the years after the death of the dictator, when the country made its transition to democracy. In the forties, penicillin was the great hope with a huge symbolic burden. In the seventies and eighties, the main problem was the resistance to antibiotics that generated a series of regulations which had until then been postponed.

María Jesús Santesmases, a researcher at the Institute of Philosophy of the Higher Council for Scientific Research in Madrid, is especially well equipped to undertake this study. She has a deep knowledge of the current historiography of science. She is skilled in handling all types of sources: print, daily press, judicial archives, industry archives, private archives, oral and iconographic sources. She has years of research experience into the constitution of biomedicine, both internationally and in Spain. She has published extensively from a gender perspective. And last, but not least, her background in chemistry provides a nuanced understanding of the more technical aspects of antibiotics and of the process of constitution of cell and molecular biology.

The book is organised in eight chapters and some brief final reflections. The first chapter explores the political and material context of Spain during the forties under a harsh and bloody dictatorship and with an impoverished and vulnerable population. Drawing on the relevant historiography, it also summarises the first stages of the development of