

Co-Winners of the 2008 PCCBS Book Prize

Deborah Harkness, *The Jewel House: Elizabethan London and the Scientific Revolution* (Yale, 2008)

The Jewel House is a fascinating ethnography of the experimental culture that made late-sixteenth-century London one of the key sites for the production of what Deborah Harkness calls “vernacular science.” Nuanced in argument, imaginative in its use of fragmentary sources, and sensitive to the limitations on how much we can know about the lived experience of early modern people, her book re-animates another kind of “world we have lost.” It is on the “natural knowledge” sought by merchants and midwives, by alchemists and instrument-makers, that Harkness’s work concentrates on. And it is among the boisterous folk of the City of London, rather than among the placid dons of Oxford and Cambridge, that the story unfolds. Who ought to be licensed to practice medicine? Of what should mathematical literacy consist? How did royal patrons and venture capitalists shape technological innovation? The answers to these and related questions create a narrative that is at once discontinuous and ingenious. As Professor Harkness puts it, “Londoners collected specimens, planted gardens, made medicines, cut open bodies...and dug into nature with wild enthusiasm.” The meanings of such messy exuberance emerge with jewel-like brilliance here.

James Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History* (Belknap Press, 2007)

In *Hunger: A Modern History*, James Vernon offers a deeply humane account of how dearth--that most material of conditions--was, to a large degree, the work of culture. It is a humane book because it shows, with piercing clarity, that the ways in which hunger was understood shaped who actually experienced it. Vernon poses two deceptively simple questions. First, how has the meaning of hunger changed over time in Britain? And second, what were the causes and consequences of those changes? The answers to these questions prove to be far from simple, of course. Starting with the demise of a neo-Malthusian view of hunger before World War One, Vernon moves on to examine how the linked emergence of nutritional science, social welfare provision, and shifting notions of citizenship created a demand for the “governance” of hunger. What this compelling study does, then, is to delineate a moral economy of the hungry in ways that say nearly as much about famine in today’s Darfur as about the politics of want in Depression-era Jarrow.