and a brief mention of typhus, the diseases which contributed to mortality crises, and to the different age-specific mortality of succeeding years, remain unexplored. Yet the question of epidemic disease deserves to be addressed directly, for the early modern period was clearly one in which important changes were occurring in the ecology of the infectious diseases in England. One hundred years ago Creighton detected a transition in the causes of English mortality as taking place somewhere around the turn of the sixteenth century. He observed that “it looks as if the conditions of population, intricate and obscure as they must be confessed to be, were somehow determining what the reigning infectious maladies with their special age-incidence should be.” As Walter and Schofield are aware, the “conditions of population” consist in far more than nutritional status and the apparent physical results of dearth on the human frame; social behavior, social dislocation in times of crisis, and the epidemiology of the different infectious diseases all have a part to play (19–21).

Historical epidemiology can contribute significant new perspectives to the problems with which this book is concerned, and it is a pity that nothing of this approach appears in it. Now that the traditional English equation of famine with starvation has been radically questioned, the time has come when mortality crises should be examined more closely in terms of human behavior and disease ecology—from the perspective of disease, as well as from that of famine.4

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_Bread of Dreams: Food and Fantasy in Early Modern Europe._ By Piero Camporesi. Translated by David Gentilcore (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989) 212 pp. $27.50

If most historians of popular culture romanticize their subject, this author is definitely swimming against the current. Camporesi, a literary scholar known for his innovative studies of popular poetry and the literature of crime and vagabondage in early modern Italy, has administered a severe corrective to the Bakhtinian vision of popular culture as

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3 Charles Creighton, _A History of Epidemics_ (Cambridge, 1894), II, 18.
a celebration of life and laughter in the face of the humorless pieties of “official” culture.¹

*Bread of Dreams*, originally published in 1980, is merely one among a series of studies focusing on the material conditions of lower-class existence during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries.² Its theme is hunger, and the ways in which persistent near-starvation, along with the narcosis produced by many bread substitutes, nourished a teeming world of fantasies, dreams, and nightmares. Drawing upon a remarkably wide variety of sources, including medical texts and treatises on magical remedies and arcane “secrets,” Camporesi paints a fascinating if repulsive portrait of an underworld existence near or below the level of subsistence.

This book has much to recommend it. To call Camporesi an “imaginative” historian would be an understatement. Moreover, he accompanies his forays into the underside of early modern consciousness with shrewd observations and a sure instinct for telling details. For example, he emphasizes the diverse ways in which patricians and plebs, despite the gaps in their terms of existence, shared much of their cultural experience, especially regarding questions of cosmology and physiology. This viewpoint comes as a welcome corrective to depictions of the relations between high and low cultures as distant and unilaterally favoring the hegemony of the elite. Finally, his repeated attacks against traditional history and literary criticism for ignoring the “tough existential reality” of the early modern era and the fascinating texts which it engendered serve to call attention to the narrowness of the evidential base from which most of our knowledge of the past derives (63).

One can hardly quibble with Camporesi’s insistence on the harsh realities of early modern life on the margin, but the general conclusions that he draws are much more questionable. At times it seems that the “culture of poverty” debates of an earlier generation have been transferred to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—especially when one reads that the inhabitants of this bleak house were paralyzed by a dimly acute “sense of impotence in the governing . . . of destiny,” or that popular riots were “convulsive jerks of an epileptic kind . . . existing as they did outside of time and space” (29, 127). Is it equally true that early modern peasants lived in isolation from nearby cities, enclosed in their own archaic, magic universe (86)?

Questions of this sort arise in part thanks to Camporesi’s penchant for overstatement. His approach is deliberately calculated to imitate the baroque style of his sources—hence the book’s repetitiveness and internal inconsistencies, carelessness in details, and recourse to the tactic of over-

whelming readers by piling on example after example, with scant regard for context or chronology. More importantly, Camporesi’s exclusive reliance on formal texts leads him to ignore many of the findings of more recent social history, such as Levi’s analyses of alternative, popular forms of “rationality,” which suggest that many early modern peasants and workers did not remain passive in the face of harsh material realities, but rather devised complex strategies to counter or minimize their effects.3

A more interdisciplinary approach, one which integrated more fully the literary texts with social history, would have produced a more balanced study. However, doing so was not the author’s intent. Rather, in Bread of Dreams Camporesi has made a provocative statement for a different sort of history, rendered literally of flesh and blood, and far removed from the bland caution of traditional academic monographs. Some readers will appreciate this book as a fascinating curio cabinet of out-of-the-way texts. Others—the majority, one suspects—will reject it as a mishmash of lurid tales, containing far more fantasy than food.

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The Tools of War, a collection of nine essays and an afterword by Michael Howard, is dedicated to the proposition that understanding ideas and institutions is as important as understanding technology in interpreting Western military affairs in the period between 1445 and 1871. But, as the goal was to assemble a team of gifted historians to produce virtuoso performances, the authors were not assigned specific subjects or prescribed methodologies. The rationale for setting the chronological limits was based on the requirement that each essay should deal with a period after the introduction of firearms but before the industrial revolution transformed armed conflict. As treated here, such conflicts as the Crimean War, the American Civil War, and the Franco-Prussian War do not lie entirely on the side of modernity (vii-viii).

In general, the authors’ efforts are well-researched in terms of traditional historical standards, although it is difficult to think of them as products of an “interdisciplinary approach,” which is the concern of this journal. Of methodology in this work, it may be fairly said that it is eclectic, but, as a reviewer who has little faith in “general lessons” on how to approach historical problems, I find this feature no great draw-