

# Wissenschaftliches Seminar Online

*William Shakespeare*



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Shakespearean Foodways:  
Feasting, Fasting, Playing and Digesting

*Wissenschaftliches Seminar Online* 6 (2008)

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# INTRODUCTION

BY

SUSANNE RUPP AND CHRISTINA WALD

Food offers powerful ways to make and communicate cultural meanings. As social anthropologists have long established, cooking, eating, drinking and consumption define groups, explore identities, celebrate social cohesion, highlight conflicts and generally perform rites and acts of great significance. This also holds true for the early modern stage. There are many ways in which Shakespearean theatre relates to eating culture. Figures of festive excess like Falstaff or Sir Toby, on-stage scenes of banqueting and feasting as in *Timon of Athens*, *Titus Andronicus* or *The Winter's Tale*, secret arts of cooking as presented with the witches' cauldron in *Macbeth* or dietary rules as discussed in *The Merchant of Venice*: all these demonstrate the centrality of foodways and define the cultural field also for theatrical performance in Shakespearean England. Above all, body issues—such as gender, sex, desire, health and healing—can be studied in this field because the early modern concept of the humoral body sees all alimentary behaviour in moral and political categories. How, then, is Shakespearean theatre situated in the seasonal contrast between everyday and festive culture? How do changing diets in this period negotiate modes of carnivalization and normalization in society? How are fundamental questions of belief and faith, such as the Eucharist debate, involved in food rites and digestive symbolism as performed in texts like *Hamlet*? How can we trace the impact of New World encounters on domestic scenes and diets, which, in the course of the colonial project, were just beginning to bring home figures and fantasies of alterity, as in anxieties of cannibalistic eating? Which role do scenarios of eating and digestion play in the political discourse on the body politic? Which impact does the choice of genre have on the theatrical representation of eating? And how are all these issues re-considered, re-interpreted and newly re-created in specific stage or screen productions, adaptations, versions or subversions of Shakespearean plays?

The contributions to this volume address these questions. They offer case studies of actual scenes of eating as well as metaphorical references to feeding in four Shakespeare plays and connect them to early modern medical, legal, (anti-)theatrical, and religious discourses. Both Christian Frobenius' and Birgit Walkenhorst's contributions engage with the cannibalistic banquet scene in *Titus Andronicus*. While Frobenius discusses this culmination of Titus' revenge strategy (as adapted from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Seneca's *Thyestes*) in the context of competing early modern legal practices and concepts of justice, Walkenhorst links *Titus Andronicus* to the Eucharist debate instigated by the Reformation and its preoccupation with the material versus spiritual consumption of Christ's body. Enno Ruge likewise examines religious aspects of food, arguing that Lucio's insinuation that Duke Vincentio consumed "mutton on Fridays" has not only sexual, but also political and metatheatrical connotations. Taking

her cue from William Rankins' trope 'drinking the wyne of forgetfulness', Isabel Karremann explores the ambiguous role which early modern pamphlets ascribed to the theatre as a site of either remembrance or (self-) forgetfulness. Looking at *Henry IV*, she inquires into the equally ambivalent effects which oblivion was imagined to have on early modern identities. The volume is completed by two more articles which offer complementary readings of the same play: With reference to modern medical discourses and witchcraft tracts, Joo Young Dittmann's examination of *Macbeth* traces the anxieties of a permeable self that is vulnerable to the (not only nourishing, but also potentially harmful) influences of food. Yuk Sunny Tien elucidates the significance of *Macbeth*'s banquet scene in both the Shakespearean text and in its adapted filmic version of *The Curse of the Golden Flower* (China, 2006).

# CANNIBAL PUNISHMENT: THE BANQUET SCENE IN *TITUS ANDRONICUS*

BY

CHRISTIAN FROBENIUS

## I. Introduction

*Titus Andronicus* has long been criticized for its depiction of horrors which climax in the cannibalistic banquet of the final scene. While critics throughout the centuries have been appalled by what seems to be an arbitrary, apparently senseless display of violence, recent interpretations point out that it is precisely this random violence which makes for the play's modernity.<sup>1</sup> Assuming, however, that it has significance beyond sensationalist display, I want to read the banquet scene in the context of early modern legal discourse.<sup>2</sup> In the following I will first briefly outline this discourse. Then I will relate the banquet scene to two literary pretexts, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Seneca's *Thyestes*,<sup>3</sup> in order to show how the motif of the cannibalistic banquet is used in *Titus Andronicus*. In my reading of the banquet scene itself I want to show that Titus turns a literary precedent into a legal precedent as justification for his revenge. This manner of justification seems to reflect the legal practice of Common law, whose practitioners sought to secure its predominance over English jurisdiction against competing legal principles in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>1</sup> An account of the harsh criticism the play encountered from Samuel Johnson to T. S. Eliot can be found in the introduction to Jonathan Bate's edition of *Titus Andronicus*: Jonathan Bate, "Introduction", in William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*. ed. by Jonathan Bate. The Arden Shakespeare (London: Thomson, 2003), 1–121, pp. 33–37. Daniel Kane sees an anticipation of Artaud's theatre of cruelty in *Titus Andronicus*. Cf. Daniel Kane, "The Vertue of Spectacle in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*", *Connotations*, 10, 1 (2000/2001), 1–17.

<sup>2</sup> The idea of relating legal discourse to *Titus Andronicus* has been brought forth several times, most recently in this essay: D. Callaghan, C. R. Kyle, "The Wilde Side of Justice in Early Modern England and *Titus Andronicus*", in Constance Jordan, Karen Cunningham, eds., *The Law in Shakespeare* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 38–57. Whereas that essay treats the implications of revenge as extra-legal 'wilde' justice in *Titus Andronicus*, I concentrate on the discourse on legal practice in early modern England. For the description of revenge as "a kinde of Wilde justice" cf. Francis Bacon's essay "Of Revenge" in e.g.: Sir Francis Bacon: *The Essayes or Counsels Civill and Morall*. ed. by Michael Kiernan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985). Quotation after: Constance Jordan, Karen Cunningham, eds., *The Law in Shakespeare*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> For source studies and discussion concerning the cannibalistic motif in *Titus Andronicus* cf. Howard Baker, *Induction to Tragedy* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1939), Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), and Bate (1995).

## II. Early Modern Legal Discourse: Common versus Natural Law

By the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the predominant but by no means exclusively administered law in England was Common law.<sup>4</sup> Its practitioners “focused narrowly on ‘native’, precedent-based law.”<sup>5</sup> The method of ruling upon precedent is the distinct feature of the legal practice of Common law, the origin of which is set to be in time immemorial.<sup>6</sup> The fiction of a law that had always already been there served to defend it against competing legal positions. Defenders of Common law upheld that

throughout all the foreign invasions of Britain, the English had always retained their fundamental cultural and legal identity. This legal chauvinism led the common lawyers to eschew ‘external’ legal foundations such as natural law or reason and to embrace the notion that English law could only be properly understood ‘internally’, on the basis of unique English custom and precedent.<sup>7</sup>

Common law was constructed as part of English identity. Sir John Davies states in his *Irish Reports* that it was “so framed and fitted to the nature and disposition of this people, as we may properly say it is connatural to the Nation, so as it cannot possibly be ruled by any other law.”<sup>8</sup> Any other law, especially positions of Natural law, was perceived by the established legal institutions as a continental, Catholic influence. They posed a threat to Common law and, by extension, to English identity. The threat of Natural law was twofold: On the one hand its use weakened the legal monopoly of Common law and on the other hand Natural law could be used as an instrument to challenge the rulings of Common law.<sup>9</sup> It is this basic quality of Natural law and its more universal and philosophical appeal that I concentrate on here: “[Natural law] is concerned with the problem of abstract justice and with the standards which should be applied not only to human law making but to human conduct generally.”<sup>10</sup>

Titus is in conflict with Natural law throughout the play. In the first scene of the play Tamora’s son Alarbus is ritually sacrificed. Pleading for him, Tamora accuses Titus of “cruel, irreligious piety” (1.1.133).<sup>11</sup> She denounces his decision as barbaric and

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<sup>4</sup> This account of early modern legal practice relies on the introductory chapter of: Brian C. Lockett, *Law and Empire in English Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> The idea of the immemoriality of the law was used by Sir Edward Coke, who belonged to the defenders of English Common law. *Ibid.*, p. 80 ff.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 81–82.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 145–146.

<sup>10</sup> George W. Keeton, *Shakespeare’s Legal and Political Background* (London: Pitman, 1967), p. 67.

<sup>11</sup> All quotations from *Titus Andronicus* are from: William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, ed. by Jonathan Bate, *The Arden Shakespeare* (London: Thomson Learning, 2003). Lines are indicated in brackets after the quotations.



unethical from a perspective of Natural law.<sup>12</sup> Also in this first scene Titus agrees to Saturninus' taking Lavinia as his wife, irrespective of the fact that she is engaged to Bassianus. Protesting, Marcus refers to Natural law: "*Suum cuique* is our Roman justice / The prince in justice seizeth but his own." (1.1.284–5).<sup>13</sup> The Latin tag meaning "to each his own"—a basic principle of Natural law—the twice used 'justice' and the legal term 'seize' for taking possession of property set the legal tone of this dispute that ends with Titus killing his son Mutius because he does not obey his father's decision. This instance shows that Titus values observance to Roman rule more than his children's life. It suggests furthermore that the stability of Roman tradition and precedent is deeply connected with the stability of Titus' identity.

### III. The Banquet Scene: Literary and Legal Contexts

It is in the Banquet scene that this valuation of precedent and tradition over the life of his family comes to a climax. On presenting the raped and maimed Lavinia to his guests, Titus asks Saturninus:

My lord the emperor, resolve me this:  
Was it well done of rash Virginius  
To slay his daughter with his own right hand,  
Because she was enforced, stained and deflowered? (5.3.35–38)

Titus is referring to a literary precedent here. It is a story told by Livy. The daughter of the centurion Virginius is threatened of being raped or, in other versions of the story, she has already been raped. In order to rescue her honour, Virginius kills her.<sup>14</sup> In Titus' use, however, the story becomes more than a literary precedent to his own 'real' story. It becomes a cue for action:<sup>15</sup> "A pattern, precedent, and lively warrant / For me, most wretched, to perform the like." (5.3.43–44) Although voicing regret—"me, most wretched"—, Titus acts on the "lively", i.e. striking, account of this "precedent" and "warrant"—both legal terms—when he kills his daughter. "To perform the like" is his principle, turning a literary precedent into a recipe for action, and at the same time "to perform the like" is the thought at the heart of precedential law. In a legal context of precedential law, Titus has made a technically just decision. Saturninus on the other

<sup>12</sup> It is in fact Lucius who demands Alarbus' sacrifice, but it is Titus who makes the decision. The implications on an early modern audience's perception of Lucius are discussed in Bate (2003), p. 15f. and, with an opposing view, in: Anthony Brian Taylor, "Lucius, the Severely Flawed Redeemer of *Titus Andronicus*", *Connotations* 6, 2 (1996/1997), 138–157.

<sup>13</sup> For the legal context of this dispute, especially the use of a maxim of natural law, cf. Andrew Hadfield, "'Suum cuique': Natural Law in *Titus Andronicus*", *I, i, 284*, *N & Q* 250 (2005), 195–196. Cf. also Bate (2003), p. 145, note on v. 284.

<sup>14</sup> Bate (2003), p. 266, note on v. 36.

<sup>15</sup> On Titus'—and Aaron's—use of literary precedents as pattern for acting in reality and the rhetorical methods they thereby employ cf. Nancy L. Christiansen, "Synecdoche, Tropic Violence, and Shakespeare's 'Imitatio' in *Titus Andronicus*", *Style* 34, 3 (2000), 350–379. Cf. also the chapter on 'The Art of Precedent' in Bate (1993).

hand reacts to Titus' deed by resorting to a stance of Natural law: "What hast thou done, unnatural and unkind?" (5.3.48). Titus, by following precedent, is working from within the Roman legal system. Yet Saturninus' reaction reveals that the code of civilization that Titus enacts in murdering his daughter is indistinguishable from arbitrary violence, which is ascribed to the 'barbaric' Goths. But Titus is disinterested in this overlap of Roman tradition and barbaric violence. When asked for the whereabouts of Chiron and Demetrius, Titus triumphantly reveals to the unsuspecting Tamora that she has just eaten her own children:

Why, there they are, both baked in this pie,  
Whereof their mother daintily hath fed,  
Eating the flesh that she herself hath bred.  
'Tis true, 'tis true, witness my knife's sharp point.

*He stabs the Empress. (5.3.59–62)*

Again Titus is resorting to literary precedent here, Ovid's tale of Philomel and Progne. He has announced this in the second scene of the fifth act when he is tormenting the bound and gagged Chiron and Demetrius by detailing his revenge to them: "For worse than Philomel you used my daughter, / And worse than Progne I will be revenged." (5.2.194–195) After his revelation Titus immediately kills Tamora, forestalling at least any verbal reaction. This surprising rashness leads to the question how the motif of the paedophagic banquet is treated in the Ovidian pretext.

#### IV. Shakespeare's and Titus' Source: Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book Six

In Ovid's tale, Tereus desires his wife Progne's sister Philomel. He rapes her and cuts out her tongue to prevent her from testifying against him. Yet Philomel is able to communicate the crime to her sister nevertheless. In cold anger Progne kills her and Tereus' son and cooks him for Tereus to eat. When Tereus, having "swallowed downe the selfe same flesh that of his bowles bred" (1.825) asks for his son, Progne replies: "the thing thou askest for, thou hast within" (1.829). Titus' more straightforward remark that Tamora is "eating the flesh that she herself hath bred" is an echo of Ovid in *Titus Andronicus*. Upon realizing that he has eaten his own child, Tereus resolves to kill his wife and her sister. Yet in the ensuing outrage all of the characters turn into birds preventing the deaths of Progne and Philomel that the reader has come to expect. The tragic catastrophe is simultaneously suspended and present—in its absence. The narrative focus shows Tereus and his metamorphosis into a lapwing, a bird recognized by the sword-like crest on its head. Since "all armed seemes his face" (1.850), the bird's physiognomy serves as a reminder of Tereus' murderous intention.<sup>16</sup> Thus, Tereus'

<sup>16</sup> In Arthur Golding's translation, Tereus' progress is thus translated: "The tyrant with a hideous noyse away the tables shoves, / And reeres the fiends from Hell. One while with yauning mouth he proves / To perbrake up his meate againe, and cast his bowels out. / Another while with wringing handes he weeping goes about. / And of his sonne he termes himself the wretched grave. Anon / With naked sword and furious heart he followeth fierce upon/ *Pandions* daughters." Publius Ovidius Naso, *Metamorphoses*, transl. by Arthur Golding, ed. by John Frederick Nims (Philadelphia: Dry, 2000), p. 158, ll. 838–843. For the function of the metamorphosis in Ovid's epic and in this case in particu-

pain is crucial for the narrative—and the sister’s revenge. They revel in Tereus’ torment, much unlike Titus. The sisters’ focus on Tereus’ reaction stands in contrast to Titus’ perception of his victim. In fact, his relation to Tamora is barely noticeable. He does not address her before he kills her, but speaks about her in the third person. Titus, it seems fair to conclude, is not only staging a dinner but also another kind of performance: a court room performance, or rather a travesty of one, to make a point to everyone attending *but* Tamora, thus making her the culprit in a spectacle of punishment.

## V. Another Case in Point: Seneca’s *Thyestes*

In another treatment of the motif of the Cannibalistic banquet, Seneca’s *Thyestes*, cannibalism has vast tragic reverberations. King Atreus is taking revenge for the adultery that his brother Thyestes has committed with his wife. He kills Thyestes’ sons, cooks them and invites Thyestes to dinner. During this supposedly reconciliatory dinner Atreus—unlike Titus again—slowly and sadistically reveals the truth, which effects a personal and universal catastrophe:

*Thyestes*: Oh this is it that shamed the godds:  
and day from hens dyd dryue  
Turnde back to easte. Alas J wretch  
what waylynges may J gyve?  
Or what complayntes? What wofull woordes  
may be enough for mee? (ll.2529–2534)

Thyestes is in a crisis of representation that leaves him unable to utter his grief. This crisis can also be seen in another instance, in which the notion of his dead sons coincides with the notion of the parts of their bodies he has digested. He asks for a sword to cut up his stomach for “all my soons to pas.” (l.2548) The play ends with Thyestes’ plea: “the gods shall all / of this reuengers bee: / And unto them for vengeance due, / my vowes thee render shall,” with Atreus replying: “But vext to be I thee the whyle, / geeve to thy children all” (ll.2679–2684).<sup>17</sup> Again, the victim’s pain following the revelation is of enough importance to be lingered on in much detail.

But the exchange between the brothers Atreus and Thyestes also dramatizes an abstract conflict that is of importance in *Titus Andronicus*. The respective stances of Atreus and Thyestes reflect the potential opposition of Natural and positive law. Natural law is associated in Greek philosophy with a universal order based on reason supported by the gods<sup>18</sup> and it is the gods that Thyestes invokes for justice and

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lar cf. Karl Galinsky, *Ovid’s Metamorphoses: An Introduction to the Basic Aspects* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975), p. 61.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted from: Seneca Annaeus Lucius, *Thyestes*, transl. by Jasper Heywood, *Materialien zur Kunde des Älteren Englischen Dramas* 41 (Leipzig, Louvain and London: Uystpruyst, 1913), pp. 186–190, ll. 2548–2684.

<sup>18</sup> The first development of the concept of a Law of Nature is to be found in the Greek philosophers, who regarded it primarily as a principle of order, based on reason, in accordance with which the universe was regulated. In this respect it could be contrasted with human laws, which were frequently changed and might be arbitrary in operation. Keeton (1967), pp. 67–68.

punishment when confronted with Atreus' deed. Yet Atreus relies on human law making, on positive law, that works independently of its moral value; in contrast, Thyestes pleads for a divine intervention. Cannibalism signifies a personal and universal catastrophe for Thyestes, whereas for Atreus it is a gesture of empowerment. Although staging a banquet quite different from Titus', Atreus thus uses cannibalism for his own ends in a way similar to Titus.

## VI. Titus, Precedential and Natural Law

In Seneca's *Thyestes*, cannibalism disrupts universal order and puts positive law and Natural law into opposition: cannibalism in fact is "unnatural and unkind" (5.3.48). In *Titus Andronicus* Titus, relying like a Common lawyer "on [...] precedent-based law"<sup>19</sup>, has no regard for the implications of his punitive practice. Likewise he is disinterested in the tragic, 'Senecan', scope of his plot. Instead, he is making a point by usurping a legal system. By resorting to a literary precedent, the story of Philomel and Progne, he justifies his revenge by appropriating the legal practice of using precedents. Thus Titus' spectacle reveals how "the formalization of revenge in performance acts as a substitution of the law, simultaneously revealing the law to be itself nothing other than a performance."<sup>20</sup> Ensuring the success of his performance, Titus rushes to kill Tamora to forestall a subversion of his decision by an appeal to Natural law. At the same time he emphasizes and empowers precedential law as foundation of Roman identity—much like Sir John Davies perceives Common law as 'connatural' to the English. The fact that turning literary into legal precedents is rather a travesty of precedential law is no reason for objection for Titus or the Roman tribunes attending the spectacular dinner. Thus, Titus' cannibalistic spectacle becomes a success, although he himself is killed by Saturninus right away and Rome's political and legal future at first seems uncertain. Here his son Lucius comes to the fore, whom the Roman tribunes have elected new emperor of Rome in a gesture of affirmation of the rightfulness of Titus' revenge.<sup>21</sup> He preserves Titus' legal heritage and rules unchecked by Natural law: Aaron is to be set "breast-deep in earth" (5.3.178) and famished and Tamora is denied a funeral. Lucius' power of jurisdiction has been defined and stabilized by his father through the 'legal' spectacle of punishment that is the cannibalistic banquet.

## Zusammenfassung

In der Bankettszene in *Titus Andronicus* stellt Titus seine Rache an Tamora rechtfertigend auf die Basis eines literarischen Präzedenzfalls: die Erzählung von Philomel und Progne aus Ovids *Metamorphosen*. Wie ein Vergleich mit frühneuzeitlichen Rechtsauffassungen zeigt, spiegelt diese Begründungslogik

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<sup>19</sup> Lockey (2006), p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> Bate (1995), pp. 26–27.

<sup>21</sup> When Lucius exclaims: "There's meed for meed, death for a deadly deed" (5,3,65) upon killing Saturninus, he acts after the *lex talionis* codified in the Old Testament's 'eye for an eye' and thus expands the scope of legal principles that are drawn upon and employed in *Titus Andronicus*.

die Rechtspraxis des englischen *Common law* wider; die Grausamkeit von Titus' Rache steht jedoch im Widerspruch zur Position des Naturrechts. Im Vergleich mit Shakespeares literarischer Quelle, der Erzählung aus den *Metamorphosen*, sowie mit Senecas Tragödie *Thyestes*, wird weiterhin deutlich, dass das Motiv der persönlichen Rache in *Titus Andronicus* gegenüber einem politischen Kalkül in den Hintergrund tritt. So wird durch das Aufrufen des literarischen Präzedenzfalls die Rechtmäßigkeit von Titus' Rache inszeniert, wodurch sie für Lucius politisch nutzbar wird. Die Position des Naturrechts, die die Unmenschlichkeit dieser Rache anklagt, wird dabei durch Tamoras rasche Ermordung zum Schweigen gebracht.



# SUBSTANCE MATTERS: FOOD RITES IN *TITUS ANDRONICUS*

BY

BIRGIT WALKENHORST

“He takes false shadows for true substances.” (3.2.81)<sup>1</sup> With these words Marcus Andronicus explains his brother’s growing madness when the latter strikes his dish with a knife, wanting to “kill a fly / That comes in likeness of a coal-black Moor” (3.2.76–79). Today most directors prefer to cut Marcus’ lines as a redundant comment, possibly also because they touch on very particular implications of the Eucharistic debate with which a modern audience would not normally be familiar. However, they may actually serve as a key to understanding the Eucharistically inflected portrayal of food rites in *Titus Andronicus*. The relationship between “likeness” and “substance” was of central concern to Elizabethan reformers who made a very clear distinction between the food of the body and the food of the soul. Seen from the perspective of Anti-Catholic propagandists, the refusal to distinguish between the two inevitably leads to disaster: heresy, crime, and cannibalism.

## Substance, Incarnation, and Transubstantiation

The Arden editor Jonathan Bate identifies this combination of shadows and substances as “one of Shakespeare’s favourite antitheses”.<sup>2</sup> In a conventional Platonist sense, it describes the relation between an object and its image, and, by extension, also the relation between the inner emotions and outer behaviour of a character. The inability to distinguish between the two carries crucial significance for contemporary iconoclastic discourse,<sup>3</sup> the debate about presence and the treacherous nature of the material world, and it indicates a loss of reason and touch with reality, which clearly is the case here with our protagonist Titus.

On a further level, this pair relates to distinct theological categories. The colloquial synonymous use of the terms ‘substance’ and ‘matter’ is apparently misleading. While ‘substance’ denotes an essential mode of being (i.e. ‘that which stands underneath’), materiality is determined by secondary factors, by contingent *accidents*. For Aristotle and the scholastics, form and prime matter constitute the substance of any object

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<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, ed. by Jonathan Bate, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Thomson, 1995). All subsequent quotations from *Titus* are taken from this edition.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Bate, “Introduction”, in William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, ed. by Jonathan Bate. The Arden Shakespeare (London: Thomson, 2003), 1–121, p. 210.

<sup>3</sup> “Shadow” in the *Oxford English Dictionary*: “6. An unreal appearance; a delusive semblance or image; a vain and unsubstantial object of pursuit. 7. Applied rhetorically to a portrait as contrasted with the original, also to an actor or play in contrast with the reality represented.” (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, Second Edition)

which inheres with accidents that give it a physical character, and thus make it perceivable by the senses.

According to the Catholic concept of the Eucharist, the matter—i.e. the *accidents* of the bread and wine—remains unchanged, while the flesh and blood of Christ are corporeally present as substances and undergo a propitiatory sacrifice. The sacrificial nature and the allegedly anthropophagous implications of the ceremony were the central targets of Reformed polemics, and one of their main arguments was the lack of mimetic convergence. While the Catholic ritual of the mass performs a sacrifice under the sacrament, or rather the form, of the supper, the Protestant emphasis on remembrance foregrounds the ‘gestalt’ or figure of the meal and therewith the aspect of nourishment in a radically new way. Peter Martyr explains this vividly in one of his disputations in Oxford:

The Analogie and resemblance betwene the Sacrament and the thyng signified must euer be kept, in all Sacramentes. [...] The resemblance betwene the Sacrament and the body of Christ is this: that as þe properties of bread and wyne doe nourish outwardly: so þe properties of the body of Christ do nourish spiritually.<sup>4</sup>

The ‘staging’ of the communion rite thus depended on the mimetic enactment of the analogy between the material food of the body and the spiritual food of the soul. *The Book of Common Prayer* (1559) foregrounds the importance of the latter as it declares that “we spiritually eat the flesh of Christ, and drink his blood” and asks the communicant to “feed on him in thy heart by faith.”<sup>5</sup> The Anglican theologian Timothy Gorrige points out, however, that “in the history of the church the use of physical elements in the sacraments, of water and bread, wine and oil, has been understood as an affirmation of the material, as the assertion, consonant with the Incarnation, that you cannot go round, or beyond matter, but that you must go through it.”<sup>6</sup> John Calvin interestingly expresses the result of this semiotic construct in performative terms, maintaining that God does not “merely feed our eyes with bare show; he leads us to the actual object, and effectually performs what he figures.”<sup>7</sup>

This liturgical emphasis on the intrinsic materiality of food provides a specific culinary aesthetic that can be strategically applied for artistic purposes, given that

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<sup>4</sup> In: John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments [1570/1576]: The Variorum Edition*, hriOnline, Sheffield 2004, <http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/johnfoxe/index.html> (accessed: 02/08/2008), 1570 edition, 9:1553.

<sup>5</sup> Church of England, *The Book of Common Prayer, 1559. The Elizabethan Prayer Book*, ed. by John E. Booty (Washington: Folger Books, 1976), p. 258 & 264. Cf. also Martin Luther: “Dis Capitel redet nicht vom Sacrament des brots vnd weins / Sondern vom geistlichen essen / das ist / gleuben / das Christus Gott vnd mensch sein Blut fur vns vergossen hat.” *Die gantze Heilige Schrift Deudsch*, 2 vols., ed. by Hans Volz (München: Rogner & Bernhard, 1972), 2151.

<sup>6</sup> Timothy Gorrige, “Sacraments”, in Robert Morgan, ed., *The Religion of the Incarnation: Anglican Essays in Commemoration of Lux Mundi* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1989), p. 166.

<sup>7</sup> Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (London, 1599), trans. by Henry Beveridge, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.html> (accessed: 09/04/2008), 4.15.14.



Eucharistic practice involved people from all social layers on a regular basis.<sup>8</sup> An account from 1520 in John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* sets out to demonstrate that even the so-to-speak 'average' churchgoer understood its principles:

[...] whē one Riuelay cōmyng from the church [...] had sayde to his wife [...] that he had heard Masse, & had seene his lord God in forme of bread & wine ouer the priestes head [...] Iohn Southwyke there present answered againe & said: [...] nay I tel thee, thou sawest but only a figure or sacramēt of hym, the which is in substance, bread and wyne.<sup>9</sup>

Eucharistic practice shaped patterns of collective perception and thus constituted a particular religiously encoded politics of looking and mode of reception which affected other forms of cultural performance as well. The authority of religious discourse enhanced the capacity of Eucharistic practice to establish 'Reformed' habits of perception that had a formative impact on other fields of society, including the secularised performance space of the theatre.

### Foodways in Titus Andronicus

Foreshortened and translated to the plot of the play in question, this means that the logic of incarnation and transubstantiation evolve into a conclusive line of thought that leads Titus from the killing of the fly to the killing of Chiron and Demetrius and to serving them as the main course of the final banquet. Based on grounds of likeness, i.e. the black colour, Titus believes to detect Aaron's substantial presence in the material fly. In his parody of the Eucharistic sacrifice, in which the accidents of bread and wine at least remain unchanged, while the substances underneath become the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, he ultimately fills the pies not merely with the substance but with the very corporeal matter of Tamora's sons.

I will substantiate this thesis by a short reading of the two banquet scenes in *Titus Andronicus*, which is inspired by Eric Mallin's recent study of the use of Eucharistic 'crackers' in this play, though arguably his attempt to distinguish the dramatis personae into a pseudo-Catholic and a proto-Protestant camp oversimplifies the case.<sup>10</sup>

For a start, the Andronici are Catholic coded. In confrontation with Lucius (literally the "enlightened"), Aaron expresses this most clearly on the basis of a conventional cliché:

I know thou art religious  
And hast a thing within thee called conscience,

<sup>8</sup> Cf. also René Girard who explains the "unity of all rites" in terms of structure. According to Girard, the Passion of Christ reproduces an act of foundational violence that is the basis, and therefore the common denominator, of all human ritual practice. Cf. *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (Paris: Grasset, 1978), p. 173.

<sup>9</sup> Foxe (1576), 7:778. Corrected pagination. The original page number is 788.

<sup>10</sup> Mallin borrows the term 'crackers' for communion wafers from an episode of the American cartoon series *Southpark*. He clearly polarises, suggesting that while "Titus regards his adversaries as Protestants," the Andronici are "Catholic-coded in their beliefs." Eric S. Mallin, *Godless Shakespeare*, Shakespeare Now! (London, New York: Continuum, 2007), pp. 36–37.

*With twenty popish tricks and ceremonies*  
Which I have seen thee careful to observe (5.1.74–77, my italics)

The play's sacrificial design is informed by Catholic principles and, according to Malin, exposes a disastrous "savagery devolving from religious ritual—[which] culminates in the apparent dismemberment, denaturing and consumption of human flesh, Tamora's crusty sons."<sup>11</sup>

The first example is Act 3, Scene 2, conveniently introduced in the stage directions as "*A banquet*". The common practice of heavily cutting or even completely omitting the entire scene for dramaturgical reasons (and because the entire scene was not included in the earlier quarto versions [Q1 1594] which are considered to derive directly from Shakespeare's manuscript, but appeared for the first time in the 1623 folio) is understandable but regrettable. Its subsequent addition bespeaks its illustrative value.

At the beginning, Titus invites his family-members:

So, so; now sit: and look you eat no more  
Than will preserve just so much strength in us  
As will revenge these bitter woes of ours. (3.2.1–3)

In the world of the Andronici, a civilised approach to eating is one of restriction. Gluttony as a manifest expression of excessive inclinations is the physical and moral Achilles heel of humanity, a deadly sin which brings about man's (in this case: Tamora's) downfall. If any kind of sensual appetite causes guilt, then Lavinia has been turned into the epitome of renunciation. Lacking a tongue, she also lacks the sense of taste, and turns the inability to take pleasure in food and drink into a spiritual virtue. In a next step, Titus makes a very telling explanatory claim about Lavinia, the living "map of woe":

I can interpret all her martyred signs;  
She says she drinks no other drink but tears,  
Brewed with her sorrow, mashed upon her cheeks. (3.2.12 & 36–38)

While the Folio has "mesh'd", most editors correct the spelling here and give "mashed", explicitly indicating a part of the brewing process.<sup>12</sup> Lavinia's action—or Titus' interpretation of it—thus reflects the words of Psalm 80,5: "Thou hast fed them with the bread of teares, and giuen them teares to drinke with great measure."<sup>13</sup> Lavinia's approach reverses the principle of transubstantiation: Here, it is not the consumable substance that is turned to bodily fluid, but instead the self-assertive martyr Lavinia chooses to consume her own physical substance.

When Marcus violently attacks his dish in the course of the meal, Titus enquires: "What dost thou strike at, Marcus, with thy knife?" Marcus replies: "At that that I have

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. e.g. Bate (1995), p. 208.

<sup>13</sup> All bible quotations are taken from: *The Bible and Holy Scriptures conteyned in the Olde and Newe Testament*, Geneva, 1561 [1587], [http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx\\_ver=Z39.88-2003&res\\_id=xri:eebo&rft\\_id=xri:eebo:image:22103:242](http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:image:22103:242) (accessed: 09/04/2008).

killed, my lord; a fly.” (3.2.52–53) Titus empathises with the “harmless fly” and its family. He accuses Marcus of murder:

A deed of death done on the innocent  
Becomes not Titus’ brother: get thee gone:  
I see thou art not for my company. (3.2.56–58)

Titus argument here is in accordance with the notion of the ‘table of peace’ or ‘table of grace’ as an expression of promise of remission of sins,<sup>14</sup> with the task of the priest to deny participation in the communal supper to members of the congregation who are at odds with or bear a grudge against any of their fellow-communicants.<sup>15</sup> Marcus apologises with an excuse that seems rather improvised: “Pardon me, sir; it was a black ill-favored fly, / Like to the empress’ Moor; therefore I killed him.” (3.2.67–68)

Titus suddenly turns and recognises this as “a charitable deed.” The idea is contagious. Titus immediately takes action:

Give me thy knife, I will insult on him;  
Flattering myself, as if it were the Moor  
Come hither purposely to poison me.—  
There’s for thyself, and that’s for Tamora. (3.2.71–74)

He triumphs over “a fly / That comes in likeness of a coal-black Moor.” (3.2.78–79) Marcus, the tribune who speaks for the “common voice” (1.1.21), assumes the function of a chorus when he evaluates his brother’s state of mind: “Alas, poor man! grief has so wrought on him, / He takes false shadows for true substances.” (3.2.80–81) In their reference to likeness and transubstantiation, these lines prefigure a later passage in which Lucius refers to the “incarnate devil” Aaron (5.1.40).

Act 5, Scene 2 prepares the second banquet scene. Titus invites his family, Saturninus and Tamora to a ‘last supper’, to “Feast at my house”, and he sends Marcus off to proclaim his invitation with the words “This do thou for my love” (5.2.128–29). The “do this” or “this do” is, of course, the essential command that Christ gave to his disciples in order to perform a ritual act of remembrance.<sup>16</sup> The notion of the communion as “the feast in the Gospel” which *The Book of Common Prayer* introduces as a promise of the “heavenly feast” is very expressive and memorable.<sup>17</sup> The connection is

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 11,19: “The Sonne of man came eatyng and drinking, and they say, Beholde a glutton and a drinker of wine, a friend vnto Publicanes and sinners.” Cf. also Luke 7,34.

<sup>15</sup> “And if ye shall perceiue your offenses to be such as be not only against God but also against your neighbours, then ye shall reconcile youreselves unto them, ready to make restitution and satisfaction [...], and likewise being ready to forgive other that have offended you, as you would have forgiveness of your offenses at God’s hand.” *The Book of Common Prayer, 1559*, p. 257.

<sup>16</sup> “[Our saviour Jesus Christ] took bread, and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you. *Do this* in remembrance of me. Likewise after supper he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of this, for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for you and for many, for remission of sins: *do this* as oft as ye shall drink it in remembrance of me.” *Ibid.*, p. 263, my italics.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255 & 257.

emphasised by Titus' repeated use of the term in his address to Chiron and Demetrius, the victims that he convicted guilty and is about to "martyr", to sacrifice (5.2.180): "You know your mother means to feast with me," and "This is the feast that I have bid her to," which will be "More stern and bloody than the Centaurs' feast." (5.2.184, 192, 203)

Titus is about to pervert the social scope of the sacrificial ritual, the reestablishment of *communitas* through hospitality and conciliatory unification. Especially the Old Testament discusses the performance of *communitas* through hospitality in a striking way: breaking the bread, the relief from isolation and grief through the sharing of the "cup of consolation" (Jeremiah 16,7). Therefore, the suggested scenario soon becomes obvious, when Titus re-enters with a knife, accompanied by Lavinia "with a basin". Titus relishes in the description of his scheme:

Hark, wretches, how I mean to martyr you.  
This one hand yet is left to cut your throats,  
Whilst that Lavinia 'tween her stumps doth hold  
The basin that receives your guilty blood. (5.2.180–183)

This is a scathing parody since it is the guilt that distinguishes this ritual killing from the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as the prototypical scapegoat. Titus gives the full details of his recipe for martyr pie:

I will grind your bones to dust  
And with your blood and it I'll make a paste,  
And of the paste a coffin I will rear  
And make two pasties of your shameful heads. (5.2.186–189)<sup>18</sup>

Thus, Titus ultimately literalises the idea of the in-carnation. He even reverses it, translating the trope of materialisation and coming to life into an act of homicide and disintegration. Titus implants the substance of human flesh and blood into a form that is nothing like a human being anymore. The notions of likeness and deformation are, once again, of central importance. In *A Sermon Preached at Paules Crosse* (London, 1571) John Bridges, Dean of Salisbury, articulates a common polemic against the Eucharistic practice of Catholics who "turned Chryst out of his owne likenesse, and made him looke lyke a rounde cake, nothyng lyke to Iesus Christe", and he complains: "dare they thus disfigure our Lord and sauior Jesus Christ or can they make suche a

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<sup>18</sup> The term "coffin" for the crust or mould of a pie was common since the early 15<sup>th</sup> century. Early modern pies were meat pies with tall crusts and sealed-on floors and lids, often of considerable size. Cf. e.g. Giovanni de Rosselli, *Epulario, or the Italian Banquet* (London 1598/ Venice 1549): "To Make Pie That the Birds May Be Alive In them and Flie Out When It Is Cut Up: Make the coffin of a great pie or pastry, in the bottome thereof make a hole as big as your fist, or bigger if you will, let the sides of the coffin bee somewhat higher then ordinary pies" [http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx\\_ver=Z39.88-2003&res\\_id=xri:eebo&rft\\_id=xri:eebo:image:5822:5](http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:image:5822:5) (accessed: 09/04/2008).

strange Metamorphosis of the sonne of God?”<sup>19</sup> Titus is determined to disfigure his opponents by all means.

In a further step, he will bid the empress “Like to the earth swallow her own increase.” (5.2.191) Likening Tamora to the earth does not only resonate with the liturgical funereal command to put the ‘ashes to ashes’. It also translates the mythological cannibalistic motif of the titan Cronus, also identified with the Roman deity Saturn, who devoured his own children, to a female figure, wife to the emperor Saturnine.

Titus continues to use liturgical key-terms when he commands, before cutting the Goths’ throats: “Lavinia, come, / Receive the blood” (5.2.196–197). Indeed, *The Book of Common Prayer* places a strong focus on the framing conditions of, and spiritual disposition for, the moment of reception:

[...]he hath given his Son our Saviour Jesus Christ, not only to die for us, but also to be our spiritual food and sustenance, as it is declared unto us, as well by God’s Word, as by the holy sacraments of his blessed body and blood, the which being so comfortable a thing to them which receive it worthily, and so dangerous to them that will presume to receive it unworthily: [in which case] we be guilty of the body and blood of Christ our Saviour.<sup>20</sup>

The warning of impending danger through the wrong attitude in and mode of the intake of food is strikingly harsh. Titus’ attitude is fundamentally misguided from a sacramental point of view. He provokes Lavinia to become instrumental in his sacrificial design and continues the scene in a theatrical posture: “I’ll play the cook” (5.2.204), assuming the function of the officiating priest in this *cuisine de sacrifice*. Marcel Detienne’s study of ritual practice in ancient Greek society has highlighted “the absolute coincidence of meat-eating and sacrificial practice. All consumable meat comes from ritually slaughtered animals, and the butcher who sheds the animal’s blood bears the same functional name as the sacrificer posted next to the bloody altar.”<sup>21</sup> Titus’ theatrical set-up corresponds to layout of these overlapping functions.

Shortly after the beginning of Act 5, Scene 3, a table is brought in, quite probably one with a “fair white linen cloth upon it”, as the rubrics, the ‘stage directions’ in *The Book of Common Prayer* indicate for the ‘last supper’,<sup>22</sup> and everybody takes their seats. Titus, “*dressed like a cook*”, welcomes his guests one by one, acting as the master of ceremonies. He explains his costume accordingly: “Because I would be sure to have all well, / To *entertain* your highness and your Empress.” (5.3.31–32, my italics)

Shockingly, Titus then kills his own daughter. Eric Mallin reads this act of homicide as the performance of a “public sacrifice of his own, killing his daughter, then at once disturbingly bidding the guests, in absence of a clear referent: ‘Will’t please you eat?’”,

<sup>19</sup> John Bridges, *A Sermon, Preached at Paules Crosse on the Monday in Whitson Weeke Anno Domini* (London, 1571), [http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx\\_ver=Z39.88-2003&res\\_id=xri:eebo&rft\\_id=xri:eebo:image:10222:63](http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:image:10222:63) (accessed: 09/04/2008).

<sup>20</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer, 1559*, pp. 256, 258.

<sup>21</sup> Marcel Detienne, “Culinary Practice and the Spirit of Sacrifice”, in Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, eds., *The Cuisine of Sacrifice among the Greeks*, trans. Paula Wissing (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer, 1559*, p. 248.

asking whether “he mean [s] them—sacramentally—to consume his daughter, too”. Interpreting this act of murder as a redemptive but “grotesque sacrificial murder”, Mallin suggests that “[p]erhaps we are meant to recall a similarly appalling sacrifice of God’s beloved child.”<sup>23</sup> In my view, Mallin is quite mistaken here. Titus’ insistence not merely on substance but on very physical matter makes a different interpretation much more conclusive. Saturninus asks: “What, was she ravish’d? Tell who did the deed.” And Titus’ seemingly random line actually answers his question: “Will’t please you eat? Will’t please your highness feed?” (5.3.52–53) Performatively and literally, he reveals the referents of this obscure statement, the heads of Tamora’s sons:

Why, there they are both, baked in this pie;  
Whereof their mother daintily hath fed,  
eating the flesh that she herself hath bred. (5.3.59–61)

Titus has arranged for the “real presence of Tamora’s sons on the dish.”<sup>24</sup> And he confirms: “‘Tis true, ‘tis true; witness my knife’s sharp point.” (5.3.62) When he stabs the Empress, he fulfils the notion of martyrdom as bodily witnessing. Substantial evidence of the truth gains the upper hand. Lucius continues in the same vein, announcing his instantaneous revenge on Saturninus : “There’s meed for meed, death for a deadly deed!” (5.3.65) In this pun on ‘meat’, Lucius resorts to the logic of retribution, of Old Testamental Law.

In this scene, food is employed in a way to provoke a straightforward visceral reaction, i.e. affecting the audience in terms of revulsion, exploited here for aesthetic purposes. The parodic combination of dialogue and action, drawing on anti-Catholic propaganda with its emphasis on cannibalism, is designed to disrupt the devotional gaze by way of contrasting it with the Reformed liturgical knowledge that has been acquired through embodied practice.

### Conclusion

Even the re-establishment of *communitas* at the end of the play seems preliminary and leaves a bitter aftertaste, when it resorts to the pervasive symbolic logic of food and feeding. Lucius pronounces Aaron’s punishment:

Set him breast-deep in earth, and famish him;  
There let him stand, and rave, and cry for food;  
If any one relieves or pities him,  
For the offence he dies. (5.3.178–181)

Aaron is not only ‘swallowed by the earth’, being re-aligned with Tamora’s former allies and Titus’ former victims Chiron and Demetrius. This punishment by starvation may also be understood as an inversion of the process of feeding.<sup>25</sup> The basic Christian

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<sup>23</sup> Mallin (2007), pp. 38–39.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Joan Fitzpatrick, *Food in Shakespeare: Early Modern Dietaries and the Plays*, Literary and Scientific Cultures of Early Modernity (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 124.

values of mercy and pity are declared a crime, subdued to a highly conditional approach. Lucius' authoritative policy can most aptly be understood as the bankruptcy of a culture that is unable to escape its pseudo-civilised state of being a "wilderness of tigers" (3.1.54). Society fails to live up to its own moral standards because ritual practice does not only fall short of containing the unavoidable antagonisms but even enhances them. Whereas the remains of the Andronici are transferred to their "household's monument" (193), not only any "funeral rite" (195), but actually any material trace that might allow remembrance, is denied to the "ravenous tiger" (194) Tamora. Lucius' sentence on her sounds as follows:

But throw her forth to beasts and birds to prey:  
Her life was beast-like, and devoid of pity;  
And being dead, let birds on her take pity. (5.3.197–199)

Thus, the last words of the play confirm again the substance-centred logic of the Old Testament: an eye for an eye, meat for meat, mercilessness for mercilessness. Both Titus and his family are representative of a culture that is essentially bound to flesh and materiality. In this play, ritual practice initially seems to serve as an indicator of a high degree of civilisation, but it ultimately testifies to the spiritual dissolution of a society. Shakespeare therefore takes the notions of substance and matter more than seriously: His aesthetic strategy in *Titus Andronicus* is centred upon the perversion and literalisation of the doctrine of transubstantiation, developed through its manifestation in the performance of Roman (Catholic) foodways.

### **Zusammenfassung**

Eucharistische Strukturen dienen in *Titus Andronicus* als Referenzmuster für die performative Erforschung der spirituellen Auflösung einer Gesellschaft. Insbesondere die (Re-)Präsentation von Speiseritualen erhellt hier, inwiefern das tragische Schicksal der Titelfigur einer radikalen Materialitätsverhaftung geschuldet ist. Die antikatholische Propaganda der Tudorzeit identifiziert die Verweigerung einer klaren Trennung zwischen körperlicher und geistlicher Speise als Wurzel von Häresie und Kannibalismus. Werden die Bankett-Szenen des Stücks im spezifischen liturgischen Kontext der englischen Reformation, im Hinblick auf deren Substanz- und Ähnlichkeitsbegriff betrachtet, so betten sie die Inszenierung spektakulärer Gewaltausbrüche in *Titus Andronicus* sinnstiftend und gezielt kulturkritisch ein.





# MUTTON ON FRIDAYS: FOOD, SEX AND PURITANISM IN VIENNA

BY

ENNO RUGE

In *Measure for Measure*, Vincentio, the Duke of Vienna, while investigating in the disguise of a friar the supposed sex crime of a young gentleman named Claudio, encounters Lucio, a well-known libertine and friend of Claudio's. Lucio enquires of the strange friar whether he has any news about the absent Duke. He does not hesitate to vent his anger about Vincentio's mysterious disappearing act. According to the libertine, the Duke, had he been in Vienna, would certainly have handled the matter of Claudio's offence differently from his deputy Angelo, who has sentenced Claudio to death for getting his bride with child. The reason why the Duke would not have condemned Claudio, Lucio assures the incredulous friar, is simply that he, in contrast to his ascetic deputy, once was one for the ladies himself:

Why, what a ruthless thing is this in [Angelo], for the rebellion of a codpiece to take away the life of a man! Would the Duke that is absent have done this? Ere he would have hanged a man for getting a hundred bastards, he would have paid for the nursing a thousand. He had some feeling of the sport; he knew the service, and that instructed him to mercy. [...] The Duke—I say to thee again—would eat mutton on Fridays. (3.1.376–382, 438 f.)<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the whole dialogue Lucio uses the imagery of food and drink when he talks about sex. A little earlier he agrees with the friar/Duke that “lechery” is a “vice”, but objects that “it is impossible to extirp it quite, friar, till eating and drinking be put down” (3.1.360, 363, 365–6). When Lucio insinuates, however, that the Duke consumes mutton on Fridays, the point is not that the ruler, like most of his subjects, occasionally follows his basic instincts. Rather, Lucio's choice of words signifies excess and transgression on the part of the Duke. (Significantly, Lucio adds that the duke “would be drunk too”, 3.1.389). As has frequently been pointed out, the phrase “mutton on Fridays” alludes to the traditional Catholic ban on eating meat on Fridays. As “mutton” could also mean “prostitute” in early modern English,<sup>2</sup> the meaning of the odd phrase seems clear: the seemingly virtuous ruler of Vienna is made out to be a regular visitor of the city's brothels. Like someone who wilfully, perhaps even hypocritically, breaks a religious fast, “the old fantastical Duke of dark corners”

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<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, ed. by N. W. Bawcutt, Oxford's World Classics, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> In his commentary on the phrase, N. W. Bawcutt, the editor of the Oxford-edition of *Measure for Measure*, refers to the fourth meaning of “mutton” in the *OED*. In Thomas Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1613) the libertine Sir Walter Whorehound brings a prostitute from Wales to London about whom it is said that “there's nothing tastes so sweet as your Welsh mutton”. Thomas Middleton, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, ed. by Alan Brissenden, New Mermaids (London: A. & C. Black, 2nd. ed. 2002), 4.1.163–4.

(4.3.154–5) is said to have violated the official moral code of his realm. Critics generally agree that these accusations are totally unfounded, including those scholars who have questioned the traditional view that in *Measure for Measure* Shakespeare wanted to portray Vincentio as an exemplary, divine ruler. The accuracy of the insinuations appears questionable not least because their originator is himself a “fellow of much licence” (3.1.461) who cynically betrays his former underworld friends from the polluted suburbs when he sees fit (cf. 3.1.308–349; 455–5), Lucio simply lacks the moral authority to call the Duke “a very superficial, ignorant, and unweighing fellow” (3.1.400). Vincentio is clearly the victim of malicious slander, as he himself laments: “What king so strong / Can tie the gall up in the slanderous tongue?” (3.1.444–5)

It has been claimed, notably by Lindsay Kaplan, that the scene nonetheless reflects badly on the Duke in the end, because he himself employs slander in his machinations, albeit to achieve Claudio’s acquittal and thwart Angelo’s plan to abuse the pure Isabella.<sup>3</sup> In my view, however, critics like Kaplan do not fully grasp Shakespeare’s treatment of the issue of slander in this scene and in the whole play. Instead of once again discussing Lucio’s defamation of the Duke under the aspect of the “Slandering [of] a prince” (5.1.521) or sexual slander in early modern England,<sup>4</sup> I propose to take a closer look at what I consider the crucial phrase in the dialogue, the insinuation that the Duke eats “mutton on Fridays”. I would like to argue that the original purpose of the strange phrase was to refer contemporary audiences to anti-puritan polemics which habitually equated gluttony with sexual debauchery. The reference, I believe, could not have escaped the experienced theatre-goer of the day, as “flesh on Fridays” was a familiar term of abuse from anti-puritan satire frequently hurled at the stage-puritan. For example, in the city comedy *The Puritan, or The Widow of Watling Street* (1606), a play published anonymously but usually attributed to Thomas Middleton,<sup>5</sup> (about which more presently) two simpletons are abused as “Puritanicall Scrape-shoes, Flesh a good Fridayes”.<sup>6</sup> The insult had its origin in the allegation that the godly deliberately broke the Catholic law of fasting on Fridays to demonstrate their distaste for all Romish traditions and to emphasize that they belonged to the communion of the saints, that blessed minority of people who believed themselves predestined to eternal salvation. In the anonymous comedy *The Family of Love* (1604–6)—now no longer believed to be Middleton’s—the merchant Dryfat proudly announces: “I keep no holydays nor fasts, but eat most flesh o’ Fridays of all days i’ the week.”<sup>7</sup> The example

<sup>3</sup> Cf. M. Lindsay Kaplan, *The Culture of Slander in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 92.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Bawcutt, “General Introduction”, *MM*, p. 55.

<sup>5</sup> The play is included in Middleton’s *Collected Works* edited by Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino for Oxford University Press (2007) under the title *The Puritan Widow*. See also Paul Yachnin, “Reversal of Fortune: Shakespeare, Middleton, and the Puritans”, *ELH* 70 (2003), pp. 757–786.

<sup>6</sup> W. S.: *The Puritaine or the Widdow of Watling-streete*, London, 1607. The Tudor Facsimile Reprints (New York: AMS [1911] 1970), sig. B<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Middleton, *The Family of Love*, in *The Works of Thomas Middleton*, ed. by Arthur H. Bullen, vol. 3 (London: Nimmo, 1885), pp. 1–120, 3.3.73 f. On the question of Middleton’s authorship see Gary Taylor, Paul Mulholland and MacD. P. Jackson, “Thomas Middleton, Lording Barry,

of Dryfat, who is applying for membership in the Family of Love, an obscure sect, whose members allegedly practice group sex at their secret meetings, reminds us that in addition to the ludicrous religious taboo-breaking the slanderous insult frequently denotes sexual transgression as well.<sup>8</sup> In John Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan* (1605) the bawd Mary Faugh informs her crony Cocledemoy that she is "none of the wicked that eat fish o' Fridays." Later in the same play, at her husband's execution, the lecherous puritan Mistress Mulligrub whispers into Cocledemoy's ear: "I have a piece of mutton, and a featherbed for you at all times."<sup>9</sup> Considering that in *Measure for Measure* the Duke's antagonist, the "precise" Angelo (1.3.50), can be (and has been) described as a hypocritical lecherous puritan,<sup>10</sup> the insinuation that the ruler "eats mutton on Fridays" like a stage-puritan renders the slander-scene deeply ironical and much more complex than critics like Kaplan imagined.

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and *The Family of Love*", *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 93 (1999), pp. 213–241. The authors of the article attribute *The Family of Love* to Lording Barry. Consequently, it has not been included in the recent *Collected Works* of Middleton.

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that the Family of Love, a spiritualist sect that flourished in England in the 16th century, must not be confused with the puritans. As an anonymous contemporary polemicist observed, the two religious groups were "mortall enemies" (*A Supplication of the Family of Loue*. Cambridge: Iohn Legate, 1606, sig. B2<sup>r</sup>). In the 1580s several puritan polemicists launched a defamatory campaign against the spiritualists aiming at discrediting the sect as much as possible in the eyes of the authorities. Under pressure to conform, the puritans needed a scapegoat. According to a familist apologist the puritans were "not ashamed to laie their owne, and all other mens disobedient, and wicked actes (of what profession soeuer they be) vpon our backes, to the ende cunningly to purchase favour, and credite to themselues, and to make vs seeme monstrous & detestable before the Magistrate, and the common people euerie where." (*A Supplication*, 1606, sig. G1<sup>r</sup>) In my forthcoming study *Stage-Puritans: Zum Verhältnis von Puritanern und Theater in der Frühen Neuzeit* I argue that the anonymous comedy *The Family of Love* satirizes the puritan campaign against the Family by conflating puritan and familist traits in one stage figure. On the sect in England see Christopher Marsh, *The Family of Love in English Society, 1550–1630* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). On the Family as a subject of literature see William C. Johnson, "The Family of Love in Stuart Literature: A Chronology of Name-Crossed Lovers", *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 7 (1977), pp. 95–112.

<sup>9</sup> John Marston, *The Dutch Courtesan*, ed. by David Crane, The New Mermaids (London: A. & C. Black, 1997), 1.2.19–20, 5.3.93–4. On Marston's satirical representation of puritans and the concept of the 'companionate marriage' see Enno Ruge, "Renaissance Sensuality vs. 'Puritan' Love Marriage in John Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan*", in Christoph Houswitschka, Gabriele Knappe, Anja Müller, eds., *Anglistentag 2005 Bamberg: Proceedings. Proceedings of the Conference of University Teachers in English* (Trier: WVT, 2006), 169–182.

<sup>10</sup> See for example Donald J. McGinn, "The Precise Angelo", in James G. MacManaway, Giles E. Dawson, Edwin E. Willoughby, eds., *Joseph Quincy Adams Memorial Studies* (Washington, DC: Folger Library, 1948), 129–139; Victoria Hayne, "Performing Social Practice: The Example of *Measure for Measure*", in Richard P. Wheeler, ed., *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's Measure for Measure*, *Critical Essays on British Literature* (New York: Hall, 1999), 145–176; Peter Lake, Michael Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven, CT, London: Yale University Press, 2002), ch. 15.

The association of the Duke with puritan hypocrisy and excess is all the more significant because the allegation of overindulgence in food and drink not only served as a metaphor of sexual abandon but also for political subversion. The fact that nonconformists regularly held their own collective private fasts whenever they wanted instead of observing the official fasting days of the liturgical calendar was considered socially disruptive and subversive to the established order.<sup>11</sup> The well-known anti-puritan satirist John Taylor, the “water-poet”, writes about such private fasting-practices:

I haue often noted, that if any superfluous feasting or gormondizing, panch-cramming assembly doe meete, the disordered businesse is so ordered, that it must bee either in *Lent*, vpon a Friday, or a fasting day: for the meat doth not relish well, except it be sawc'd with disobedience and contempt of Authority. And though they eate Sprats on the Sunday, they care not, so they may be full gorg'd with flesh on the Friday night.

Then all the zealous Puritans will feast,  
In detestation of the Romish beast.<sup>12</sup>

A corpulent stage-puritan like Ben Jonson's Zeal-of-the-land Busy, who stuffs his face with roast pork in *Bartholomew Fair*, thus reflects the political transgression associated with the “obstinate, counter-cultural eating practices” of the godly. “As a representational category,” Kristen Poole concludes, “the puritan registers the anxieties surrounding socio-ecclesiastical structures in flux.”<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, it seems only logical that Poole does not include Shakespeare's best known ‘puritans’, the equally dour and self-controlled Malvolio and Angelo, in her fine study on the grotesque puritan, but focusses instead on the fat, bragging knight Sir John Falstaff in *Henry IV*, whom she sees as an example of the “puritan bellygod”, a satirical stereotype which she traces back to the polemical anti-puritan literature of the 1580s and 90s.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, I would argue that she rejects Malvolio and Angelo

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Kristen Poole, *Radical Religion from Shakespeare to Milton: Figures of Nonconformity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 48–54. As Robert Greaves notes, the prohibition against eating meat on Fridays and during Lent was retained in Protestant England—partly to support the English fish trade. Robert Greaves, *Society and Religion in Elizabethan England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), p. 491. Other unofficial assemblies of the godly, such as the so-called “prophesyings”, “exercises”, or “conventicles”, as well as the “gadding” of believers to sermons of popular preachers, were eyed equally suspiciously by the authorities. Cf. Patrick Collinson, “The English Conventicle”, in William J. Sheils, Diana Wood, eds., *Voluntary Religion. Papers Read at the 1985 Summer Meeting and the 1986 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical Historical Society*, Studies in Church History 5 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 223–259.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Poole (2000), p. 51. In *The Family of Love* the lecherous gallant Lipsalve claims to have been converted from “two very notorious crimes: the first was from eating fish on Fridays, and the second from speaking reverently of the clergy.” *Family* (1885), 4.1.87–89.

<sup>13</sup> Poole (2000), pp. 5, 50.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15. Poole sees Falstaff, who was originally named after the Lollard martyr Sir John Oldcastle, as a hybrid character, whose ‘puritan’ features are derived from satirical representations of the anonymous puritan pamphleteer who called himself Martin Marprelate. However, if Falstaff repeatedly speaks like a puritan in Shakespeare's play, it does not mean that he is really meant to be one.

partly because she underestimates the slanderous nature of anti-puritan discourse. It is precisely the defamatory strategies of this discourse, as employed by the theatre in particular, which are foregrounded by Shakespeare in *Measure for Measure*.<sup>15</sup> If we realize that Shakespeare aims at exploring puritanism primarily as a discursive phenomenon rather than at satirising his puritan neighbours, it even becomes *significant* that Malvolio and Angelo fail to match the stereotype of the grotesque puritan entirely. The fact that they are only “kinds of puritans” is part of the plays’ design.

It is widely assumed that anti-puritan satire and particularly satirical comedies were instrumental in official Elizabethan and especially Jacobean conformist politics. As John Aubrey reports about Ben Jonson, “King James made [Jonson] write against the Puritans, who began to be troublesome in his time”.<sup>16</sup> If the plays were indeed subject to this kind of pragmatization, it was frequently called into question by the theatre’s dramatic self-representation. A good example to illustrate this point is the anonymous satirical comedy *The Puritan, or The Widow of Watling Street*, which I have already mentioned. The city comedy’s villain-hero, George Pye-board, is not only the author of an elaborate (if unsuccessful) plot against a rich puritan family but also of plays which satirize London puritans as hypocrites. It is no surprise, therefore, that the local parson, either called “Maister Pigman” or “Maister Ful-bellie”, “railes againe Plaiers mightily” “because they brought him drunck vpp’oth Stage once, as hee will bee horribly druncke”.<sup>17</sup> As a man-about-town, Pye-board claims to have first-hand knowledge about all walks of life. In this, he is reminiscent of the so-called “urban pamphleteers” of the 1580s and 90s, like Robert Greene and Thomas Nashe, who emphatically based their authority on personal experience. As Barnabe Rich points out in 1614, the “ghosts” of this legendary generation of satiric writers were regularly conjured up in early Jacobean literature “to give the world new eyes to see into deformitie”.<sup>18</sup> Pye-board’s motivation for writing satirical comedies, however, is not moral instruction or the correction of vice, but profit. Despite the fact that the victims (both of his plays and his tricks) are hypocritical puritans, his moral authority is highly questionable. A classical trickster figure, he seeks his personal advantage in everything he does and is prepared to sacrifice his cronies when he no longer needs them. Pye-board can be seen as

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Rather, as Tobias Döring has argued, Falstaff merely appropriates puritan discourse parodistically in order to render it meaningless. Personal communication.

<sup>15</sup> I discuss *Twelfth Night* in this respect in my forthcoming study on *Stage-Puritans*.

<sup>16</sup> Cited in Ian Donaldson, *The World Upside-Down: Comedy from Jonson to Fielding* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 73. There is no evidence, however, that Jonson or any other playwright acted on orders whenever they ridiculed the puritans. The dedication to *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) suggests that at least after 1614 anti-puritan satire was fully in accordance with James’s anti-sabbatarian politics. It was indeed around this time that the puritans began to be increasingly troublesome to the King. Cf. Leah Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell, and the Defence of Old Holiday Pastimes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> *The Puritan* (1970), sig. A3<sup>r</sup>, B3<sup>v</sup>, C2<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> Barnabe Rich, *The Honestie of this Age* (1614), cited in Lawrence Manley, *Literature and Culture in Early Modern London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 330.

the “enfleshed ghost”<sup>19</sup> of one of the legendary university wits of the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. His name echoes that of the playwright George Peele, who managed to acquire the reputation of being “dishonorable, sensual, wild, dissipated, lascivious, immoral, wanton, disreputable, a drunkard, a brawler, an unredeemed scrapegrace, in short, a thoroughly bad man”.<sup>20</sup> All this makes George Pye-board the typical antagonist of the stage-puritan.

The question is, of course, why in a play which clearly intervenes in the current controversy between the puritans and the stage it is precisely the playwright who is such an ambivalent character. I believe that by making a man like Pye-board the representative of the theatre in a city comedy relentlessly ridiculing the London godly, *The Puritan, or The Widow of Watling Street* foregrounds the defamatory character, the sheer unfairness of much anti-puritan satire, including its own. This, however, should not be mistaken as a sign of self-conscious doubt “about the social as well as moral dubiousness of acting”, but rather as a manifestation of an “increasing confidence, even arrogance” towards the puritan antitheatricalists on the part of the theatre people, as Jeffrey Knapp observes with unconcealed disapproval.<sup>21</sup>

In *Measure for Measure* the equivalent character is Lucio. As someone who is equally at home in the sinful suburbs and the respectable city of Vienna/London<sup>22</sup> he claims to have first-hand knowledge about people from all walks of life. His discourse abounds with tags like “that I know to be true”, “that’s infallible” and “that let me inform you” (3.1.373–4, 390), while he does not seem to care whether what he tells the false friar confidentially about Angelo’s frigidity and the Duke’s incontinence is true or not. As a police informer he remorselessly betrays his former low life friends. If he is thereby instrumental in the official state action against the licentiousness in the suburbs, it is not because he—a notorious “fellow of much licence” (3.1.461)—hates vice. Rather, he appears to delight in denouncing others.

What follows from this? When Lucio insinuates that the Duke “eats mutton on Fridays” the ruler of Vienna is not merely charged with transgressive sexuality. He is—

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<sup>19</sup> Manley (1995), p. 331. Cf. *ibid.* pp. 314–326.

<sup>20</sup> David H. Horne, “The Life of George Peele”, in *The Life and Works of George Peele*, ed. by David H. Horne, vol. 1 *The Life and Minor Works of George Peele* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1952), 1–146, p. 126. Peele also lends his name to the fictional trickster of a jestbook entitled *The Merrie Conceited Jests of George Peele*. According to Horne, Peele’s notoriety is the result of conflating the fictional and the real George Peele.

<sup>21</sup> Jeffrey Knapp, *Shakespeare’s Tribe: Church, Nation and Theater in Renaissance England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 145. Knapp argues that aggressive anti-puritan satire like this, aimed at excluding the godly from society, ultimately worked against the theatre’s aim of being recognized as a respectable institution. “With their task of allying church and theatre simplified by the shared threat of puritanism [...] later protheatricalists grew emboldened about the social as well as moral dubiousness of acting and presented that dubiousness itself, paradoxically, as both more palatable and more edifying than puritannical zeal.” Oddly enough, Knapp counts *Bartholomew Fair* among those plays which present a “inclusivist” Christian countervision (*ibid.*, p. 72).

<sup>22</sup> On ‘Vienna’ as ‘London’ see Leah Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Readings and Its Discontent* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 160–164.

through the resonant phrase well known from anti-puritan satire—made out to be a nonconformist whose outward moral rigorism and inward corruption threaten to disrupt society and subvert order in the state and the church—a libertine in the double sense of the word: a debauchee who leads a life of reckless drinking, promiscuity, and self-indulgence and an antinomian, an enthusiastic follower of the spirit who no longer feels obliged to adhere to any moral law.<sup>23</sup> What is more, these slanderous charges are brought against Vincentio by a dubious character who can be seen as the representative of the anti-puritan stage. Instead of underlining the difference between the humane Duke and the “precise” Angelo, the scene stresses the similarity between the two statesmen. After all, both are moralists and dedicated fighters against the boiling and bubbling corruption in Vienna (cf. 5.1.320). Consequently, both are made out to be “seemers” (1.3.54). The Duke, moreover, is implicitly criticized for using and later disavowing his soul mate Angelo.

It has been claimed that *Measure for Measure* is a play for King James to make him feel good about himself.<sup>24</sup> It could, however, also contain a coded warning for the ruler not to regard the theatre as his willful instrument for anti-puritan propaganda. It is well known that King James disliked the puritans but nonetheless needed at least the moderate reformers for his project of religious unity and—at least at the beginning of his reign—found the godly preachers useful as enforcers of moral discipline in his realm. At the same time he allowed anti-puritan satire, slandering the godly as gluttons, drunkards, lechers and seditious radicals, to flourish. In the phrase “mutton on Fridays” anti-puritan slander is directed against a ruler. This may be a hint that anti-puritan slander may not only work for, but also against, the monarch. In *Measure for Measure* slander is a double-edged sword—an insight that rulers deplore but the theatre celebrates. The fact that in *Measure for Measure* the slanderer is punished in the end makes little difference here. As Lucio says: “I am a kind of burr. I shall stick” (4.3.174).

### Zusammenfassung

In Shakespeares *Maß für Maß* begegnet der Herzog von Wien, Vincentio, der *incognito* in der Stadt unterwegs ist, dem Wüstling Lucio, welcher im Gespräch den Herzog als Mann mit Vergangenheit diffamiert. Bei Lucios Einlassung, der Herzog habe früher selbst gerne “Fleisch am Freitag” zu sich genommen, handelt es sich nicht nur um die Unterstellung, der als sittenstreng geltende Vincentio sei sexuellen Abenteuern nicht abgeneigt gewesen. Der Ausdruck “mutton on Fridays”, so die These des Beitrags, verweist vielmehr auf die Sprache der antipuritanischen Satire der Zeit, wie sie auch auf den

<sup>23</sup> ‘Libertine’ was also used pejoratively for spiritualistic religious sectarians in early modern England, for example by the puritan polemicist George Gifford: “Now as Satan laid the foundation of this his deepe diuinitie in the Apostles times, which he afterward did further build up by the Valentinians and others, so in these last times [...] he set it on foote againe by the Anabaptists, *Libertines*, Familie of Loue, and other such monsters: for they boast of such deepnesse of illuminated elders, and men deified, that looke whatsoeuer they committed, euen the foulest deed, yet they sinne not.” *Sermon upon the whole booke of Revelation* (London: Richard Field, 1599, sig. F8<sup>v</sup>). My emphasis.

<sup>24</sup> Lake, Questier (2002), p. 676.

Londoner Bühnen zu hören war. Sieht man Lucio als Repräsentanten des Theaters vor dem Hintergrund einer möglichen Instrumentalisierung des Theaters durch König Jakob I., dann lässt sich die üble Nachrede als codierte Botschaft an den Herrscher lesen.



# “DRINKING OF THE WYNE OF FORGETFULNESSE”:

## THE AMBIVALENT BLESSINGS OF OBLIVION

### AND THE EARLY MODERN STAGE

BY

ISABEL KARREMANN

#### I

When William Rankins in 1587 railed against theatre-going and described its pernicious effects on both players and audience alike as “drinking of the wyne of forgetfulness”,<sup>1</sup> he voiced an antitheatrical attitude which we recognize today as part of the puritan vilification of the stage. What sounds perhaps less familiar in our ears today, is his insistence on forgetfulness and the metaphor he is using to bring home his point. What does Rankins mean by ‘forgetfulness’? How is the effect of watching a play alike to that of drinking wine? And, perhaps most importantly, what is it that is forgotten in such states of intoxication? Of course, the connection between wine and forgetting has been familiar since antiquity, and appears for example in several episodes of the *Odyssey* or in the Latin proverb *Vinum memoriae mors*, ‘wine is the death of memory’.<sup>2</sup> What interests me here are the specific ways in which ‘forgetting’ was used in early modern culture to negotiate the status of the theatre, both off and on the stage.

For Rankins, oblivion clearly has negative connotations, as can also be seen from the following quotes from other antitheatrical tracts: In his *Treatise wherein Dicing, Dauncing, Vaine playes, or Enterluds [...] Are reprovued* (1577), John Northbrooke judges that playgoers are like those who “have no mind of any reformation or amendment of [their] life”. Stephen Gosson claims in *The School of Abuse* (1587) that playgoing makes spectators “unmindful of [their] end” and in another tract, *Playes Confuted in Five Actions* (1582), that hence plays must “bee [...] banished, least little and little we forget God”.<sup>3</sup> What is forgotten, then, are the duties one owes God, part of which are that one lead a godly life, which is obviously incompatible with having fun at the play-house.

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<sup>1</sup> William Rankins, *A MIRROUR of Monsters: Wherein is plainely described the manifold vices, & spotted enormities, that are caused by the infectious sight of Playes, with the decription of the subtle sights of Sathan, making them his instruments* (London, 1587).

<sup>2</sup> For more examples, see Harald Weinrich, *Lethe: Kunst und Kritik des Vergessens* [1997] (München: Beck, 2005), p. 29–30.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Zackariah Long, “‘Unless you could teach me to forget’: Spectatorship, self-forgetting, and subversion in antitheatrical literature and *As You Like It*”, in Christopher Ivic, Grant Williams, eds., *Forgetting in Early Modern English Literature and Culture: Lethe’s Legacies* (London: Routledge, 2004), 151–164.

William Rankins in *A Mirrour of Monsters* spells out explicitly the connection between the theatre, the consumption of intoxicating liquids and the dire consequences of stage-induced oblivion. Playgoing for him is a form of idleness invented by the devil himself, “[who] called forth Idlenes, from his boyling Caldron of insatiate liquor”. What is so dangerous about this liquor is that it tastes “more sweete then *Nectar*, and farre more pleasant then *Manna* from Heaven”, so that the addiction to this infernal beverage is immediate: “But the infection of this vice [idleness] is so contagious, that as the River *Laethes* maketh hym that drynketh thereof, presentlie to forget his own condition & former deedes, so this damnable vice of idlenes, so besotteth the sences, and bewitcheth the myndes of menne, as they remembred not the profitable fruites of virtuous labour.”<sup>4</sup> Here the connection is made between the river Lethe, the mythological river of forgetfulness which flows through the underworld, and the infectious vice of idleness—or, to use another name for this disease: of lethargy.

Early modern medical tracts were well aware of this etymological and conceptual connection. Pierre de la Primaudaye, for example, states matter-of-factly: “And the disease called the *Lethargie* bringeth with it forgetfulnesse and want of memorie, as the name itself giveth to understand.” (*Second Part of the French Academie*, 1605) John Bullokar in *An English Expositor* (1616) identifies the word ‘Lethe’ as a “Poeticall word, signifying a feyned River in hell, the water whereof being drunken, causeth forgetfulness of all that is past”, and describes its spiritual and physical signs as “a losse (in a manner) of reason and all the sense of the body.”<sup>5</sup> The effects of both, idleness and lethargy, are described in terms of forgetfulness as a loss of control over oneself and one’s body. This self-forgetfulness threatens to obliterate one’s “own condition & former deedes”, that is, one’s social position and duties, as well as one’s history as an individual.

Another etymological trace leads into the wider ramifications of self-forgetfulness for early modern subjectivity. According to the OED, ‘to forget’ means ‘to miss or lose one’s’ and ‘to forget oneself’ is paraphrased as follows: “To lose remembrance of one’s own station, position, or character; to lose sight of the requirement of dignity, propriety, or decorum; to behave unbecomingly.” While we still use this phrase today to register a violation of etiquette, much more is at stake in early modern culture when someone forgets himself or herself. Since the early modern self is originally constituted in terms of its place in a social network, to forget oneself by losing remembrance of one’s station and position is to become dislodged from such a network and disengaged from what determines your identity.<sup>6</sup> Theatre-going, from this perspective, is not only a moral problem which might entail the loss of one’s soul, but also a social problem which might lead to the weakening of social coherence and the loss of one’s identity.

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<sup>4</sup> Rankins, p. 6–8.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr., *Memory and Forgetting in English Renaissance Drama: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Webster* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 29.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

How did apologists of the stage react to these attacks? The most usual strategy was to hold up the stage's central function for individual and collective memory, adopted, for example, by Thomas Heywood in *An Apology for Actors* (1612) or by Philip Sidney in his *Defence of Poesie* (1624). Here is an especially telling quote from Thomas Nashe's *Pierce Pennilesse* (1592):

Nay, what if I prove plays to be no extreme, but a rare exercise of virtue? First, for the subject of them: for the most part it is borrowed out of our English Chronicles, wherein our forefathers' valiant acts, that have lain long buried in rusty brass and worm-eaten books, are revived and they themselves raised from the grave of oblivion and brought to plead their aged honours in open presence: than which, can be a sharper reproof to those degenerate, effeminate days of ours?

Reminding his readers of England's national heroes who were resurrected from "the grave of oblivion" on the stage, Nashe links the watching of plays with national history and collective memory. Moreover, he emphasises the exemplarity of what one can see on stage and claims that play-going actually enhances self-remembrance and through this, the moral standard of the time. This exemplarity is also the focus of Heywood's defence in *An Apology*, echoing Nashe's argument that the representation of history on the stage is much more attractive than the "worm-eaten books" of the chronicles: "[...] so bewitching a thing is lively and well spirited action, that it hath power to new mold the harts [sic] of the spectators and fashion them to the shape of any noble and notable attempt." Again, historical subjects are especially apt to incite virtuous self-reflection and self-remembrance: "in the lives of Romans, Grecians, or others, either the vertues of our Country-men are extolled, or their vices reprov'd [...]."<sup>8</sup> From this perspective, the theatre is a space which fosters social coherence through acts of collective remembrance and provides guidelines for proper individual behaviour.

What looks like two very different views on the theatre turns out, in fact, to be built on a common argumentative ground. Both positions operate within a closed dialectic in which the theatre is enlisted under the banner of either memory or forgetting: the stage is seen either as a medium of self-forgetfulness or as a medium of remembrance. The texts by Rankins and Nashe set up a clear dichotomy of oblivion versus history, of sinful feasting versus affective mourning, of effeminizing immorality versus manly exemplarity. The logic governing both arguments remains the same throughout: memory is good, forgetting is bad.

However, there was also a third perspective on theatre, memory and forgetting available at that time, which did not define forgetfulness in merely negative terms as a failure of memory. I want to start my exploration of this more positive attitude to oblivion with an early modern emblem from Joannes Sambucus' *Emblemata* from

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Nashe, *Pierce Pennilesse, his Supplication to the Divell*, ed. by G. B. Harrison (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966), p. 86–87.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors*, ed. by J. W. Binns (New York: Johnson Repr., 1972), p. B3r-v, F3v.

1566 which also uses the imagery of the “wyne of forgetfulnesse”, albeit in strikingly different ways than Rankins.

DE OBLIUIONE ET FERULA BACCHO DICATA.  
ODI MEMOREM COMPOTOREM.



Glossed as “The blessings of oblivion”, the image shows a naked Bacchus, the god of wine and festivity, sitting on a wine barrel next to a gaunt female figure who is sacrificing a *ferula*, or a fennel rod, to him on the altar. The Latin motto reads “I hate the unforgiving man”, a statement that is elaborated in the accompanying poem:

Odi symposij memorem, dubiae et simul  
Liti: nam calices volo, verbaque libera,  
Ludos atque iocos nive pectora candida.  
Baccho recte igitur veteres Ferulam dicant,  
Oblitumque cor, vt penitus sileant, suos  
Aut laesi socios leuitur modo puniant.

I hate him who remembers both the drinking bout  
and the ensuing quarrel, for I love the tumbler and free words,  
the jesting play of a pure and joyful heart.  
Thus the elders have justly dedicated to Bacchus the giant fennel  
and the oblivious heart, so that they bury it [the insult] in silence or,  
in case they got hurt, may punish their companions only lightly.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Joannes Sambucus, *Emblemata* (1566), p. 69, reprinted in *Emblemata*, ed. by Arthur Henkel, Albrecht Schöne (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1996), p. 350–351.

At first glance, this poem seems to echo Rankins' invective against drink: wine induces forgetfulness. However, forgetfulness here does not appear as a negative but rather as a positive force. The speaker of the poem rejects the man who remembers both the drinking bout and the following quarrel as detestable, praising instead "the tumbler and free words, the jesting play of a pure and joyful heart". He seems to claim no less than the freedom of speech and to identify it with the freedom to forget his sober, law-abiding self in drink. However, this carnivalesque claim to drunken self-forgetfulness as a liberation from the rules of everyday life can be quite dangerous, as the second part of the poem shows: it closes with a prayer that hurtful words may be forgotten, or, should this prove impossible, that the punishment may be a mild one. As a symbol of this forgiveness from the powers that be, the *ferula* is sacrificed to Bacchus.

The blessings of oblivion, then, seem to be rather ambivalent: The praise of forgetfulness turns quickly into a prayer for forgiveness. This ambivalence is also borne out by the *ferula*, the staff of a giant fennel, which in ancient times was both a fertility symbol, used in Bacchanalian rites, and a symbol of punishment, used to discipline children and slaves who had forgotten their place.

## II

In the final part of this paper, I want to show how these different perspectives on memory and forgetfulness were negotiated on the early modern stage itself. My hypothesis is that the stage provides us with a more complex notion of the workings of forgetfulness than either its attackers or its defenders.<sup>10</sup> The Bacchus-emblem serves me as a model for the ambivalent blessings of oblivion, and my test-case will be that most Bacchus-like of all early modern stage figures, Sir John Falstaff in the two parts of *Henry IV*.

Of course the connections between Bacchus and Falstaff have been drawn for quite a while now, at least since C. L. Barber's seminal study of *Shakespeare's Festive Comedies* was published in 1959. Since then, Falstaff has been interpreted productively as an embodiment of the festive culture of carnival.<sup>11</sup> However, the problem

<sup>10</sup> For a similar line of argument, see Long (2004), p. 153.

<sup>11</sup> The two poles of festivity and order have usually been discussed either in terms of space (the contrastive worlds of tavern and court) or festive versus historical time. For examples of the first, see Paola Pugliatti, *Shakespeare the Historian* (New York: St. Martin's, 1996); Jean Howard, Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering a Nation: A Feminist Account of Shakespeare's English Histories* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Alexander Leggatt, "Killing the Hero: Tamburlaine and Falstaff", in Paul Budra, Betty Schellenberg, eds., *Part Two: Reflections on the Sequel* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 53–67; François Laroque, "'Shakespeare's 'Battle of Carnival and Lent': The Falstaff Scenes Reconsidered", in Ronald Knowles, ed., *Shakespeare and Carnival: After Bakhtin* (New York: Macmillan, 1998), 83–96. The temporal distinction prevails in Shigeki Takada, "The First and Second Parts of *Henry IV*: Some Thoughts on the Origins of Shakespearean Gentleness", in Yasunari Takahashi, ed., *Hot Questrists After the English Renaissance* (New York: AMS Press, 2000), p. 183–196 and Peter Womack, "*Henry IV* and Epic Theatre", in Nigel Wood, ed., *Henry IV, Parts One and Two* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1995), p. 126–161.

with this interpretive tradition, as David Ruitter points out, is that it operates within a closed dialectic of festivity versus order, tavern versus court, Carnival versus Lent, and, one might add with Rankins: idle self-forgetfulness versus duty and virtuous labour. Even if one takes into account, as especially New Historicist scholars in the wake of Foucault and Greenblatt have done, that carnival is complicit in upholding the social order by acting as a kind of safety-valve, the dichotomy itself has remained (un)surprisingly stable.<sup>12</sup> I would like to argue that a shift of focus onto oblivion challenges this dichotomy and shows that the relations between festivity and order, between oblivion and memory in these plays are in fact rather ambivalent.

Since the equation of Falstaff with carnival spirit is well established by now, I will only touch this very briefly by pointing out that he embodies the positive, pleasurable sides of self-forgetfulness as they are described in the first part of the Bacchus-poem. Especially the Falstaff of the early tavern scenes is aptly described in its words as a lover of “the tumbler and free words, the jesting play of a pure and joyful heart”. In his drinking sessions, he repeatedly forgets himself, that is, his station and the proper behaviour it requires. His idleness proves every bit as contagious as William Rankins feared, since he also seduces his companions, most notably Prince Hal, into forgetting their positions and duties as well. Calling him familiarly by his first name and accosting him as “lad” (1.2.35), “sweet wag” (1.2.13–14) and “mad wag” (1.2.39), he claims for himself a freedom of speech which ignores their respective positions in the court hierarchy.<sup>13</sup> Falstaff is of a forgetting and forgiving disposition, as is pointed out by a servant in the second part who reports how Prince Hal played a prank on Falstaff that “angered him to the heart”, only to add in the same breath: “But he hath forgot that.” (2H4, 2.4.6–7) While this comment certainly serves to characterize Falstaff once again as good-natured, it also implies that the fat knight has not quite forgotten about the respect he owes his social superiors: after all, it would be most unwise to hold a grudge against the future king. In fact, he is not unmindful either of his unruly past or of his future prospects but keeps reminding Prince Harry of the forgiveness as well as privileges he hopes for “when thou art king” (1H4, 2.1.13–15, 20–26, 51–52, 54).

If Falstaff is always ready to forget injuries done to him, he is even more so regarding the dishonourable acts done by him. When Hal discovers his cowardly behaviour in the robbery at Gad’s Hill (2.5.) or when he is caught claiming that the prince owes him one thousand pounds in order to prolong his credit at the tavern (3.3.), Falstaff simply refuses to be ashamed and wittily offers the most favourable interpretation of his behaviour instead. His famous catechism against honour in the context of a battle scene, in which he inverts the common hierarchy of honourable death over staying alive, is another case in point (5.1.129–139). Forgetting, then, enables Falstaff to avoid the demands of chivalric behaviour or of honourable dealings and to carve out an

<sup>12</sup> David Ruitter, *Shakespeare’s Festive History: Feasting, Festivity, Fasting and Lent in the Second Henriad* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp.1–39, esp. pp. 5–16.

<sup>13</sup> William Shakespeare, *The History of Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt et al., The Norton Shakespeare (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997). All further references taken from this edition.

imaginative space in which he recasts the memory of past events in terms of his alternative set of values.

Similarly, his self-forgetfulness should not be understood in terms of a loss of identity but rather as a productive, creative force, since it frees Falstaff to adopt social roles or poses at will. Hugh Grady has suggested that we see Falstaff's refusal to be tied down to any single identity and his continually reinventing himself through a series of dramatic improvisations, as a strategy of resistance to Althusserian interpellation: "This playfulness, this ability to subvert ideological interpellation through theatricality is Falstaff's crucial characteristic [...]"<sup>14</sup> I would like to argue that his deliberate forgetting of "former deedes" (Rankins) can be interpreted similarly as an act of resistance to interpellation. This is nowhere more obvious than in Falstaff's encounters with the Lord Chief Justice, the foremost representative of state authority, in the second part of *Henry IV*. In a scene which resembles Althusser's prime example of interpellation,<sup>15</sup> the Lord Chief Justice attempts to call Falstaff to account for the Gadshill robbery he committed in the first part. Falstaff, however, pretends to be deaf to these acts of interpellation, a deafness which he explicitly and tellingly describes as "a kind of lethargy" (1.2.101). "Lethargy", as pointed out before, derives etymologically from Lethe, the river of forgetfulness, and Falstaff's 'lethargy' here is nothing but an attempt to forget his former deeds and to eschew being interpellated and punished as a criminal. Falstaff himself marks this forgetting as a deliberate act rather than an accidental disease, when he confesses tongue-in-cheek that his deafness is "[r]ather [...] the disease of not listening, the malady of not marking, that I am troubled withal" (1.2.110–111).

However, forgetting can be found not only on the side of carnivalesque celebration and subversive resistance, but also on the side of order and power itself. This becomes clear in the second encounter between Falstaff and the Lord Chief Justice, in which the latter simply turns Falstaff's own strategy against himself: When he asks the Lord Chief Justice eagerly "What's the news, my lord?", he is deliberately and repeatedly being ignored by him (2.1.152–164). The implication is, that the Lord Chief Justice pretends to the same "kind of lethargy" or "deafness" in order to put Falstaff into his place. Yet the very moment he attends to the old knight's calls of "My lord!", Falstaff turns the tables once again and ignores the Lord Chief Justice. Upbraided by him—"What foolish master taught you these manners, Sir John?"—Falstaff agrees readily with him, managing to insinuate that the Justice was the fool who taught him this habit. While Falstaff seems or pretends to have forgotten that it was in fact he himself who started this game, what he has not forgotten is the name of the game: to get even

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<sup>14</sup> Hugh Grady, "Falstaff: Subjectivity between the Carnival and the Aesthetic", *The Modern Language Review* 96 (2001), 609–623, p. 613.

<sup>15</sup> Althusser likens the act of interpellation, by which individuals become subjects as they subject themselves to ideology, to that moment when somebody is hailed by a police officer on the street "Hey, you there!" and turns around because he or she identifies him-/ herself as the person hailed. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses [1968]", in Julie Rivkin, Michael Ryan, eds., *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 301.

with his social superior. “This is the right fencing grace, my lord”, he triumphantly calls quits, “—tap for tap, and so part fair.” (2.1.175–6)

That forgetting can also be a strategy employed by the powerful does perhaps not come as a surprise in a play whose main plot—the nobles’ rebellion—is driven by the king’s refusal to remember by whose help he came onto the throne in the first place. The Earls of Worcester and Northumberland who were involved in the deposing and murder of Richard II and the accession of Henry Bolingbroke to the throne, are now held in low esteem by the king. Thus from the first act on, he is repeatedly accused by them of forgetfulness, even disrespectfully apostrophised as “this forgetful man” (1.3.159). Harry Hotspur, Northumberland’s son, specifies the king’s debts to his family in detail, reminding him that “My father and my uncle and myself/ Did give him that same royalty he wears.” (4.3.56–57) Worcester finally charges the king directly of forgetfulness: “It pleased your majesty to turn your looks/ of favour from myself and all our house;/ [...] Forgot your oath to us at Doncaster” (5.1.30–31, 58). From the king’s point of view, this forgetfulness is not so much dishonourable as a political necessity: he cannot allow his nobles to have such a powerful claim over him, much less to let his own person be connected with the disgrace of regicide. Nor, for that matter, can he allow anyone to remember that regicide is indeed a possibility. Nevertheless, forgetfulness turns out to be quite an ambivalent blessing: it is the king’s disregard of the Percy family’s services that incites them to rebellion in the first place.

As much a necessity as a liability, forgetting is above all a political strategy. Again, this strategy can be employed by those at the centre of power as well as those hovering precariously at its margins: In the second part of *Henry IV*, the rebellious nobles—having lost the decisive battle at the end of the first part in which Prince Harry killed their champion Hotspur—recognize the king’s absolute will to oblivion and try to turn this to their advantage. About to negotiate a peace treaty with their sovereign, they fear that the king will remember their disobedience ever after:

*Mowbray:*            [...] our valuation shall be such  
                          That every slight and false-derived cause,  
                          Yea, every idle, nice, and wanton reason,  
                          Shall to the King taste of this action. (2H4, 4.1.187–190)

The Archbishop of York, obviously better versed in Machiavellian tactics than Mowbray, is able to reassure him, however:

*Archbishop of York:*    No, no my lord; note this.            The King is weary  
                                  Of dainty and such picking grievances,  
                                  [...]  
                                  And therefore will he wipe his tables clean,  
                                  And keep no tell-tale to his memory  
                                  That may repeat and history his loss  
                                  To new remembrance; [...]  
                                  And therefore be assured, my good Lord Marshal,  
                                  If we do now make our atonement well,  
                                  Our peace will, like a broken limb united,  
                                  Grow stronger for the breaking. (195–221)



In contrast to the Bacchus poem, however, their petition for forgiveness is met with harsh punishment when they are arrested and sentenced for high treason (332–349).

What importance the policy of oblivion has in Henry's eyes becomes clear when the dying king explicates its rationale in the "very latest counsel" (4.3.310) to his son and heir, cautioning him to adopt it for his reign as well:

*King Henry:* Yet though thou stand'st more sure than I could do,  
 Thou art not firm enough, since griefs are green  
 And all thy friends—which thou must make thy friends –  
 Have but their stings and teeth newly ta'en out,  
 By whose fell working I was first advanced,  
 And by whose power I well might lodge a fear  
 To be again displaced; which to avoid  
 I cut them off and had a purpose now  
 To lead out many to the Holy Land,  
 Lest rest and lying still might make them look  
 Too near unto my state. Therefore, my Harry,  
 Be it thy course to busy giddy minds  
 With foreign quarrels, that action hence borne out  
 May waste the memory of the former days. (*2H4*, 4.3.331–343)

To erase the memory of rebellion and regicide from his nobles' restless minds and to secure domestic stability by keeping them busy abroad is Henry's favoured strategy of staying in power. How well the prince has learned his father's lesson becomes obvious in *Henry V*, where the "foreign quarrels" against France (as well as the young king's charisma) unite the chequered nation.

But one need not look to the next play in the tetralogy to see that Harry is himself a master of the "art of oblivion"<sup>16</sup>. For most of the first part of *Henry IV*, he seems to be joyfully forgetful of his position and duties as heir apparent, so much so, that his father doubts or rather wishes that his enemy's valiant son, Harry Hotspur, might not be his true heir (*IH4*, 1.1.77–89). However, Hal proves that he is his father's son indeed. Already in act 1.2., in his famous "imitate the sun"-soliloquy, he makes clear that this self-forgetfulness is not merely a disease he caught from Falstaff, but part of a strategic self-fashioning. Distancing himself from his companions and "the unyoked humour of [their] idleness [!]", he intends to "throw off" such improper behaviour in good time; his spectacular "reformation" is to "glitt[er] over [his] fault" (1.2.191), thus obliterating it from memory, and to win him the admiration and respect of his subjects. In other words, he counts on the willingness or ability of his subjects to forget in order to complete his project of self-transformation. His present familiarity with the world of the lower social classes—which at first glance looks as if he is lost in drunken self-forgetfulness—never obscures the future he is born for. Coming from a drinking bout with a couple of drawers and recalling what they say about him, the sentence "when I am King of England I shall command all the good lads in Eastchap" (2.5.13–14) allows for an ambivalent reading: as indirect speech, it expresses the drawers' acknowl-

<sup>16</sup> John Willis uses this expression in *Mnemonic; or, the Art of Memory* (1618) to describe the techniques of deliberate forgetting.

edgment of his superiority and an oath of loyalty; spoken in Harry’s own voice, it not only announces his intention to assert his rank in the future but that he will do so more effectively because of his intimate knowledge of the common people. His seeming self-forgetfulness, then, is not only self-indulgence, but also a mask which can and will be thrown off at will.

What is more, as a king he has to forget his old friends—much like his father had to forget the friends whose “fell working” (2*H4*, 4.3.334) helped him onto the throne. Several times in the two parts of the play, Prince Hal openly admits to this necessity, as when he tells Poins, another of his roguish companions: “What a disgrace is it to me to remember thy name! Or to know thy face tomorrow!” (2*H4*, 2.2.12–13). Part of remembering his duties as heir apparent, then, is a deliberate forgetting of his old companions, most notably of Falstaff. Too late (and by then also too unimportant a courtier?) to be present at the coronation, Falstaff stands in the crowd, trying to catch the young king’s attention. Calling him “King Hal, my royal Hal!” (2*H4*, 5.5.39), “my sweet boy” (41) and “My king, my Jove, I speak to thee, my heart!” on a scale of mounting anguish at being ignored by his foster-son, the scene recalls that in which he was pointedly snubbed by the Lord Chief Justice earlier on. Here, too, the Lord Chief Justice is present to remind him of the gap in rank which separates Falstaff from the king: “Have you your wits? Know you what ’tis you speak?” (43–44) When Harry finally turns to him, it is to dismiss him with the words: “I know thee not, old man.” (45) Whether he does so in cold blood or breaks his heart over it, has become an issue of hot academic debate. In either case, he is following here his father’s policy of oblivion to the letter.

Falstaff thus also embodies the *dangers* of self-forgetfulness as they are hinted at in the second part of the Bacchus poem: having indulged too freely in the pleasures of self-forgetting, he is himself being deliberately forgotten in the end. Left behind in the race for positions and privilege when his foster-son comes into his royal rights, Falstaff sinks into oblivion.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, all prayers to Bacchus for a mild punishment are in vain: being banished from the presence of the king and thus barred from access to power and privilege, is the most severe sentence that can be dealt out to an early modern courtier.

### III

To sum up, I hope to have shown that a dichotomous notion of memory and forgetting in terms of good and bad is too simplistic. Oblivion can be a positive, productive force, not just a failure of memory: self-forgetfulness does not only mean a loss of identity but rather an opportunity for resistance against interpellation and for self-transformation. However, the blessings of oblivion are ambivalent; they can be employed by those in power as well, and oblivion can be a cruel form of punishment. From this fol-

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<sup>17</sup> That Falstaff does precisely *not* sink into oblivion—he holds centre-stage again in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and is at least verbally represented in *Henry V*—but rather remains one of the most memorable and most popular Shakespearean characters, is of course one of the ironies of stage history.

lows that we have to reconceptualise the relation between memory and forgetting: memory and forgetting are complementary forces, and their respective roles are quite ambiguous—or perhaps *contingency* is a better word here, because whether forgetfulness is something positive or negative (or both) depends on the context and the web of power at play.

### **Zusammenfassung**

Entgegen der von Umberto Eco postulierten Unmöglichkeit einer Kunst des Vergessens (*“An Ars Oblivionalis? Forget It!”*, 1988) zeigt dieser Aufsatz, dass das Vergessen mitnichten eine bloß naturhaft-zerstörerische Kraft und das Vergessene selbst nicht nur als negative Abwesenheit und Gegensatz zu einem bewahrenden Erinnern denkbar ist. Während eine solche dichotome Logik die polemische Debatte über das frühneuzeitliche Theater durchaus prägt, stellt sich das Vergessen auf der Bühne selbst als konstruktive, bewusst einsetzbare und mehrdeutige Kraft dar. Am Beispiel von Shakespeares *Henry IV* und hier besonders an der Figur des Falstaff wird gezeigt, wie das Vergessen als widerständige Position gegenüber Staat und Autorität ebenso wie als Kalkül einer machtgestützten Erinnerungspolitik operiert, dass es als eine kreative Strategie des *self-fashioning* ebenso wie als strafende Auslöschung einer gesellschaftlichen Existenz zum Einsatz kommen kann.



# “A GAP” IN THE BODY: THE WITCHES’ CAULDRON AND THE PERMEABLE SELF IN *MACBETH*

BY

JOO YOUNG DITTMANN

## I

Standing in the heath after his disturbing encounter with “[t]he weird sisters” (1.3.30), Banquo states: “Were such things here as we do speak about?/Or have we eaten on the insane root,/That takes the reason prisoner?” (1.3.81–83).<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the play depicts the process in which Macbeth’s “reason”, that is, the rational part of the soul in Aristotelian terms, is gradually dissolved after his meeting with the sisters.

Banquo’s description of demonic possession through the language of food intake reflects a crucial concern of early modern medical theory, in which quality of diet was supposed to determine one’s physical and psychological state. Authors of medical treatises repeatedly asserted the significance of diet in sustaining the balance of one’s bodily and psychic disposition. Warning his readers of the danger of poor diet, Thomas Paynell writes that “Surfet and diversities of meates and drynkes lettynge and corruptynge the digestion febleth man . . . Yll diete (as me thynketh) is chief cause of all dangerous and intollerable diseases”.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, William Vaughan, the author of the popular *Directions for Health*, notes: “Physicians hold that men be diversly affected, according to the dyet which they use”.<sup>3</sup>

In these writings, the impact of food on the body was considered to be ambivalent. While sound dietary regimen nourishes the body, poor diet or diet that does not suit one’s physiological temperament can prove serious damage. Even the same food was believed to make various impacts on different humoral complexions. Furthermore, the inseparability of body and mind in early modern thought attributed to food the power to affect not only one’s physical health but also one’s soul.<sup>4</sup> These ambiguous effects

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations from *Macbeth* are from William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. by A. R. Braunmuller, The New Cambridge Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Paynell, *Regimen sanitatis Salerni* (London, 1528), sig. A2v, quoted in Margaret Healy, *Fictions of Disease in Early Modern England: Bodies, Plagues and Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> William Vaughan, *Directions for Health* (London, 1626), quoted in Michael C. Schoenfeldt, “Fables of the Belly in Early Modern England”, in David Hillman, Carla Mazzio, eds., *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 251.

<sup>4</sup> For the early modern notion of the inseparability of body and mind, see Michael C. Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell

of food were a central topic not only of medical discourse but also of witchcraft disputes. In early modern witch-lore, with its potential power to breach the boundary of the body, food was frequently used as a medium of bewitching.<sup>5</sup> These discursive overlays indicate the significance of food in relation to the body, selfhood, and subjectivity. With its ambiguous relation to the body, food offers a point through which to explore the conflict-ridden relation between interior and exterior, between the subject and the world, between container and contained.

The anxieties about potentially dangerous effects of food elaborated in medical theory and witchcraft tracts pervade *Macbeth*. The play is fraught with references to multifarious impacts of eating and drinking on the body, interrupted feasts, and images of malnurtured and disorderly bodies. Banquo’s speech quoted above, as if echoing the concern of witchcraft tracts, links bewitchment with ingestion of poisonous food. The chief guest Duncan is murdered after a banquet, and Banquo is slaughtered on his way to supper. Furthermore, under Macbeth’s tyranny, Scotland is metamorphosed to a malnurtured, open, and bleeding body suffering from internal imbalances. Various associated with occult power, dissolution of selfhood, and breakdown of political order, food in the play refers to a wide range of meanings that suggest the uneasy relation between inside and outside, between constitution and blurring of boundaries.

This essay explores the play’s pervasive concern with poisonous food, malnutrition, dissolving boundaries, and deconstitution of selfhood in the light of early modern medical discourses and witchcraft disputes. As recent scholarship has shown, the body is not a transhistorical entity. Rather, it is a malleable construct, whose figurations entail historically specific modes of inscription.<sup>6</sup> As discursive sites of inscription and articulation, *Macbeth*, witchcraft tracts, and medical discourses participated in complex and sometimes contradictory processes of fashioning the early modern body. In this essay, I aim at examining cultural dynamics enmeshed in the representations of the body these texts provide, focusing on the following questions: how does the era’s preoccupation with ingestion and digestion of food point to the historical formation of the specific model of the body and selfhood?; how can we read the pervasive motif of the disorderly and malnurtured body in *Macbeth*?; and finally, how can we understand the varying figurations of food, the body, and subjectivity in medical treatises, witchcraft tracts, and *Macbeth* in the historical context of early modern England?

## II

Critics have emphasized the specifically material understanding of selfhood in early modern England. Relying on the authority of Galenic humoralism, writers of the pe-

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University Press, 1993); Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-century Representations* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 128.

<sup>6</sup> For some instances, see Thomas Lacqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); Hillman and Mazzio (1997); Paster (1993); Paster (2004).

riod claim that the material state of the body is determined through the balance of four humors, and the body thus constituted affects one's physical as well as psychological state. However, sustaining the balance of body and mind was a difficult task, since bodies were imagined as a vulnerable boundary characterized by "its faulty borders and penetrable stuff" that "interacts differently with the world than the 'static, solid' modern bodily container".<sup>7</sup> In this pre-Cartesian understanding of body and mind, subjectivities are perceived as a porous and volatile entity susceptible to external influences. As Timothy J. Reiss indicates, the early modern subject is "embedded in and acted on by [...] the material world and immediate biological, familial and social ambiances [...] [T]hese circles preceded the person, which acted as subjected to forces working in complicated ways from 'outside.' But because of the embedding, that 'outside' was manifest in all aspects and elements of 'inside'—of being a person".<sup>8</sup>

Medical treatises in this period repeatedly sought to overcome this vulnerability. Although the body is embedded in its surroundings, these writings claim that it can sustain itself through self-discipline and vigilant monitoring. Sir Thomas Elyot states in his highly esteemed *Castel of Helthe* that one's "castel", that is, one's own body can be sustained through regulating external factors.<sup>9</sup> Elyot's arguments concerning the significance of the sustenance of health as well as his figuration of the human body as a spatial image of "castel" were echoed by writers of the period. In 1562 William Bullein declares that one must defend one's "little Fort" "against sickenes, or evill diate". Similarly, in 1604 James Manning writes that one should "look after his castle" and "keepe the cage as cleane as he can".<sup>10</sup> At the center of this argument, as Margaret Healy observes, lies the compulsion to sustain the bounded sense of the self: as "a model which can stand for any bounded system", the body must have secure boundaries which protect itself from harmful external influences.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Paster (2004), p. 23. In the early modern preoccupation with the vulnerability of bodily boundaries, we can observe the increasing influence of the newly emerging Paracelsan paradigm of the body. In Galenic humoralism, disease was caused by internal imbalance of humors. This Galenic conception of disease, however, began to be complemented and displaced by the newly emerging understanding of the body asserted by the Swiss physician Paracelsus. Challenging the Galenic system of internal balance, he claimed that origins of disease lie outside the body. As Margaret Healy argues, early modern medical texts tended to combine these theories, which produced the era's idiosyncratic understanding of the body (Healy [2001], p. 6, pp. 18–49). For the increasing influence of Paracelsianism in early modern England, see Jonathan Gil Harris, *Foreign Bodies and the Body Politic: Discourses of Social Pathology in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 19–47.

<sup>8</sup> Timothy J. Reiss, *Mirages of the Self: Patterns of Personhood in Ancient and Early Modern Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Castel of Helthe* (London, 1541), introduction by Samuel Tannenbaum (New York: Scholar's Facsimiles & Reprints, 1937).

<sup>10</sup> William Bullein, *A newe booke Entituled the Government of Healthe* (London, 1558), sig. C2v, quoted in Healy (2001), p. 24; James Manning, *A New Booke Intituled I am for you all, Complexions castle* (London, 1604), p. 2, quoted in Healy (2001), p. 34.

<sup>11</sup> Healy (2001), p. 18. The quotation is in Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 116.

In these writings, choice of diet plays a crucial role in sustaining bodily and psychic health. As an external substance incorporated into the body, food occupies a liminal position in its relation to the body: it is at once inside and outside, same and other. In this sense, food functions as ‘extimité’ of the early modern body, the intimate exteriority that simultaneously constitutes and threatens the integrity of the body.<sup>12</sup> Early modern medical discourses attempted to domesticate anxieties about the ‘extimate’ effects of food. The popular genre of dietaries and health manuals aimed at instructing readers how to govern one’s body through regulating external factors, especially dietary regimen. These texts discuss at length digestive and nutritive qualities of foods and their impacts on each humoral temperament and prescribe suitable diets to each complexion. For instance, “in a cholericke stomake”, states Elyot, “biefte is better digested than a chykens legge, forasmoch as in a hotte stomacke fyne meates be shortly aduste and corrupted. Contrarywise in a colde or fleumatyke stomake grosse meate abydeh longe undigested, and maketh putrifid matter: light meates therefore be to suche a stomacke more apte and conveyent”.<sup>13</sup> Not only prescribing suitable food to each humoral temperament, writings in this period also repeatedly warned readers of the harmful impact of poor diet and excessive appetite. “As a lamp is choked with a multitude of oil”, writes Robert Burton in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, “so is the natural heat with immoderate eating strangled in the body [...] [the stomach] is a pernicious sink, and the fountain of all diseases, both of body and mind”.<sup>14</sup> Overall, in this symbolic economy, as Michael C. Schoenfeldt argues, eating is a highly codified symbolic ritual that materially constitutes the self, and sound dietary regimen serves as a crucial means to sustain physical and psychological well-being, in other words, “literal acts of self-fashioning”.<sup>15</sup>

This attempt to sustain bodily boundaries is thwarted in *Macbeth*. The image of the disorderly body that escapes the control of the subject pervades the play. Macbeth’s almost hallucinated state after his encounter with the witches provides a vivid description of dissolution of boundaries:

This supernatural solliciting  
 Cannot be ill, cannot be good. If ill,  
 Why hath it given me earnest of success,  
 Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor.  
 If good, why do I yield to that suggestion,  
 Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair  
 And make my seated heart knock at my ribs  
 Against the use of nature? Present fears  
 Are less than horrible imaginings.

<sup>12</sup> For the notion of ‘extimité’, see Jacques-Alain Miller, “Extimité”, in Mark Bracher et al., eds., *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure, and Society* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 74–87.

<sup>13</sup> Elyot (1541), 16.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), ed. by Holbrook Jackson (London: J. M. Dent, 1972), p. 226.

<sup>15</sup> Schoenfeldt (1997), p. 243. See also Schoenfeldt (1999), p. 11.



My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,  
 Shakes so much my single state of man that function  
 Is smothered in surmise, and nothing is,  
 But what is not. (1.3.129–41)

This passage as a whole depicts bewitchment as a transferential process. As if drugged by “the insane root” (1.3.82), Macbeth undergoes physical transformations over which he has no control: his hair is “unfix(ed)” by “horrid image”, and his “seated heart” leaves its place and knocks at his ribs “against the use of nature”. What is at stake is not only integrity but also agency: his internal organs elude his grasp and seem to have lives of their own, shaking his “single state of man”. This corporeal metamorphosis is accompanied by psychic transport. In his enraptured mind, distinctions between “good” and “ill”, being and non being, truth and falsity (“nothing is,/But what is not”), present and future, are blurred: the “horrible imaginings” of the future (i.e. the dead Duncan) comes to take the space of reality, and the very thought of murder precedes his “function” of man.

The dramatic plot that follows stages various forms of unbounded bodies that elude the control of the subject. In her invocation to the “spirits/That tend on mortal thoughts” (1.5.38–39) to “unsex” (1.5.39) her, Lady Macbeth wishes her body to be transformed into an open, disorderly body, not unlike the witches’. At the same time, the play represents the dissolution of the bounded sense of self in scopic terms. Instead of ensuring the spectator of a position of visual mastery, in *Macbeth*, the spectacle disintegrates visual agency of the spectator. Duncan’s corpse, like “Gorgon”, destroys the sight of the spectator (2.3.65–66); Lady Macbeth’s sleepwalking has “mated” the onlooker’s mind and “amazed” his sight (5.1.68); confronting “the air-drawn dagger” (3.4.62), Macbeth is no longer able to sustain his visual mastery over the object of seeing, and his “eyes are made the fools of o’th’other senses” (2.1.44). Likewise, the sight of his own bloody hands blinds Macbeth’s eyes (“What hands are here? Ha: they pluck out mine eyes”, 2.2.62), and the spectacle of Banquo’s ghost dislocates Macbeth’s attempted display of power.

The play forges a link between this dissolution of self and poor diet. Instead of nourishing the body, food in the play is a poisonous substance that harms physical and psychological health. Pleading to exchange her milk with gall, Lady Macbeth becomes the agent of infiltration, who poisons those whom she feeds: she claims to “pour [her] spirits” (1.5.24) in Macbeth’s ear and drugs the guards to facilitate the murder of Duncan:

When Duncan is asleep,  
 Whereto the rather shall his day’s hard journey  
 Soundly invite him, his two chamberlains  
 Will I with wine and wassail so convince  
 That memory, the warder of the brain,  
 Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason  
 A limbeck only. When in swinish sleep  
 Their drenchèd natures lies as in a death,  
 What cannot you and I perform upon  
 Th’unguarded Duncan? (1.7. 61–70)

Intensifying the concern of early modern medical writings, this passage foregrounds the potentially ambiguous effects of food. While featuring as a sign of hospitality, wine simultaneously functions as a poison that disintegrates “memory” and “reason”, two mental qualities that sustain the integrity of the self, into formless “fume”. The guards, drugged by “wine and wassail”, are beside themselves, lapsing into the comatose state of sleep. This infiltrating power of drugs and foodstuff was a pervasive concern in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England. In this period, accusations of poisoning were prevalent, culminating in the conviction of the Portuguese Jewish doctor, Roderigo Lopez (1594) and in the Overbury case (1613). As Tanya Pollard indicates, the cultural anxieties about poisoning centered upon the fact that poisoning was extremely difficult to prevent. Again what is at stake is the subject’s agency: with its power of invisible infiltration, poisonous food renders the self a site vulnerable to malign plotting of another.<sup>16</sup>

In *Macbeth*, not only affecting the guards, the destructive consequences of drinking pervade the entire murder scene. Macbeth’s psychic and physical state is compared with that of a drunken man who has failed to discipline himself (“Was the hope drunk/Wherein you dressed yourself? Hath it slept since?/And wakes it now to look so green and pale/At what it did so freely?”, 1.7.35–38). With its insistent knocking at the gates (which echoes the ‘knocking’ of Macbeth’s heart depicted in Act 1 Scene 3), the castle itself is turned into a disorderly body that has lost control over itself. Throughout the play, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth imagine themselves in terms of a malnourished, diseased body deprived of sleep, “great nature’s second course,/Chief nourisher in life’s feast” (2.2.42–43).

This malnourished body provides a suggestive gloss to the horror represented in *Macbeth*. Not only representing the crisis of subjectivity, the malnourished and poisoned bodies embody the sense of cosmic disorder, as dramatized through the two banquets in the play. Banquets are social rituals that reaffirm the social bond. As such, in banquets, food signifies the symbolic bond between the king and the subject: in banquets the king is “fed” (1.4.55) in “commendations” of the subject (1.4.55), and “the sauce to meat is ceremony” (3.4.36). Macbeth fails to sustain this symbolic function of banquet. Instead of nourishing their guests, the Macbeths poison them. Furthermore, in the second banquet, distracted by Banquo’s ghost, Macbeth fails to fulfill his symbolic role as host. Due to his breaching of this symbolic function, Macbeth is accused of robbing his country of peaceful feasts (3.6.33–37) and of transforming Scotland into a disorderly body that is “[a]lmost afraid to know itself” (4.3.167). This image of the malnourished, disorderly body, combined with the trope of poisonous food, creates a powerful semantic pull that points to the shattering of subjectivity, familial bond, and nation.

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<sup>16</sup> Tanya Pollard, *Drugs and Theater in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 7–9.

### III

Considering the early modern preoccupation with the bounded sense of the body, how can we understand the disorderly bodies in *Macbeth*? The play implicates the witches in a threat to boundaries. As has often been noted, they are themselves embodiments of boundary transgression. Simultaneously inhabiting the natural and supernatural world, confusing the rational with the enigmatic, and challenging gender distinction that sets off men from women, the sisters confuse the boundaries marked by the rules and norms of society. At the same time, their language disrupts a stable referring function of language. In their words, “fair is foul, and foul is fair” (1.1.12), and Banquo is “[l]esser than Macbeth, and greater”, “[n]ot so happy, yet much happier” (1.3.63–64). Furthermore, they attach Macbeth to three incompatible signifiers of “Thane of Glamis”, “Thane of Cawdor”, and “king” (1.3.46–48). This linguistic disruption and the specters of boundless bodies provide a telling emblem of the world where distinctions are dissolved, where “what seemed corporal/Melted, as breath into the wind” (1.3.79–80).

As a form of power that involves interaction between the bodies, witchcraft dissolves secure boundaries. In early modern witchcraft disputes, fantasies of witchcraft are often articulated through the image of porous, disorderly bodies. The witch was believed to shift shape, unfixing the contour of bodily boundaries. Furthermore, she could invade the body of others through her curse, her evil eye, or her food.<sup>17</sup> While the truth of witchcraft could not be proven, anxieties concerning potential danger of witchcraft pervaded sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. In village-level witchcraft beliefs, witches were accused of poisoning, causing illness and madness. At the same time, even the royal power was not in a safe distance from this transformative power of the witch. Both Elizabeth and James expressed their concern about the occult. In 1580, Elizabeth decreed an Act condemning anyone who attempted to harm the queen by witchcraft or conjurations. In Scotland, more than 300 witches were accused of aiding the earl of Bothwell’s conspiracy against James VI.<sup>18</sup> At the center of these disputes lie anxieties concerning the dissolution of boundaries facing the power of another. Witches transgress boundaries that distinguish self from other, natural from unnatural, rational from enigmatic. In early modern witchcraft disputes, the fear of possession was frequently articulated through the language of contagion. In his *Daemonologie*, James I defines the witch as “the direct haunting [...] [of] societie, with that foule and vncleane Spirite”. Even Reginald Scot, who argued against the existence of witchcraft from the perspective of skepticism, seems to lend some credence to the contagious power of the witch’s evil eye: “For the poison and disease in the eie infecteth the aire next unto it, and the same proceedeth further, carrieng with it

<sup>17</sup> For the association of witchcraft with the image of disorderly bodies, see Purkiss (1997), pp. 119–44; Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 23–26.

<sup>18</sup> Peter Stallybrass, “*Macbeth* and Witchcraft”, in Alan Sinfield, ed., *Macbeth: New Casebooks* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 26–27.

the vapor and infection of the corrupted bloud: with the contagion whereof, the eies of the beholders are most apt to be infected”.<sup>19</sup>

The play as a whole foregrounds the formative impacts of the witches. Not only associated with “the insane root” (1.3.82), the weird sisters set the climate of “fog and filthy air” (1.1.13), which was considered to harm one’s health by causing disruption of humors.<sup>20</sup> Their meeting with Macbeth is framed by descriptions of their power to cause corporeal transformations. The first witch, as a revenge on the sailor’s wife who denied her food, claims to use her magic to “drain” her husband “dry as hay” (1.3.17), deprive him of sleep, and toss him at sea, making him “dwindle, peak, and pine” (1.3.22). While it is not clear whether their *maleficium* can achieve the desired effects, the torments they devise establish them as threatening figures of infiltration. In addition, their use of fragmented body parts for their magic (“a pilot’s thumb”, 1.3.26) symbolically links them with an antithesis to the wholesome, balanced body.

The brew concocted by the witches in Act 4 Scene 1, made out of ingredients such as “poisoned entrails”, “[f]illet of a fenny snake”, “[l]iver of blaspheming Jew” and “[n]ose of Turk, and Tartar’s lips” (4.1.5, 12, 26, 29), powerfully evokes their potentially destructive power. While this brew is not literally consumed, the poisonous image pervades the whole play. Composed of fragments of body parts, the simmering cauldron is figured as a parodic, disorderly body that in turn produces fantasmatic bodies that bewitch Macbeth. As an antithesis of the balanced body promoted in medical discourses, the cauldron provides a rich commentary upon the play’s prevailing concern of bodily disintegration. In this scene, the play again presents the anxieties about boundary transgression through the language of food. As has been observed, in spite of its gruesome ingredients, the making of the brew evokes the process of everyday cooking: the list of ingredients is a perverse recipe, and its detailed cooking instructions such as “[m]ake the gruel thick and slab”, “[c]ool it with a baboon’s blood” (4.1.32, 37) hint at discourses of cookery.<sup>21</sup>

At the same time, with its image of contagion, the witches’ poisonous brew evokes Lady Macbeth’s milk she pleads to exchange with gall. Lady Macbeth’s invocation is all the more striking, if we take into account the symbolic significance of breast milk in early modern England. Considered the most purified form of blood, in this period, milk defines the female body as a source of nourishment that materially constitutes the infant. “We may be assured”, writes James Guillimeau in *The Nursing of Children*, “that the Milke [...] hath as much power to make the children like the Nurses, both in

<sup>19</sup> King James I, *Daemonologie* (1597), ed. by G. B. Harrison (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1966), p. 16; Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), ed. by Montague Summer (London: John Rodker, 1930), pp. 281–82.

<sup>20</sup> For the early modern notion of miasma as disrupting humors, see Healy (2001), p. 40–43.

<sup>21</sup> Purkiss (1997), p. 212; Deborah Willis, *Malevolent Nurture: Witch-hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 231; Wendy Wall, *Staging Domesticity: Household Work and English Identity in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 199.

bodie and mind; as the seed of the Parents hath to make the children like them”.<sup>22</sup> This symbolic significance of breast milk attributes to the maternal breast ambivalent power to form and de-form the infant. Through her invocation, Lady Macbeth, like the witches, is turned into an agent of poisoning, as she herself states in her fantasmatic imagination of infanticide: “I would [...] / Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums / And dashed the brains out” (1.7.56–58).<sup>23</sup>

Through presenting Lady Macbeth and the witches as perverse nurturers, the play sets a link between the threat of infiltration and women’s domestic labor of nurturing and food preparation. It is the ‘extimate’ nature of food that attributes to women the power to dissolve bodily boundaries: since they are responsible for feeding, they can also harm others.<sup>24</sup> As a potentially harmful nurturer, the witches and Lady Macbeth serve as a point onto which the threatening ambiguity of the formative power of food, the fear of malnurturing, and the anxieties about porosity of the body are projected and displaced. It is the early modern fascination with boundaries that nourished the era’s cultural preoccupation with the perverse nurturing, the recurring motifs central to the imagination of the witch-craze and early modern medicine.

#### IV

By representing the potentially harmful impact of feeding and nurturing, *Macbeth* registers the anxieties about the porosity of the body elaborated in early modern medical discourses and witchcraft tracts. In spite of their differences, both early modern medical treatises and witchcraft tracts seek to sustain the boundary of the body and selfhood: medical treatises aim at containing the porosity of the body through self-discipline; witchcraft tracts attempt to negotiate the anxieties about boundary transgression by defining the witch as a source of contamination.

The play shows an ambivalent stance toward the possibility of sustaining boundaries. On the one hand, through its depiction of Lady Macbeth and the witches, the play defines the sphere of the feminine as a threat to the balanced body. Furthermore, as Janet Adelman states, it stages a process of excision of the feminine, through which patriarchal power consolidates itself. Presented as powerful figures at the beginning,

<sup>22</sup> James Guillimeau, *The Nursing of Children* (1612), sig.li4, quoted in Kathryn Schwarz, “Missing the Breast: Desire, Disease, and the Singular Effect of Amazons”, in David Hillman, Carla Mazzio, eds., *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 152. For the symbolic significance of breast milk in the early modern period, see *ibid.*, pp. 147–69.

<sup>23</sup> In the early modern period, the witch was frequently associated with perverse nurturing. For the projection of anxieties about feeding and nurturing onto the witch, see Purkiss (1997), pp. 133–34; Willis (1995), pp. 27–81. For the play’s overlapping of the occult with the domestic, see Wall (2002), p. 199; Frances Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England 1550–1700* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 225.

<sup>24</sup> Critics have attended to the play’s preoccupation with destructive nurturing, often focusing on psychological dynamics of nurturing. For some instances, see Stallybrass (1992), pp. 30–33; Janet Adelman, “‘Born of woman’: Fantasies of Maternal Power in *Macbeth*”, in Alan Sinfield, ed., *Macbeth: New Casebooks* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 53–68.

the witches and Lady Macbeth disappear in the course of the play. Macduff, whose Caesarian birth symbolically sets him off from the contaminating effect of women, defeats the bewitched Macbeth, and the fantasy of male parthenogenesis is achieved.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, however, the play questions the possibility of cultural reordering through excision of the feminine. First of all, it leaves ambiguous the role of the witches. Although they are associated with infection and perverse feeding, in the larger context of the play, the witches’ agency in Macbeth’s transformation remains opaque. The play even questions the validity of their existence, whether they are “fantastical” or “that indeed/Which outwardly [they] show” (1.3.51–52). Even the significance of the witches’ brew so powerfully associated with the image of contagion remains ambiguous. The spectacles produced by the brew, while they dissolve Macbeth’s selfhood, paradoxically affirm the patriarchal fantasy of autotelic birth.

The play further complicates the issue by blurring the distinction between the witches’ prophecies and Macbeth’s choice, bewitcher and bewitched, poisoner and poisoned. Macbeth’s ambition is largely forged by Lady Macbeth, who is symbolically fused with the witches throughout the play. This commingling of bewitcher and bewitched is further highlighted in the sleepwalking scene, where Lady Macbeth is turned into a bewitched sleepwalker. Furthermore, as Stephen Greenblatt states, the play dramatizes the overlapping of the demonic with the secular through the strategy of “translating”, “a mode of rhetorical redistribution in which the initial verbal elements remain partially visible even as they are woven into something new”.<sup>26</sup> Macbeth’s first line echoes the sisters’ speech (“So foul and fair a day I have not seen” 1.3.36). The witches’ greeting of Macbeth—“All hail Macbeth, hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor./All hail Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter” (1.3.47–48)—is echoed by Duncan (“Thane of Cawdor:/In which addition, hail, most worthy Thane”, 1.3.103–4) and Lady Macbeth (“Great Glamis, worthy Cawdor,/Greater than both by the all-hail hereafter”, 1.5.52–53). The commingling of the demonic and the secular is also apparent on the intertextual level. In Holinshed’s text which serves as the source of the play, it is not Lady Macbeth but Duncan who drugs his opponents with poisoned brew.<sup>27</sup>

As such, the play represents witchcraft as ‘the uncanny’ in Freudian terms, a peculiar intermingling of the familiar and the unfamiliar, of the proper and the improper. The witches are both inside and outside the self and the symbolic dimension. Thus, the symbolic function of witchcraft overlaps with that of food: both function as the intimate exteriority that blurs the division between inside and outside, between self and other.

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<sup>25</sup> Adelman (1992), p. 60.

<sup>26</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, “Shakespeare Bewitched”, in Jeffrey N. Cox, Larry Reynolds, eds., *New Historical Literary Study: Essays on Reproducing Texts, Representing History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 125.

<sup>27</sup> A. R. Braunmuller, “Introduction”, in *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 14.

## V

This fusion of the demonic and the secular poses another problem: since it is impossible to localize the source of contagion, there can be no easy remedy. Together with its depiction of disorderly, malnurtured bodies, *Macbeth* also represents various attempts at cure. The play opens with the language of suturing, a surgical reattachment of fragmented body parts: the “bloody man” (1.2.1) is sent to a surgeon, and the body of Scotland is restored through Macbeth’s heroic victory. Lady Macbeth seeks to contain her husband’s irrational psychic transport through rationalization and calculation. Replying to Macbeth’s reluctance to see Duncan’s dead body, she attempts to contain his anxiety by defining the image of the dead Duncan as an inanimate object: “The sleeping and the dead/Are but as pictures” (2.2.56–57). To his anxious question of “[w]ill all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood/Clean from my hand?” (2.2.63–64), she calmly replies: “A little water clears us of this deed” (2.2.70). Likewise, after being informed of his wife’s precarious state of health, Macbeth desperately seeks a cure, asking the Doctor for an “oblivious antidote” (5.3.44). Malcolm describes his battle against Macbeth in terms of a purgatory cure: “Let’s make us med’cines of our great revenge/To cure this deadly grief” (4.3.216–17).

The play, however, frustrates these attempts at cure. The sutured body of Scotland is again disintegrated by Macbeth’s regicide. In spite of their attempt to sustain themselves, the Macbeths succumb to forces that cannot be explained. Upon Macbeth’s request of an “antidote”, the Doctor, echoing early modern medical discourses, states that the disorderly body must be cured through self-disciplining: “Therein the patient/Must minister to himself” (5.3.46–47).

Malcolm’s victory seems to have cured Scotland by expelling Macbeth. The play as a whole, however, foregrounds the fragility of his new reign by drawing attention to structural problems inherent in the feudal patronage system. With its utter dependence on loyalty, in the feudal patronage system, the bond between the king and the lords is ultimately performative. The sovereign power is justified not because of the ruler’s natural property but because of the symbolic system sustained through iterative performances of social codes.<sup>28</sup> Hence the significance of communal events such as royal banquets, or hospitable gathering as symbolic rituals that reaffirm social bond through displays of hospitality. As Jacques Derrida has shown, drawing on the work of Emil Benveniste, hospitality, deriving from the Latin *hostis* which refers to both host and stranger, shares with the word ‘hostility’ its etymological root.<sup>29</sup> The two banquets Macbeth holds show the fragility of the social bond predicated on hospitality. Due to its performative nature, displays of hospitality can be manipulated, as Duncan states at the beginning: “There’s no art/To find the mind’s construction in the face” (1.4.11–12). This potential separation of signifier from referent, face from mind, informs the play’s anxieties about equivocation and disguise and at the same time highlights the fragility

<sup>28</sup> For the significance of iteration in performative construction of norms, see Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>29</sup> Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*, trans. by Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

of the feudal bond. The Macbeths, “look[ing] like th’innocent flower” while being “the serpent under’t” (1.5.63–64), sever the symbolic bond that sustains society by blurring the line between hospitality and hostility. Malcolm’s testing of Macduff in Act 4 Scene 3 again calls into question the possibility of sustaining the feudal symbolic bond by problematizing the capacity to know one another. Both Malcolm’s and Macduff’s language is frustratingly equivocal like the witches’ prophecy, and, due to this semiotic confusion, it is extremely difficult to draw a clear line that distinguishes hospitality from hostility. By locating the unsettling specter of dissolution of boundaries not only in witchcraft but also in sovereignty, *Macbeth* shows that even the most hegemonic symbolic formation is not able to constitute itself as a coherent entity.

## VI

As a discursive construction, early modern medical theory participates in a regulatory production of the body. Early modern medical discourses negotiate anxieties about the porosity of the body by regulating the relation between the self and the other, interior and exterior. Here, the healthy and balanced body functions as a social imaginary that must be sustained through vigilantly regulating what threatens its integrity. As such, not only designating dietary taboos, these writings engage themselves with the question of identity and difference, self and other.<sup>30</sup> In this symbolic economy, the balanced, healthy body is constituted through expelling what cannot or should not be incorporated in this body: hence the compulsive demonization of poor diet, excessive appetite, and ungoverned lifestyle. In this framework, the uncontrolled body that is unable to govern itself functions as a domain of the abject, through the differentiation from which the balanced body defines itself and onto which the anxieties about the porosity of the body are displaced.

Critics have suggested that the early modern subject’s attempt at sustaining itself through disciplinary regimen contributes to the emergence of the distinctively modern form of subjectivity that governs itself through conscious control.<sup>31</sup> While this attempt at boundary construction was prevalent in this period, the regulatory production of the body was not so much a totalizing as a fragmentary and contradictory cultural process. With its representation of disorderly, porous bodies, *Macbeth* calls into question the possibility of sustaining bodily boundaries through self-conscious disciplining. Instead of being neatly disciplined by the subject’s acts of self-fashioning, in the play, bodies are porous and uncontrollable (non)entities that exceed the grasp of the subject. This impossibility of sustaining boundaries is also apparent in the history of witch-hunting. Early modern witch-hunters sought to escape from the inexplicable, supernatural, and potentially malign power of witches by persecuting them. Similarly, witchcraft tracts

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<sup>30</sup> Not only constructing boundaries of selfhood through disciplinary regimen, early modern medical discourses also consolidated national and gender identity. Wendy Wall observes that writers in this period often emphasized the danger of foreign food, setting a link between diet and national identity (Wall [2002]). At the same time, these texts contributed to fashioning gendered subjects by constructing the female body as disorderly and excessive (Paster [1993], p. 23–63).

<sup>31</sup> Schoenfeldt (1997); Schoenfeldt (1999).



attempted to negotiate the fear of witchcraft by defining the witch as a source of contagion. The disturbing mystery of witchcraft, however, remained unresolved. Perhaps it was the very irresolvability of the truth of witchcraft that provoked compulsive repetition of the drama of witch-hunting. As such, the figure of the witch questions the attempts to construct secure boundaries by drawing into attention what exceeds this regulatory construction of the body, a surplus that cannot be integrated into the symbolic structure of the bounded body.

In *Macbeth*, even after Malcolm reorganizes the social body by expulsing the Macbeths and abjecting them as “this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen” (5.9.36), his victory cannot entirely eliminate the specters of disorderly bodies and the witches’ cauldron vividly staged throughout the play. They are at once within and outside Malcolm’s rule: they are not a part of the play’s newly restored all-male society, yet, at the same time, they circulate within the symbolic dimension as ghostly apparitions. As such, the specters of witchcraft and disorderly bodies mark negativity, that is, contradictions, ambiguities, and fissures that simultaneously exist within and exceed symbolic organizations. In the representational framework of the play, these specters function as an anamorphic stain, which exists at once inside and outside the field of meaning and distorts ostensible meaning from the margins.<sup>32</sup> The play has shown another anamorphic stain in one of its most compelling depictions of dissolution of boundaries: Banquo’s ghost. His appearance as a ghostly specter visible only to Macbeth utterly dislocates Macbeth’s claim of power and agency as the newly crowned king, making “a gap” in the feast (3.1.12). Like Banquo’s ghost that disrupts Macbeth’s display of agency, these specters of dissolved bodies leave “a gap”, an anamorphic stain that casts an uncanny shadow over Malcolm’s rule and, furthermore, over the contour of the bounded self.

### Zusammenfassung

Der Artikel erforscht die Darstellung von Nahrungsmitteln und deren Auswirkungen auf den menschlichen Körper in *Macbeth* vor dem Hintergrund medizinischer Diskurse und Hexenschriften der frühen Neuzeit. Abhandlungen dieser Periode zeigen eine eigentümliche, intensive Beschäftigung mit den materiellen Einflüssen von Nahrungsaufnahme auf den menschlichen Körper. Im Rahmen der

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<sup>32</sup> Early modern painters used the pictorial device of anamorphosis in order to suspend ostensible meaning of a picture. The most well-known example of anamorphosis is Holbein’s picture titled *The Ambassadors*. This is a portrait of two foreign emissaries surrounded by objects signifying worldly achievements. However, at the bottom of the picture is a stain which, if viewed from a certain angle, is a skull. This stain, at once visible and invisible, alters the ostensible meaning of the picture from the margins. For an account of the use of anamorphosis in early modern paintings, see Barbara Freedman, *Staging the Gaze: Postmodernism, Psychoanalysis, and Shakespearean Comedy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 10–20. For an analysis of the anamorphic function of Banquo’s ghost, see Philip Armstrong, *Shakespeare’s Visual Regime: Tragedy, Psychoanalysis and the Gaze* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp. 187–91. For the representational effect of anamorphosis, see Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981), pp. 79–90.

medizinischen Theorie dieser Zeit war die Aufnahme von Nahrungsmitteln ein Zeichen für Durchlässigkeit von Grenzen, da eine externe Substanz in ein geschlossenes Ganzes eingliedert wird. Medizinische Abhandlungen dieser Zeit versuchten demzufolge auch, die Begrenzungen des Körpers und der Subjektivität aufrechtzuerhalten, indem der potentiell schädliche Einfluss von Nahrungsaufnahme streng reguliert wurde. Aus den gleichen Beweggründen strebten Hexenschriften dieser Zeit danach, dem Schrecken von Grenzüberschreitungen zu begegnen, indem sie Hexen als den Grund für Verseuchungen ausmachten, die folgerichtig vertrieben werden mussten. Der Artikel vertritt die These, dass *Macbeth* eine ambivalente Haltung zum Prozess der regulierenden Konstruktion auf den Körper einnimmt. *Macbeth* erkennt das Verlangen nach Grenzen und auch die Ängste, diese aufzuheben. Gleichzeitig stellt *Macbeth* die regulative Konstruktion auf den Körper, wie er in den medizinischen Diskursen und Abhandlungen über Hexerei ausgearbeitet wird, in Frage und betont die vergebliche Bemühung, die körperliche Integrität durch Regulierung und Vertreibung aufrechtzuerhalten.

**REVENGE AND DISRUPTED ORDER:  
THE BANQUET SCENE IN *MACBETH* AND *CURSE OF THE GOLDEN  
FLOWER***

BY

YUK SUNNY TIEN

In Shakespeare's plays, feasting plays a crucial role in highlighting conflicts, characterizing relationships and exploring the nature of human society. How are these scenes transmitted in a cross-cultural context? In this paper, I will discuss the banquet scene (3.4) in *Macbeth* and *Curse of the Golden Flower*, which is a spin-off of Shakespeare's plays. *Curse of the Golden Flower*, directed by Zhang Yimou and released in 2006, is a Chinese epic film that is set during the turbulent Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms. Inspired by Shakespeare's plays, the storyline of the film has obvious roots in his tragedies, namely the three siblings from *King Lear* and the jealous king from *Othello*. I argue that the film also reformulates the banquet scene in *Macbeth* as a feast held during the annual Chong Yang (Chrysanthemum Festival) in ancient China.

Act three, scene four, immediately following Banquo's murder, is the second banquet scene, and one of the most significant in *Macbeth*. The state banquet is a celebration of the new regime. It is also in this scene that Macbeth achieves a moment of tragic insight: the realization of his own spiritual chaos, and that he is living in a world over which he has no control, a world in which the dead return to "push us from our stools".<sup>1</sup> Much attention has been given to the meaning of the banquets in Shakespeare. Banquets and feasting are traditional symbols of harmony, fellowship and union, as well as order and hierarchy. The banquet scene in *Macbeth*, which is introduced by the formal entrance of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, represents feudal monarchy, honors and hospitality.<sup>2</sup> It opens with a procession in which the lords are ranked according to "degree", when Macbeth says: "You know your own degrees, sit down" (3.4.1).<sup>3</sup> The banquet scene is what we might call the formal or gestured attempt by Macbeth to enthrone himself as the true king. We have here a ceremonial, a social ritual at which "the good king" tries to play the "humble host" and mingle with his people. In this ordered hierarchy, grouping according to rank or place within the unity of a family or state (3.4.3–5), Macbeth is determined to take his place ("here I'll sit i' th'

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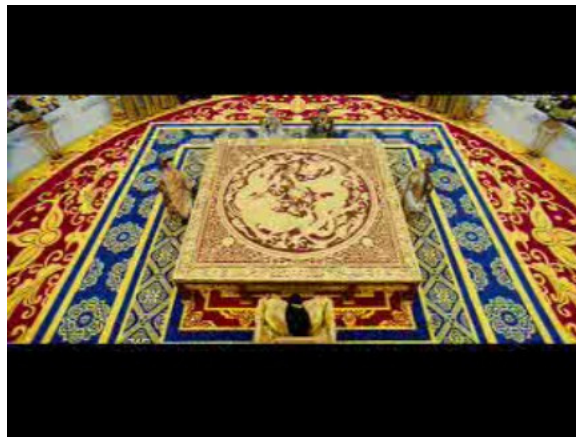
<sup>1</sup> J. P. Dyson, "The Structural Function of the Banquet Scene in *Macbeth*", *Shakespeare Quarterly* 14 (1963), p. 370; Nancy Glass Wright, "Banqueting as Symbol in *King Lear* and *Macbeth*", *Tennessee Philological Bulletin* 28 (1991), p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Jan Blits, *The Insufficiency of Virtue: Macbeth and the Natural Order* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), p. 116.

<sup>3</sup> All references are to William Shakespeare, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. by G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).

midst”, 3.4.10).<sup>4</sup> The symbolism of the scene here both depends on and helps define the nature of human society. The banquet could be called a model for the natural order, combining “the lowest natural need with the high majesty of royal splendor”.<sup>5</sup>

Feasts or banquets offered some of the best opportunities for a king or nobleman to show off his magnificence and power. A ceremonial feast was interpreted as a visible sign of political and military glory.<sup>6</sup> Macbeth and his wife invite all the lords of Scotland for a sumptuous banquet at Forres Castle in celebration of his coronation. Another purpose is to consolidate his new regime through the shared fellowship of eating and drinking. Under this formal pretext of solidarity, Macbeth inwardly wishes to regain the nobility’s loyalty and trust in him, which he intuitively already senses are shaken and doubtful.



The first banquet scene in *Curse of the Golden Flower*: The terrace is round, the table is square.

The first banquet scene in *Curse of the Golden Flower* also reflects order and rules. When the Emperor invites his wife and sons to their seats, he emphasizes how the law of the heavens dictates the rule of earthly life. The heavens themselves observe degree, priority and place, and whether this degree has been violated. The banquet is thus a symbol of “idealized order, in family, tribe, and state: an archetypal gesture of amity and concord”.<sup>7</sup>

*The Emperor*: Prince Jai has returned. The family is reunited. Do you know why every Chrysanthemum Festival, we assemble on this high terrace as a family?

*Prince Yu*: Father, on the ninth day of the ninth month, the sun and the moon unite, we call this the Chrysanthemum Festival. It symbolizes the strength and harmony of the family, and we always celebrate on this high terrace.

*The Emperor*: That is a very good answer. The terrace is round, the table is square. What do they represent? That represents the Heaven is round, and the Earth is square. The law of the heavens... dictates the rule of earthly life. Under the circle, within the square, every-

<sup>4</sup> Dyson (1963), p. 371.

<sup>5</sup> Blits (1996), p. 116.

<sup>6</sup> Masaaki Imanishi, “*Macbeth*: The Banquet Scene and the Sleeping-walking Scene”, *Renaissance Bulletin* 18 (1991), p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of Macbeth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 429.

one has his proper placement. This is called natural law. Emperor, Courtier, Father, Son...loyalty, filial piety, ritual and righteousness... All relationships obey natural law.<sup>8</sup>

The Emperor then rebukes the Empress for not finishing the medicine that has been served to her every two hours for the past ten years. He insists that the remaining medicine to be served to the Empress, and her sons remain kneeling until their mother drains the cup. He states that “medicine has to be taken in the right measure, at the right time, and that everything abides by its own law”. Medicine is governed by dosage, just as life is governed by natural law.

The emphasis on order and the natural law, however, only proves to be an irony in both *Macbeth* and *Curse of the Golden Flower*. The word “degree” emphasizes hierarchy and the Lords know their respective positions. It is, however, this hierarchy that Macbeth violates in the murder of Duncan. The word “degree”, used here in the sense of mock irony, brings to the spectator’s mind the cosmic order or harmony that has been violated. While all the invited guests do know their own degrees, Macbeth knows his to be illegitimate—“As kinsman, host, and subject, he has violated ties of blood, hospitality and state. He has overturned the whole order of things”.<sup>9</sup>

While all the guests are seated, Macbeth does not immediately take his seat. In fact, he is on his feet for the whole of this scene, and is never seen as being united with or heading his countrymen. As the Lords are presumably settling into their seats, he moves around the table in order to “mingle with society and play the humble host.” (3.4.3–4) As Macbeth moves around greeting his guests, the most important seat at the table is thus vacant.<sup>10</sup> The symbolism of this is powerful, for Macbeth is not the legitimate King of Scotland, and is therefore unqualified to preside at a state occasion.

Similarly, in *Curse of the Golden Flower*, although banqueting and feasting are symbolic of order and hierarchy in heaven and earth, the incest, lust, treachery and murder in the royal family have violated the “natural law”. For many years, the Empress and her stepson Prince Wan have had an illicit affair. Meanwhile, relations between the Emperor and the Empress are strained, and the Empress’ health is failing because the Emperor is slowly poisoning her through a strategically prescribed herb. Later, the past of the ambitious Emperor is revealed as one that offends against order. To rise to the throne from the position of an army captain, he killed his former wife so that he could marry the daughter of the King of the Liang state, who is now his Empress.

Further, both banquet scenes are closely associated with the disruption of the natural law, the transformation of order into chaos.<sup>11</sup> In *Macbeth*, after the exit of the murderer, the King’s mind is already distracted from the ceremony, and murder, not the pleasures of kingship, is his preoccupation now: “I am cabin’d, cribb’d, confin’d, bound in/To saucy doubts and fears” (3.4.23–24). While the audience expects the self-

<sup>8</sup> All quotations from *Curse of the Golden Flower* come from the English subtitles of the Edko Films VCD edition.

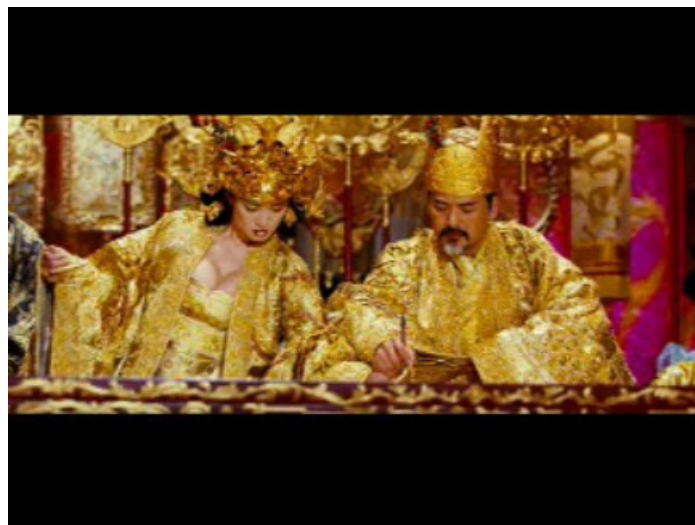
<sup>9</sup> Dyson (1963), p. 371.

<sup>10</sup> Wright (1991), p. 27.

<sup>11</sup> Wright (1991), p. 26.

glorifying banquet to resume, Banquo's ghost appears. Macbeth starts up and shouts at the vacant stool on which he was about to sit: "Which of you have done this?" "Thou canst not say I did it; never shake/Thy gory locks at me" (3.4.48–50). The audience and Macbeth are privileged to see the ghost of Banquo sitting in Macbeth's royal chair.<sup>12</sup> Lady Macbeth soon insists that the guests go hastily: "At once, good night./Stand not upon the order of your going,/But go at once" (3.4.117–118). The ceremonial banquet that began so formally, magnificently and gloriously, with due regard paid to status and appropriate behavior, ends in chaos and disarray as the order symbolized in the protocol of the state is disregarded in the guests' hurried exit from the room. The consequence of the ghost's visit is chaos, which Lady Macbeth expresses "You have displac'd the mirth, broke the good meeting,/With most admir'd disorder" (3.4.108–109).

While the banquet scenes in comedies make extensive use of the parallel of lust and appetite, and are a venue for erotic encounters, the banquet scenes that occur in tragedies also establish a link between the banquet and revenge, a link which gains from and develops, figuratively, the metaphorical appetite for revenge and for extravagant foods<sup>13</sup>. Shakespeare draws upon the figurative similarity between the hungers for lust, revenge and food. The appearance of Banquo's ghost reminds Macbeth of vengeance, as this was originally Banquo's banquet. Macbeth has stolen the role of host from him, and the ghost enters, almost like an upstart clown, to disrupt his murderer's charade. The banquet is thus a way to "expose to public view the disguises of [the] usurpers".<sup>14</sup>



The banquet on the eve of the Chrysanthemum Festival: The Emperor and Empress write the four characters "loyalty, filial piety, ritual and righteousness".

<sup>12</sup> Imanishi (1991), p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> Chris Meads, *Banquets Set Forth: Banqueting in English Renaissance Drama* (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 70, p. 89.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Willson, "Macbeth the Player King: The Banquet Scene as Frustrated Play within the Play", *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* 114 (1978), p. 111.

In the Chinese film, the banquet on the eve of the Chrysanthemum Festival is also a site for revenge within the royal family.<sup>15</sup> The banquet starts with the Emperor and Empress writing the four characters of “loyalty, filial piety, ritual and righteousness” together in Chinese calligraphy, but it turns into a chaotic battlefield.

Uncovering the wicked plot of the Emperor, the Empress revenges him with the help of her devoted warrior son, Prince Jai, who leads the army against his father on the banquet night. Meanwhile, in the palace, the youngest prince, Yu, kills his brother Prince Wan and orders his father to abdicate, but is eventually beaten to death with a golden belt by his raging father. After the Empress’ soldiers are defeated, the banquet resumes, and the Empress and Prince Jai are brought to the festival table where the Emperor sits. Although *Macbeth* ends in a chaotic exit of the thanes, the banquet scene in *Curse of the Golden Flower* ends ironically in reinforcement of order, loyalty, and virtue, as the guards and servants sing in celebration of the Chrysanthemum Festival:

Humanity, wisdom, trust, ritual righteousness, loyalty  
 Deep virtue pervades.  
 Father to son...wise kings all  
 Follow the Heaven’s way.  
 Peace and glory above.

Both *Macbeth* and *Curse of the Golden Flower* draw on a deep cultural understanding that the banquet exudes significance at all social levels. Laden with symbolic power, the banquet forms a language that expresses cultural and individual identity. Feasts and their food culture can be read as forums in which people define their humanity. A banquet not only defines cultural sophistication but also social distinctions.<sup>16</sup> It reveals distinctions between degrees and social boundaries, and therefore defines hierarchy in households and the state.

As in all other periods and cultures, the banquet reflects the ideological aspects of social and political order. The encoded discourses of order in the dramatic representation of a banquet are symbolic in that the feast implies internalized principles of order or power.<sup>17</sup> The investment of symbolic order in banquets and feasts can be identified in both banquet scenes in the play and the film. The ceremonial and ritualized nature of *Macbeth*’s banquet and the reflected ideological discourse of social degree, royal power, and national order are doubly ironic. While the scene clearly establishes the orthodox inscriptions of a banquet, *Macbeth* has already contradicted the natural order through the radical and subversive act of regicide. Additionally, this particular banquet is disrupted by the arrival of the ghost, which inverts and dislocates the social ritual. In *Curse of the Golden Flower*, the banquet on the eve of the Chrysanthemum Festival

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<sup>15</sup> In *The Banquet* (2006), another Chinese feature film based on *Hamlet*, the banquet is also portrayed as a site of revenge and chaos.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Parolin, “‘Cloyless Sauce’: The Pleasurable Politics of Food in *Antony and Cleopatra*”, in Sara Munson Deats, ed., *Antony and Cleopatra: New Critical Essays* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 218.

<sup>17</sup> Henry Jacobs, “The Banquet of Blood and the Masque of Death: Social Ritual and Ideology in English Revenge Tragedy”, *Renaissance Papers* (1985), p. 41.

has also turned into a battlefield and acts of murder among family members. The result is the subversion of the ideology of order normally reflected in a royal banquet. Thus, both texts reveal “the symbolic context in which the banquet becomes an emblem of perverted ritual and ideology”.<sup>18</sup> The rituals, as encodings of the discourses of order and power, become emblems of the ideological subversion inherent in vengeance.

### **Zusammenfassung**

*Der Fluch der Goldenen Blume*, unter der Regie von Zhang Yimou gedreht und 2006 zum ersten Mal gezeigt, ist ein chinesischer Monumentalfilm, der von Shakespeares Dramen inspiriert ist. In diesem Beitrag vertrete ich die Auffassung, dass der Film die Bankettszene in *Macbeth* bei einem Fest des Chong Yang Festivals (Chrysanthemen Festival) im alten China reformuliert. Bankette und Festessen symbolisieren in diesem Film Ordnung und Hierarchie im Himmel und auf der Erde. Wenn Inzest, Lust, Verrat und Mord in der königlichen Familie das Naturrecht verletzt haben, dann müssen in dem Fest Treue, Frömmigkeit der Kinder, Ritual und Rechtschaffenheit die ganze Ordnung wieder herstellen. Der Beitrag analysiert, wie die Bankettszene im Film und in Shakespeares *Macbeth* dargestellt wird.

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<sup>18</sup> Jacobs (1985), p. 46.



CALL FOR STATEMENTS—*WISSENSCHAFTLICHES SEMINAR DER  
SHAKESPEARE-TAGE 2009*

**(Post-)Modernist Responses to Shakespeare**

While critics keep arguing whether we live in postmodern times, and if we do, whether the ‘post-’ of postmodernism indicates a break with modernism or a more continuous development, it is safe to say that the early twentieth-century reception of Shakespeare, which turned against Victorian bardolatry, has shaped our understanding of Shakespeare until the present day. Our seminar aims at tracing responses to Shakespeare’s plays since the 1920s from an interdisciplinary and international perspective and will thus also re-examine the (dis-) continuities between ‘modernist’ and ‘postmodernist’ Shakespeares. We invite contributions on theatrical stagings, literary, dramatic and filmic adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays as well as on the academic reception of his work in and beyond Europe. How have modernist aesthetics, e.g. German expressionism, affected stagings of Shakespeare and how has Shakespeare affected the modernist project? Which impact did the development of film have on our understanding of theatre in general, and of Shakespeare in particular? Which developments can we trace in Shakespeare criticism, which has undergone a number of ‘turns’ and methodological innovations in the twentieth century? How have European societies responded to Shakespeare’s plays in times of devastating world wars and the Holocaust? In which ways have Shakespeare’s plays been read to underpin particular aesthetic, but also political or ideological endeavours? For example, to which uses have Shakespeare’s plays been put in colonial and postcolonial contexts?

The *Shakespeare-Tage 2009* will take place from **23rd to 26th April in Weimar**. In the context of the conference’s focus on *Shakespeare: Aufbruch in die Moderne*, our seminar plans to address these and related questions. As critical input for the discussion and provocation for debate, panelists are invited to give short statements in either German or English (of no more than 15 minutes) presenting concrete case studies, concise examples and strong views on the topic (“Thesen statt Exegesen!”). We would in particular like to encourage younger scholars to contribute to the seminar. Please send your proposals (**abstracts of ca. 300 words in English or German**) and all further questions by **30th November 2008** to the seminar convenors:

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