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Food in Shakespeare

A Study of Culinary References
in the Bard's Plays

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Introduction

The inspiration for this thesis, oddly enough, came about while reading an article about the Minnesota Starvation Experiment. It was a clinical study funded by the University of Minnesota in 1944, which set out to analyse the psychological effects of severe and prolonged dietary restriction. The study was conducted because, early in the year, millions of people across Europe and Asia were found to be at risk of mass famine: information about their psychological state and possible course of rehabilitation was needed to offer relief assistance. Although the study was conducted for a good cause, it is remembered as one of history's most inhumane experiments.

One of the most surprising findings of the experiment, and the one that constituted the "germ" of this thesis, is that the participants became obsessed with food. Their unusual behaviour did not just concern mealtimes themselves, although as expected aggressive behaviour and stealing occurred. The participants were excessively preoccupied with food as a topic: they read cookbooks and collected recipes in their free time, to the point that three of the participants even went on to become chefs. They did not show any interest in conversation if it did not involve food, and many also began to show a warped body image, seeing themselves as fat even though they were the thinnest they had ever been.

The experiment inspired me to write about food in Shakespeare because the Bard too lived in an era in which food scarcity was very common. During my university studies, I learnt about the Thomas-Macfarlane "charity refused" hypothesis, which posits that widowed women were particularly vulnerable and had to rely on the charity proceeding from their community to survive in the harsh economic climate of the Early Modern period. However, if some neighbours refused to provide help and then experienced misfortune, they might accuse the woman of having used magic in order to exact her revenge. The theory, then, is highly connected to the food availability in the Early Modern period. While researching, I learnt that food scarcity at the time was so common, poor people risked going hungry even when the harvest went smoothly. The situation was further complicated by the Little Ice Age of the 16th and 17th century, a period of rapid cooling after the Medieval "warm" period age, but also the Great Dearth

of 1593-1597.

All this information together made me wonder whether people in the Early Modern period, during times in which they had to endure food scarcity, had also suffered from the same symptoms as the participants of the Minnesota Starvation Experiment, particularly the propensity to fantasise and talk about food. This, in turn, made me question if the general food insecurity typical of the period might have somehow translated on the Early Modern stage, and if so – how.

This thesis, then, follows what at first seems a counter-intuitive idea, but in reality is in line with the theory that food insecurity leads to food fantasies and fears of starvation. It explores Shakespeare's plays from the point of view of excess and plenty to investigate the work born from a period of general scarcity. It tries to find patterns in the depiction of surfeit in the Bard's works and come to conclusions about his usage of food related topoi and imagery. In particular, the thesis focuses on three main topics: food plenty – as seen in banquets, food excess – resulting in obesity, and a type of hunger excess – resulting in cannibalism.

The topic of food in Shakespeare is generally considered to be a relatively new branch of studies: Joan Fitzpatrick defines it “a burgeoning area of interest”. Indeed, now there are a number of scholars whose work has proved to be essential for my research, and who approach food in Shakespeare and in the Early Modern period from a variety of different standpoints, coupling analysis of the texts with historical and cultural considerations.

My work has been divided into two chapters. The first chapter presents the necessary framework to understand the importance of food in the Early Modern period. First of all, it is necessary to comprehend the culture surrounding food at the time. This is why the first section, called *Food and the Body*, describes the close connection that the Early Moderns drew between diet and overall physical and psychological well-being. The section delineates a short history of dietary medicine, focusing on the work of authors - Galen in particular - which influenced the way of thinking of Shakespeare's contemporaries. It provides an overview of the Galenic theory of the four humours, and follows its influence throughout the Early Modern period, from the early works after the Galenic revival, to the golden era of Galenism, and finally to its criticism. Ken Albala's

Eating Right in the Renaissance (2002) has proved to be a particularly insightful source on the topic of health in relation to diet in Shakespeare's time - delving deep into the topic of Galenic theory and Early Modern dietaries. Thomas Culpeper's work *Galen's Art of Physick* (1652), though slightly posthumous to Shakespeare's life, provides a fitting example of how humoral theory was adapted centuries after Galen, in the Early Modern period. The section then outlines the stages of digestion, as they were important in gauging the effects different ingredients might have in the production of specific humours. It also helped divide foods into different categories based on the potential effects they have on the body. Lastly, *Food and the Body* delineates how exactly foodstuff was categorised and consequently judged, which is necessary to understand why some foods were invested with either a positive or negative connotation.

Another aspect fundamental to a thorough understanding of the culture surrounding food in Shakespeare's era concerns its production. *Food Staples, Crops and the Agricultural Revolution* focuses on how food was entangled with daily life on multiple levels. It explains what the daily food staples of Early Moderns in Europe were and where they were produced. It appears that, although quality and quantity of the ingredients changed according to social class and wealth, the bulk of the Early Modern diet was composed of these same ingredients. Since sourcing these ingredients appears particularly important, the section also provides an overview of how farming and agricultural techniques were changing to maximise production, respond to population growth especially in urbanised areas, and counter famines. These new production techniques appear to be similar in nature to those identified as the markers of the agricultural revolution, traditionally considered to begin centuries later. Essential in research was the work of agricultural historian Eric Kerridge, whose work *The Agricultural Revolution* constitutes a revolutionary milestone in dating the English agricultural revolution during the 16th century. The section, then, articulates exactly which burgeoning techniques were bound to change agriculture for the centuries to come: the introduction of new crops in the rotation, up-and-down husbandry, fen drainage, floating the watermeadows and new fertilisers and stock were all important innovations.

Lastly, politics and local government action have to be considered, as they were

fundamental in managing supplies and dealing with famines. *Colonial Conquests and Discoveries* describes how governments were becoming increasingly politically and economically involved in the lives of individuals, in a process called the rise of the nation-state. This, of course, included poor relief, measures to counter famines, and laws to control food production and consumption. Queen Elizabeth issued Orders against exporting, hoarding and price inflation. Her government also monitored the commercial use of grain, butter, cheese and animal feed. The aim was to secure England's security, stability and national welfare and value it above foreign interest in a difficult period. Perhaps born out of a burgeoning national identity, foreign foodstuff, even coming from Europe, was looked at with suspicion in England most of the time. When it came to new foods coming from the Americas, reception was mixed: some were adopted without many problems, while others were merely deemed exotic curiosities. The section tries to identify the possible reasons behind public opinion of foreign ingredients, and explain how the expansion of English maritime activity was bound to change food reception and commerce in the centuries to come.

The second chapter of the thesis shifts the focus to the literary representation of food in Shakespeare's plays, following the three main themes of banquets, obesity and cannibalism. The first section, *The Role of Food in Shakespeare's Life and Works* introduces themes which are crucial for the interpretation of food-related topoi within the Bard's plays. It underlines the importance of interlocking food-related discourses in the Early Modern period, and particularly those surrounding Galenic theory. It cites *The Taming of the Shrew* (1594) and *Hamlet* (1599-1601) as two examples of plays in which knowledge of humoral theory is necessary to understand what, to the modern reader, may be rather obscure references that added depth to the plot and characters. It then outlines which food groups are commonly mentioned in Shakespeare's plays, and if the negative or positive characteristics associated with the ingredients might have been informed by dietetics of his time. It also points out some of the peculiarities of Shakespeare's depiction of foodstuff, which seems to have been unusual at the time, and proposes possible reasons why Shakespeare chose to include unusual ingredients and which role they might have in the play. Finally, it highlights general tendencies in food representation in Shakespeare which will also be useful in the sections that follow.

The first food-related theme analysed in the thesis concerns banquets. *Food Plenty: the Banquet*, focuses on the depiction of banquets in Shakespeare's works. It attempts to link the complicated and shifting definition of what the occasion truly consisted of, as well as its social implications, to Shakespeare's use of the event across a variety of his plays. The aim is to find commonalities in Shakespeare's depiction of banquets across comedies, historical plays and tragedies, highlighting their role as a literary device to be found at crucial moments in the plot, and to find characteristics specific to banquets in Shakespeare, such as not following conventions of genre and being important examples of larger strategies to be found in his work.

Food Excess: Obesity in Shakespeare, describes the second theme of the thesis, obesity, in relation to the beauty standards of the Early Modern period, disproving the myth that fatness – and obesity in particular - were always perceived as positive characteristics, when in fact obesity was sometimes associated to intemperance, gluttony, and humoral imbalance, as well as being closely related to the sins of lust and greed. The section then analyses the character of Hamlet, in particular the line in the text which suggests he could possibly be interpreted as overweight, weighing the reasons why critics over the centuries have argued either in favour or against a fat Hamlet, and finally discussing how interpreting Hamlet as fat would affect the interpretation of the play as a whole. Then Mistress Quickly in *The Comedy of Errors* (1594) is analysed in relation to Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque and the association between fatness, comedy, femininity and unbridled sexuality. Then the analysis shifts to Shakespeare's most famous fat knight, Falstaff, comparing him to other famous Shakespearean gluttons and identifying which characteristics found in other fat characters are also applicable to him. It highlights how peculiar his character is in his perception of his own fatness and how his self-representation is fundamentally different compared to the other characters in the play.

The last section of the thesis, named *Hunger Excess: Cannibalism*, explores excess in its most terrifying form – anthropophagy. Since it constitutes the ultimate form of invasion of bodily boundaries, it becomes a metaphor for fears related to different types of boundary crossing. The analysis focuses on Caliban in *The Tempest* (1611) and his dubious connections to cannibalism, reflecting his ambiguity as a character. *Othello*

(1603), *Much Ado about Nothing* (1600) and *Macbeth* (1606) are then analysed as examples of plays in which references to cannibalism and perverted feeding are frequent and add layers of interpretation to the characters and to the play as a whole.

Ultimately, this thesis tries to assess the relevance of food and food-related topoi in the Bard's works. This is achieved by combining a cultural approach with literary analysis, offering a broad perspective on Shakespeare's era and the influence it had on his works. Since little is known about Shakespeare's life, one ought to rely on what is known about the culture and history of 16th century England to reach a deeper understanding of Shakespeare's perception of food, as well as the themes connected to it, in order to discern what is derived from the cultural *milieu* he experienced and what is peculiar of his sensibility.

1.1 Food and the Body

We usually think of diet talk as something modern: nowadays we are bombarded with buzzwords such as calories, saturated fat, vitamins, minerals and cholesterol. However, as surprising as it might seem, Shakespeare's contemporaries were as obsessed with nutrition as we are. In the period between the 1470s and the 1650s, Europe produced about a hundred nutritional guides, many of which by the middle of the century had became so popular they were not simply written in Latin, but also in many different European languages, and even vernaculars, specifically for a lay audience (Gentilcore 2015: 12; Albala, 2002: 1). As for the authors of these guides, they were definitely diverse: physicians, philosophers, poets, or even politicians – anyone, as long as they felt they had something to say regarding food and diet (Albala, 2002: 1). Physicians and medical experts in particular were constantly pushing new trends, initiating discourse and promoting new and miraculous diets. Politics, of course, influenced such literature, as the author tried to appease a certain social group or was influenced by political relations when assessing a foreign ingredient (Albala, 2002: 2). The few who could consume such content at the time must have felt confused by all this advice, which sometimes was contradictory. In his essay *On Experience*, the illustrious French philosopher Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) eloquently observed:

> The art of medicine is not so rigid that we cannot find an authority for anything that we may do... If your doctor does not think it good for you to sleep, to take wine or some particular meat, do not worry; I will find you another who will disagree with him. (Montaigne, 1958: 371)

It remains unclear whether the precepts preached in dietaries and by physicians were followed closely by the readers of these books. What is undeniable is that scholars were obsessed with the idea of a proper diet and spent a significant amount of time thinking about nutrition. Even Montaigne, despite his acute awareness of the volatility of dietary advice, in the same essay clearly feels guilty when he reflects on the greedy and anxious way he approaches a meal:

> Tis indecent, besides the hurt it does to one's health, and even to the pleasure of eating, to eat greedily as I

do; I often bite my tongue, and sometimes my fingers, in my haste. Diogenes, meeting a boy eating after that manner, gave his tutor a box on the ear! There were men at Rome that taught people to chew, as well as to walk, with a good grace. I lose thereby the leisure of speaking, which gives great relish to the table, provided the discourse be suitable, that is, pleasant and short. (Montaigne, 1866: 454)

Such concerns were not limited to a single country, or merely a topic of discussion among literates, but were shared by monarchs in all of Europe. Even King James I (1566-1625) in his treatise *Basilicon Doron,* directed towards his infant son and future heir Henry, deemed it necessary to warn him: "beware with vsing excesse of meat and drinke: and chiefly, beware of drunkennesse, which is a beastly vice, namely in a King" (James I, 1616: 181).

It thus appears that the idea of healthy eating in order to live longer not only was central, but was also closely linked to morals. Understanding the cultural signification of a good diet is more relevant than finding out whether or not the principles delineated by scholars were actually followed in real life. A good diet was associated with the avoidance of putrefaction and fever, maintenance of humoral balance, but also morality and rational thought (Temkin, 1991: 47).

In 1825, the celebrated French gastronome Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin published his masterpiece, *The Physiology of Taste*, which included the famous quote: "Tell me what you eat: I will tell you who you are" (Brillat-Savarin, 1970: 13). In the realm of cultural studies, however, one could infer more about a specific culture by studying their aspirational diet. In other words, the connotations of certain foods, their glorification or vilification, and the rituals that are built around mealtimes are mutable and play a fundamental part in helping us bridge the historical gap that stands between contemporaneity and Early Modern times.

In order to more thoroughly understand the connection that Early Moderns drew between diet and health, it is necessary to briefly introduce dietetics, which is the discipline that studies the link between food and health. The etymology of the word "diet" can be traced back to the Latin *diaeta*, which can be translated as "mode of life". Indeed, the English word boasted a much broader scope until the last century (Hwalla & Koleilat, 2004: 716). Dietetics as an art dates back to Ancient Greece: even though it did not constitute an official profession, physicians and philosophers alike considered a

proper diet fundamental to physical as well as mental health. Such figures also appear in ancient literature: Podalirius, a physician in *The Iliad* stands out because of his keen interest in dietetics. In the 5th century, the illustrious Greek physician Hippocrates wrote his treatise *On Diet* about the role of nutrition in preventing and curing diseases. After him, many other physicians focused on the role that food plays in granting man a long and healthy life. Erasistratus and Herophilus in the 3rd century B.C., and even Plato dedicated great amounts of their energy to research the effects and make-up of an healthy diet (Skiadas & Lascaratos, 2001: 532). Given the more than substantial corpus on the topic produced in Ancient Greece by famous personalities, it comes as no surprise that Shakespeare's contemporaries felt very inspired by ancient Greek texts, and often looked back at them as a point of reference when reflecting on diet and health.

1.1.1 Early Modern dietaries

Since dietaries and nutritional guides produced between the late 15th and mid-17th century are so abundant and varied in their content, scholars like Ken Albala, author of *Eating Right in the Renaissance*, devised systems of categorisation. According to him, Early Modern diet and medicine discourse can be divided into three different periods (Albala, 2002: 7). Although his system has been criticised by contemporary food historians such as Mikkeli as overly schematic (Mikkeli, 1999: 27), it is still useful as a broad guide to the main phases, which is why it will be employed in the context of this thesis.

Period one, spanning from the 1470s to roughly 1530, contains the first printed texts and shows significant medieval influence. Reference texts by acclaimed authors such as Platina, Savonarola and Ficino mainly relied on three sources: Galenic, Jewish and medieval Arab treatises, the latter incorporating ideas and theories from ancient Greek and Roman literature, and also from Galenic texts whose original versions had yet to be rediscovered at the time. Authors who helped bridge the gap between Early Moderns and Antiquity include Avicenna, Rhazes and Isaac Judeus (Gentilcore 2015: 11; Albala, 2002: 7, 23). Writers of this period mainly worked for princely patrons: the Medici, the Sforza, the Este or the Papacy, although their works were printed and circulated widely

and freely among the élite. Their writings shared an open, multi-cultural and liberal attitude towards diet (Gentilcore 2015: 13, Albala: 2002: 7).

Period two, lasting from 1530 to the 1570s, followed the revival of original Galenic texts in the 1520s and 30s. In university towns such as Padua, Basel, Lyon and London and cultural centres all throughout Europe, philologists and humanists were intent on translating the entirety of the original Hippocratic works and the Greek medical texts at large, which before then were only partially available through the mediation of mainly Arab sources. Physicians began to study Greek in order to gain access to the original texts, unsullied by the comments and imperfect translations of the Middle Ages (Gentilcore 2015: 11). Their aim was to replace the Arab medical canon with Greek authors such as Aëtius, Oribasius and Paul of Ageina. They firmly believed that ancient Greek writers possessed a knowledge that they sought to restore, in contrast to our moden view of knowledge as something constantly advancing, projected towards the future instead of the past (Gentilcore 2015: 12).The main difference with authors of the first period lies in the way the authors distanced themselves from courtly audiences, rejecting and actively critiquing excesses and gluttony. This trend closely reflects the rejection of indulgences in Reformation Europe, although not many authors declared religious intent explicitly (Albala, 2002: 8).

Lastly, the writings of period three lasted until the middle of the 17th century. During these years, authors finally started to stray from the Ancient Greek texts, openly criticising them whenever new discoveries came to light (Gentilcore 2015: 14). They relied on local custom and sometimes social prejudice, making use of their personal experience. Although still far from a proper revolution based on experimental method and research, typical of the following centuries, it still represents a remarkable step away from the orthodoxy representative of the dietaries written during the Galenic revival (Albala, 2002: 8).

1.1.2 The Galenic revival

It is evident, then, that vast majority of diet literature in the Early Modern period stemmed from Galenic writings, and his humoral theory in particular. Galen was born in

Pergamum c.AD 129. He studied philosophy as well as medicine, serving as a physician to Pergamum gladiators before moving to Rome. There, he gained the favour of the emperor Marcus Aurelius thanks to his popularity among the Roman élite and his precious contributions in public debates and anatomical demonstrations. During his life he wrote a plethora of books and treaties, displaying his interest in the most varied topics, ranging from Logic and Philosophy to Anatomy and Pharmacology (Galen & Singer, 1997: 1). In the Renaissance, his theory of the four humours was particularly influential and drew a tight link between overall health, diet and even morality (Schoenfeldt, 2006: 9). His thesis expanded upon Hippocrates' work, who did not mention humours as liquids inside the body, but simply health as a balance of hot, cold, moist and dry. Galen introduced the concept of four elemental properties, or humours: hot and moist blood, cold and moist phlegm, hot and dry choler or yellow bile and cold and dry melancholy or black bile (Albala, 2002: 48). The four humours found in the human body directly reflected the four Empedoclean elements of water, air, fire and earth: water is cold and wet, air wet and hot, fire hot and dry, earth dry and cold. In this view, man is but a microcosm, a perfect mirror of nature itself. All four humours are naturally present in the body in small quantities and are necessary for health (Jackson, 2017: 33). Should there be a strong imbalance (dyscrasia) or illness (cachochimia) the natural order of the body must be restored. The main way to cure a sick person is through diet. (Jackson, 2001: 487-488). It is important to note, however, that people tended to show a natural prevalence of one humour over the others. This determined one's complexion and had effects on their physical and psychological characteristics as well as possible health issues. The key to health was reaching and maintaining a delicate balance between these four liquids, although it was considered normal for people to present a slight imbalance (Gentilcore 2015: 15).

These theories were further expanded in Thomas Culpeper's work, *Galen's Art of Physick* (1652), which perfectly shows how the influence of humoral theory did not stop in the Middle Ages; rather it carried well into the Early Modern period. Although it was published well after Shakespeare's death, it reflects the kinds of additions and modifications physicians were promoting during his life much more closely than Medieval texts. Born in London in 1616 from a Sussex clergyman, he studied in

Cambridge for a short period of time and then decided to come back to the City. He was well versed in astrology, which at the time included both the study of the motions of the heavenly bodies as well as their supposed influence on humans and the Earth at large (Chance, 1931: 394). It was not unusual for a physician to believe in astrology and combine it with medicine to heal patients (Chance, 1931: 395). While Culpeper is most known as one of the founding fathers of modern obstetrics and for his original work on medicinal herbs, *The Complete Herbal* (1653), he also translated Latin texts into English, such as the *Pharmacopoeia* and extensively commented Galen's writings (Chance, 1931: 394).

While re-elaborating Galen's work, Culpeper also stressed that a slight humoral imbalance was natural and not the basis for serious medical intervention. For instance, medical blood-letting was only recommended in severely distempered individuals. For the majority of the population, health was to be achieved through an adequate diet (Albala, 2002: 49; Jackson, 2001: 488). Conversely, an improper diet was thought to disrupt humoral balance. Culpeper notes that a body or part of it can become too hot or too cold and gives the example of a child becoming excessively hot from nursing a choleric woman (Culpeper, 1652: 15). Throughout *Galen's Art of Physick*, he offers remedies to fight distempered body parts, which range from herbs to spices such as nutmeg, cinnamon, saffron, rosemary, beverages like lemon and citrus juice, wormwood beer, fennel and lettuce (Culpeper, 1652: 28-33). In particular, naturally hot and "windy" foods as well as creatures that are naturally "lustful and fruitful" are recommended to remedy cold and dry genitals: peas and beans, eggs, crabs, lobsters, shrimps, sparrows, quails and partridges (Culpeper, 1652: 33).

Culpeper also points out how an individual may have a natural, primary complexion, but a secondary or accidental complexion could be achieved through improper diet and exercise. Identification of primary complexion often employed physiognomy, judging hair colour and quantity, stature and physical build, movement of the eyes, personality, hand temperature, pulse, urine, taste preferences and even dreams (Albala, 2002: 50). For instance, this is how a sanguine person is described:

A Man or Woman in whose Body heat and moisture abounds, is said to be Sanguine of Complexion, such

are usually of a middle Stature, strong composed Bodies, Fleshy but not Fat, great Veins, smooth Skins, hot and moist in feeling, their Body is Hairy, if they be Men they have soon Beards, if they be Women it were rediculous to expect it; there is a redness intermingled with white in their Cheeks, their Hair is usually of a blackish brown, yet somtimes flaxed, their Appetite is good, their Digestion quick, their Urine yellowish and thick, the Excrements of their Bowels reddish and firm, their Pulse great and full, they dream usually of red things and merry conceits. (Culpeper, 1652: 37)

This passage and the following section delineate how a prevalent temperament affects appetite and digestion. Choleric people are blessed with good appetite and quick digestion (Culpeper, 1652: 37), and they do not have to follow any specific diet advice, apart from being careful not to eat excessively or drink too much strong alcohol (Culpeper, 1652: 38). Choleric men and women are usually "able to digest more than their appetite" (Culpeper, 1652: 38) and are able to eat meats which are hard to digest, such as beef and pork. They are also able to handle strong liquors, although excessive drinking is not recommended, as it could inflame the liver (Culpeper, 1652: 38). Surprisingly enough, melancholic people are described as having a good appetite. They suffer, however, from poor digestion: it naturally follows that they must avoid heavy meats and drink water often throughout a meal (Culpeper, 1652: 39). Phlegmatic people are plagued by weak appetite and digestion. Since they are usually obese, they ought to follow a "very slender diet" and they are also encouraged to fast, "for fasting cleanseth the body of those gross and unconcocted Humors which Flegmatick People are usually as full of as an Egg is of Meat" (Culpeper, 1652: 40). Some people are described as having a "commixture" of temperaments. For instance, a choleric-melancholic man possesses attributes of both humours and should follow a specific diet combining elements from those advised for each humour (Culpeper, 1652: 40).

As people present different primary complexions and health issues, there is no such thing as a universal diet which guarantees longevity and physical well-being. Nutrition is important because improper digestion can result in the production of qualitatively or quantitatively undesirable humours. Natural philosophers, especially Avicenna, thought of the body as a lamp with a given amount of oil (radical moisture) given at birth and consumed by a flame (vital heat). People who exert a lot of energy require more food to keep the flame alive. They burn brighter compared to sedentary people, although their

lives tend to be shorter. It is possible to oversupply the flame and extinguish it as a result of gluttony. As we age our vital heat diminishes, we become colder and drier, requiring less nourishment to keep it burning (Pomata, 2018: 198-199). This concept is analogue to our notion of calories, although there are some fundamental differences (Albala, 2002: 54). It logically follows that an individual can be healthy only when they consume food which is both digestible and compatible with their natural complexion.

When it comes to food, what dominates the body also dominates the tongue. Normally, a healthy body has an appetite for humorally opposite foods, which aid in offsetting its slightly imbalanced complexion. However, when such imbalance exceeds the limits that are deemed “normal” or “healthy”, one's cravings may change (Albala, 2002: 85-87). The desire for certain foods is linked to a specific afflicted organ. For instance, an afflicted liver desires “to feed upon things that are not natural food” and an afflicted stomach causes an appetite for food which is too moist or too dry (Culpeper, 1652: 53). Sudden changes in appetite can also be signs of a sickness to come. For example, if someone starts craving meat or feels suddenly disgusted by it, or if they start drinking too much or too little (Culpeper, 1652: 56). In very serious cases, a person may desire to eat things that are not fit for human consumption, an illness we now call “pica” (Dawson, 2008: 49). This disease was already well-known and studied: it even makes an appearance in Cervantes's *Don Quijote* (1605): “I suffer now from the disease that afflicts some women, filling them with the desire to eat earth, plaster, charcoal, and other things that are even worse, and sickening to look at, let alone to eat” (Cervantes, 2003: 304). German humanist Camerarius wrote to a friend: “a certain girl of Norimberg did eat up her own hair, as much elsewhere as she could get; neither could she be persuaded by parents or friends, to think it an unpleasant or unwholsom meat” (Camerarius in Moffett, 1655: 37). It naturally follows that, in such cases, one should consume foods considered “unpalatable” to restore balance in humours. The idea that an unpleasant medicine is the most effective was regarded true even in the Early Modern period (Albala, 2002: 88).

One might wonder what exactly causes such serious disruptions. Galen cites six components that are able to alter the bodies: air, food and drink, sleep and wake, movement and rest, retention and evacuation including sexual activity and, lastly, the

passions of the soul or the emotions (Culpeper, 1652: 58, Wear, 2009: 156). As Andrew Wear notes, although diet merely represented one out of these six factors, it was sometimes equated with health (Wear, 2009: 160). Because of the power that food and drink hold on overall well-being and humoral balance, there were some general rules that it was advisable to follow. For instance, Culpeper dedicates a significant section of *Art of Physick* to the factors that may affect individual needs in terms of food intake. As a general rule, a moderate quantity of meat and drink is always advisable (Culpeper, 1652: 59). However, in addition, one must pay attention to the quality of the food consumed, as well as the custom, order in which specific meats and drinks are consumed, meal time and also age, as children, adults and old people all have different needs (Culpeper, 1652: 61-63). There was no such thing as a "one-size-fits-all" diet and countless factors influenced which foods it was advisable to consume, how to do so and when.

1.1.3 Food properties and digestion

Early Modern physicians had to take into consideration the properties of each food when devising personalised diets. Their advice had to stem from a very thorough understanding of the impact different ingredients had on their patients' bodies. Such knowledge relied on the way digestion was conceptualised, which differs considerably from our current perception.

For this reason, in order for the modern reader to understand how the Early Moderns classified food, it is necessary to understand the digestive process. "Digestion" at the time did not have the exact same meaning as it does today. Generally, in our modern minds the word conjures up images of the breakdown of food inside the stomach in order to extract nutrients and energy. In the Early Modern period, however, the term also referred to the distribution of nutrients throughout the body, while "concoction" (from Latin "concoctus", meaning "to boil together") comes closer to the modern meaning of the term (Schoenfeldt, 2006: 28).

Surprisingly enough, the first stage of digestion was thought to be appetite. It was thought appropriate to eat only when hungry (Albala, 2002: 54). Appetite stimulants,

elaborate presentations and rich sauces cause men to eat even when not hungry, with disastrous consequences (Laudan, 2008: 158).

The second stage is chewing. It is dangerous to greedily choke down food. James I also commented on how a king should eat: “In the forme of your meate-eating, bee neither vnciuill, like a grosse Cynicke; nor affectatlie mignarde, like a daintie dame; but eat in a manlie, round, and honest fashion” (James I, 1616: 181).

Next is concoction. Bad concoction spoils the body. Renaissance theorists thought about digestion as a process of cooking eaten food inside the stomach, rather than a breakdown into nutrients (Schoenfeldt, 2006: 28). It follows that a digestible food must be easily broken down by heat. The order in which the foods were meant to be eaten was thus important. For instance, it was not advisable to consume easily combustible foods such as sugar at the start of a meal, when the stomach is still in its original hot and dry state (Albala, 2002: 57). This idea also led to the custom of consuming cheese at the end of a meal, as it was believed to “seal off” the stomach (Smith, 2014: 155; Broomhall, 2015: 188). Food had to stay in the stomach for the proper amount of time to guarantee health, neither too long nor too little. Afterwards, it headed towards the intestines and kidneys, to be broken down into useful nutrients and waste (Albala, 2002: 60). The important material left by this process headed to the liver and began a process called sanguification, producing blood which was then distributed throughout the body (Orland, 2010: 167). Alcohol was considered fundamental as it made blood thinner, thus aiding this process. Even Falstaff in the second part of Shakespeare's *Henry IV* waxes on about the digestive properties of sherry:

> [The] second property of your excellent sherry is the warming
> of the blood, which before, cold and settled, left the liver
> white and pale, which is the badge of pusillanimity and
> cowardice. But the sherry warms it, and makes it course
> from the inwards to the parts' extremes. (4.2.99-103)

Onions, garlic and leeks we also were believed to possess similar humour-thinning properties (Galen & Wilkins, 2009: 114).

The digestive process is closely connected to humours and, ultimately, mental clarity.

The blood heads to different organs, in which the four different humours are located, as well as the heart, linked to the production of spirits. Some enter the lungs and the venous system, some come in contact with spirits in the left ventricle and, refreshed, enter the arteries. Although a great number of external factors, for instance air quality and seasonal fluctuations, can contribute to the consistency of these spirits, diet represents an essential condition. In the brain, which is reached by blood previously purified by the heart, is a sieve called *rete mirabile*, able to distil the purest form of spirits, namely the animal spirits, messengers of all involuntary acts prompted by the brain (Albala, 2002: 62-63). This means that everything begins with digestion and a faulty digestion can cloud the mind.

Considering it was crucial for dietary prescriptions, foodstuff was divided according to its intrinsic humoral qualities. Counterintuitively enough, a food containing water could be classified as choleric (hot and dry). On the other hand, a "dry" food such as sugar by Elizabethan times was widely regarded as hot and moist, as it encouraged the production of blood (O'Hara-May, 1977: 281). In other terms, the primary, or actual characteristics could differ from the secondary or potential qualitative effects (Albala, 2002: 78). The method used to determine the qualities of a food was primarily inductive, starting from observation: for instance, since tomato is cold and moist, it logically follows that it will produce cold and moist humours in the body. However, additional methods were used, which explains why sometimes this categorisation was not as straightforward.

Firstly, an older system, probably rooted in folklore, claimed that there is a direct transfer between what one eats and the effect it has on the body, called the doctrine of similarities. For example, eating animal brains sustains the intellect, consuming testicles improves fertility (Von Hoffman, 2016: 225, Albala, 2002: 79-80). Certain animals were associated with specific qualities which were believed to transfer through consumption: rabbits are shy and fearful, which means that their meat is a melancholic food, eating fox meat makes one cunning, and consuming deer ensures longevity since the animal lives on its own for a long time (Von Hoffman, 2016: 225). Later authors generally regarded such beliefs as vulgar superstition: as a result, the doctrine lost traction and was mocked by the end of the sixteenth century. However, the very fact that writers

were still mentioning the theory is proof enough that many people still believed in it (Albala, 2003: 222).

Another theory is the doctrine of signature: the colour of food or its visible characteristics were signals of their uses "writ upon their breast" by God (Harrison, 2010: 193). The Swiss physician Paracelsus (1493-1541) wrote that God "left nothing unmarked, but provided all things with outward, visible marks, with special traits just as a man who has buried treasure marks the spot in order that he may find it again" (Paracelsus Werke, I, 11: 1928-33: 393). As John Edwards expressed it: "the outward Signature or impression which is in some Plants, shews their inward Virtue, and [...] from the resemblance which they have with parts of a Man's Body we may gather their secret power, and know to what particular part they are appropriated" (Edwards, 1696: 133). The chief example was that of the walnut: since it resembled a brain, it was often prescribed for headaches and sicknesses having to do with the brain in general. Kidney beans, similarly, bore such name precisely because of their function (Harrison, 2010: 193). While the colour system was older and rarely mentioned in Renaissance dietaries, it was still used an indication of nutritional value: red fruits and vegetables are hot and aid in the production of blood, yellow leaves were used to treat jaundice, black foods denote melancholy. Consequentially, red grapes and beans were deemed hotter and more nutritious than white ones, promoting blood production (Albala, 2002: 80).

Odour emitted also contributed to its characteristics. Cloves, thanks to their volatile aroma, were deemed hot and dry. The smell of putrefaction was associated with moisture. The rank odour of carnivorous animals was a signal of their excessive heat.

Perhaps surprisingly to our modern sensibility, dieticians in the Early Modern period paid great attention to texture. Slimy texture, for instance, was sometimes the determining factor in proclaiming a food cold and moist (Albala, 2002: 92). The most popular terminology employed refers to food as either "subtle", or light, and "crass", or dense. This does not merely refer to the mouthfeel, but also the way the food behaves inside the body, if it tends to stay in the stomach for too long or if it exits immediately (Albala, 2002: 97).

Lastly, the environment in which the animal or plant was found influenced its characteristics. Plants growing in damp environments are more phlegmatic than those

growing in sunny ones. Roots, absorbing “undigested” nutrients straight from the soil are harder to digest than leaves. Fish is cold and moist like the water it swims in. (Albala, 2002: 81-82).

As diverse as these methods may be, according to Renaissance writers, flavour is the most reliable criterion to ascertain the humoral qualities of a certain food (Gentilcore, 2016: 20). Blood was usually considered sweet, and sweetness in food indicated heat and moisture. The natural preference babies have for sweet things points towards a similarity with the warmth and moistness of their body. Logically, our innate aversion to bitter foods must depend on their lack in nutritional value. Most authors classified such foods as hot and dry, since choler (yellow bile) was deemed the most bitter substance (Albala, 2002: 82). Melancholy (black bile) had a sharp or sour flavor. Cold and moist phlegm was neutral or unsavory, but it could also taste sharp, salty or sweet. (Swann, 2020: 59). Generally, vegetables and bland fruit fell in this last category, and were not considered particularly nutritious, proving how food perception is wholly influenced by culture (Albala, 2002: 84).

Once established that food possesses the ability to influence a body's elemental properties because of its intrinsic characteristics, it is crucial to note how not all foods possess the same strength when it comes to affecting the organism. According to Galen, there are four degrees of intensity. First degree foods have effects so slight they are not perceivable, second degree foods alter the body mildly yet perceptibly (Gibbs, 2019: 16). For instance, the cold and moist humours produced by lettuce should be discernable (Albala, 2002: 84). Third degree foods, such as the hot and dry cloves, have a strong but bearable effect. Fourth degree foods have caustic results, they can burn the body with heat or stupefy it with cold. Garlic and cucumber, respectively, are good examples of this phenomenon (Albala, 2002: 84, Gibbs, 2019: 16). Few foods are perfectly tempered, bread being one of the most notable examples (Gerritsen & Riello, 2015: 33). While pharmacists frequently employed this categorisation, few dietaries boasted such pinpoint accuracy, stating that changes in the body after consuming a specific substance are conditioned by individual circumstances, making it impossible to determine how much of an effect will be produced a priori (Albala, 2002: 84-85).

So, should people avoid eating foods which are intensely humoral altogether? The

Early Modern physicians' answer would have been negative. Sauces, condiments and even fruits and vegetables were used to adjust the humoral makeup of certain foods. Hot and dry pepper could be used to balance out cold and moist fish, so that it could be consumed by a phlegmatic person (Albala, 2002: 88). This idea begged the issue of how much condiment was needed to properly counteract a highly distempered ingredient. This certainly led to the overspiced dishes typical of the period, which would likely disgust a modern gourmand. Some spices were combined to correct a dish less intensely. For instance, seasoning fish with cinnamon and pepper would be less harsh than using the latter alone (Albala, 2002: 90). It is clear, then, that sugar and spices added to dishes we would now consider nauseating did not only serve the purpose of being an indicator of wealth, but they also had medicinal uses (Albala, 2002: 91). When choosing food combinations, one must also consider the texture of the ingredients: dense food should always be accompanied with light food, but not vice versa (Albala, 2002: 98). Cheese is so dense some authors recommend it is never eaten to avoid a slow and difficult digestion (Albala, 2002: 93).

By discussing Galenic theory, its impact on Early Modern food discourse, exploring medical beliefs about appetite and digestion, properties of different ingredients and possible reasoning behind such beliefs, it has been made abundantly clear just how relevant food was in the Early Modern period. It was not merely a daily necessity, but also a topic of discussion and research. Physicians did not only aim to guarantee health and well-being to their patients, they were taking part in a larger debate about proper behaviour, ethics and morality at large. Linking certain character traits to humoral complexion charged food choices with the power of potentially altering one's own behaviour. This very coupling of diet and virtue constitutes the basis of Galenic philosophy. In short, as Temkin eloquently summarised:

> Proper regimen balanced the temperament of the body and its parts, and with them the psychic functions. Correct and incorrect diet could determine health and disease, and because it was under human control, the choice of diet gave a moral dimension to health and sickness. (Temkin, 1991: 47)

1.2 Staple Foods, Crops and the Agricultural Revolution

Food production in Early Modern Europe was undoubtedly influenced by the environmental conditions that allowed for growth, as well as by social and cultural factors, which had such a long-lasting impact that their effects are still visible today. Environment and climate certainly affected the daily lives of the lower class, which depended on a good harvest for survival. Given that their lives depended on the very products they harvested, they tended to choose whichever crops would guarantee a more substantial production. In contrast, the higher classes often disregarded higher-yield products in favour of lower-yield food which happened to be in demand among the élite at the time: examples are durum wheat in Italy and veal or beef year round in the Mediterranean, despite unfavourable weather conditions (Grieco, 2012: 29). However, these rare ingredients did not account for the vast majority of the diet of the higher class. When analysed more closely, the diet staples of the Early Modern period were the same regardless of class and latitude. In fact, a common meal was composed of just four elements: bread, wine or beer, meat and vegetables (Grieco, 2012: 29). Such uniformity in diet is surprising at first, especially considering the five different climates the continent boasts. However, it needs to be considered that the Northern taiga and tundra were largely uninhabited; the grassland, with its hot summers, rigid winters and heavy rains was mainly roamed by nomadic populations. The warm Mediterranean climate with rainy bouts in autumn and winter and the Northern deciduous forests were the only truly populated areas.

The two cultures dwelling there had different farming practices. The Roman-Mediterranean was characterised by wheat cultivation and arboriculture, The Northern-Germanic was largely dedicated to hunting, fishing, gathering wild fruits and raising animals, especially pigs. For these reasons, according to historians such as Georges Duby the diet of the former consisted of wine, olive oil, bread, meat of mutton and goat, and cheese produced from their milk. The second adopted a mainly carnivorous diet with little greens from vegetable gardens and some wheat, mainly used to produce beer (Duby, 1974: 17; Grieco, 2012: 30). However, the two systems interacted with each other: in the Northern climate, viticulture, the production of grains and olive oil were

promoted by the spread of Christianity and its use of wine and bread during mass as well as by the tradition of abstaining from animal products, including butter, during Lent and fasting days. In addition, in both areas the higher classes introduced elements of the diet typical of the other climate, as the ingredients were rarer and thus more valuable (Montanari, 1992: 16).

This sharp division is often challenged by archaeological discoveries. For instance, pig rearing was found to be very common in Roman Italy. Romans also produced fruit, which according to the model should have been typical of the transalpine areas (André, 1981: 74-91). While it is true that production fell slightly during the Middle Ages, it picked up again in the 14th-15th century, because it was regarded as a luxury item, even if fruit was not considered particularly nourishing to the body (Grieco, 1993: 204-205). All these findings seem to undermine the theory of the existence of the Mediterranean diet, especially the fact that olive oil, supposedly a staple, in reality was not the prevalent cooking fat used during the Early Modern period. In cookbooks from the 14th to 17th century, recipes calling for olive oil range from a mere 6.7% to a modest 26.7% (Flandrin, 1983: 385). Olive oil consumption started to increase during the 16th century, when vegetables and salads became fashionable among the upper classes (Grieco, 2012: 33). In short, all these discoveries reveal that the Early Modern diet in those areas close to the Mediterranean Sea was very different from what is now known as the Mediterranean diet, a concept which has been promoted since the 50s by an American scientist called Ancel Keys (Keys, 1975; Grieco, 2012: 33).

1.2.1 Food staples

It appears evident that the food cultures were not completely different from one another and were based on the same four staple foods: bread, wine or beer, meat and vegetables.

The importance of bread is underlined in iconographic cycles, called labours of the months, particularly popular in France and Italy, in which wheat sowing and reaping is depicted in at least three out of twelve months (Mane, 1983: 155). Bread was so common in Europe, that the few areas where it was not a staple food, such as the South of Scotland, were considered barbaric precisely because of their lack of bread. Pope

Pius, visiting Scotland during the 15th century, commented that Scots were "barbarians, who had never seen white bread!", thus reacting to white bread with "wonder" (Pope Pius in Piccolomini, 1936-7: 19). In the vast majority of Europe bread constituted half of the daily calories of the lower classes (Dyer, 1988: 25-26), although some studies suggest that in England in particular there was precocious movement towards the decentralisation of bread as a diet staple because of the increased price of wheat (Dyer, 1988: 27).

As for wine, it was vital in the areas where vineyards thrived or where it could be transported at reasonable costs. Everywhere else, beer played the same role (Grieco, 2012: 36). It is important to notice that there is no clear demarcation between wine and beer areas; in the places were both were available they usually appealed to different social groups. In England, for instance, local wine was soon replaced by expensive imported wine, which means that the lower classes had to resort to drinking beer (Unger 2005, 108-109). Some venture to say this is in part due to the onset of a colder climate, but in reality the divide between expensive wine and affordable beer dates back to Roman times (Hames, 2014: 25).

Bread and wine were accompaniments for the main star of the meal, which was meat. During the 12th and 13th century, pork was the most commonly eaten meat (Grieco, 2012: 38). During the Early Modern period it was partly replaced by mutton in Mediterranean regions and with beef in Northern regions (Blanchard, 1986: 427–460). While in some countries meat was consumed prevalently by the élite, in others, such as England, meat consumption was widespread among lower classes. (Dyer, 1989: 159).

Vegetables were likely cultivated in local vegetable gardens, though it is difficult to track the scale of the production. They were often cultivated in a larger scale by important institutions such as monasteries and hospitals. When a surplus occurred, they were sold in markets. Research shows that private vegetable gardens in England might have declined in the late Middle Ages because common folk relied more on markets (Dyer, 2000: 130). The same lower classes were probably the ones who consumed greens the most, although consumption among the élite is easier to track due to all the records of food expenditures (Griego, 2012: 40). It is evident that fruit was much more socially prestigious than vegetables and it constituted a substantial portion of food

expenses among the very wealthy (3% of vegetables against 7-10% of fruit). Merchants, on the other hand, spent more on vegetables and less on fruit (Griego, 2012: 41)

In conclusion, although rich and poor people generally relied on the same diet staples, the amounts of each category were very different: the high class consumed significantly more meat (which includes sought after delicacies such as quail and partridge), while the lower class mainly relied on bread, wine and vegetables (Griego, 2012: 42).

1.2.2 The agricultural revolution

Having briefly touched on the four diet staples, it is now important to understand how they were produced. Figures show that the English population was on the rise during the 16th century, particularly in urban areas (Wrigley, 1985: 688-690). Although agricultural productivity is hard to measure, especially when there is a distinct lack of exact data, a possible method is to consider the urban growth in England and compare it to the occupational structure of the rural component of the entire population (Wrigley, 1985: 695). Since the population was indeed growing, and the percentage of the population working exclusively in agriculture was decreasing, it is reasonable to speculate that a rise in productivity was the natural result of this tendency (Wrigley, 1985: 697). Such an increase can be brought about by new agricultural techniques and technologies, which are typically associated to the concept of agricultural revolution.

It is not entirely clear when exactly this process started. The common denominator in its definition seems to involve the amount of grain produced, which is highly dependent on the usage of the Norfolk four-course system. This technique consisted in implementing a strict four-year rotation of crops, in a precise order. Wheat was planted first, then the next year came turnips, followed by barley with clover and ryegrass undersown. During the fourth year the latter two were fully grown and used to feed cattle or sheep (Gorlinski, 2012: 76).

Before the revolution, two or three crops were followed by a fallow, which is unploughed or bare earth, in order to recover fertility. The process was aided by manure, dependant in quality and quantity on the fodder available to the animals (Overton, 1996:

2). The main problem in this system was that if grain area was increased, it resulted in reduced pasture, which meant less manure and consequently less fertile land, thus not resulting in a significant increase in productivity or output (Ashton, 1997: 22). Replacing fallow with fodder crops, namely clover and turnips, led to four main results: first of all, the highly unproductive land was replaced by crops. Secondly, the loss in fodder resulting from the decrease in fallow was outweighed by the new fodder derived from clover and turnips. Additionally, clover was used to fix atmospheric nitrogen into the soil, actively making the land more fertile. Finally, turnips acted as a cleaning crop, smothering pesky perennial weeds and getting the land ready for wheat without need for ploughing. They also provided fodder for animals during the winter (Overton, 1996: 3).

Dating the agricultural revolution

Usually, both the industrial revolution and the English agricultural revolution are considered to begin in the mid 18th century and to end in the middle of the 19th (Overton, 1996: 4). During this period, the government eliminated open commonfields, thus allowing farmers to intensify selective animal breeding and allowing free development of big capitalistic farms (Ashton, 1997: 4). Additionally, during those years some famous personalities helped popularise technological innovations, for instance "Turnip" Townsend, credited as the first person to grow turnips on his estate; Jethro Tull, inventor of the seed drill; Coke of Holkham and Robert Bakewell (Kerridge, 1967: 15). However, not only does history mix with myth when it comes to these individuals, but their inventions are also proven to have long antecedents, dating back even earlier than the 17th century (Overton, 1996: 4).

In fact, many of the innovations typical of the agricultural revolution can be dated as early as the 16th century. British Historian Eric Kerridge, in his book *The Agricultural Revolution*, claims that revolutionary changes took place in England in the period between 1560 and 1767. Kerridge defends his thesis using three main arguments.

First of all, he denies that some of the mechanisation typically associated with the post 1750s agricultural revolution happened at all, such as the mechanisation of farming. Far from being revolutionary discoveries, machines changed the world of agriculture just slightly, and certainly very slowly. Plowing techniques were more

important than the variety of ploughs themselves, which had to change according to the soil (Kerridge, 1967: 33). He also states that the "heroes" of the agricultural revolution were mythologised or vastly overrated. For example, when it comes to Jethro Tull, he claims that although inventive, a lot of his creations were unusable. The corn drill and horse-hoeing are exceptions, as they are undoubtedly practical. However, they are not very original, since similar systems date back at least a century (Kerridge, 1967: 36). Other inventions considered indicative of the agricultural revolution in reality were not new, either. Field drainage, for instance, in the past was achieved through trench drains, hollow drains or turf drains, depending on the region. What is certainly typical of the 19th century is merely the improvement of drainage pipes, although these improvements were not needed and limited in application in most cases. Logically this did not affect agriculture noticeably (Kerridge, 1967: 37).

Secondly, according to his studies, some of the innovations ascribed to the period between 1760 and 1830 were not immensely relevant. In this category, he includes: parliamentary enclosure, the extinction of common law rights, extension of cultivation, the replacement of bare fallows, the Norfolk four-course rotation and selective breeding (Overton, 1996: 5).

Although the passage from open fields to enclosures is typically considered one of the trademarks of the agricultural revolution, there is no real distinction between old open fields and new "closed" ones, as their morphology entirely depended upon the terrain even in the 16th century. Some had hedgerows and shaws, which were the remains of the woods and pastures that once occupied the land before it was cultivated, others did not. More importantly, the open or closed state of the fields ultimately did not have much of an effect on productivity (Kerridge, 1967: 21).

Similarly, the extinction of the common law rights did not accompany a substantial growth in the field of husbandry nor did it make a substantial change in the amount of common-field that was actually enclosed. The data that is commonly used as proof is often inconclusive and offers no usable estimates (Kerridge, 1967: 22). Extension of cultivation is also sometimes used as a yardstick to measure the progress of the agricultural revolution. According to Kerridge, this would mean "to misunderstand the nature of the economic revolution and to confuse technological innovation with mere

economic growth". In fact, even before legal action was taken, almost all the suitable land was cultivated, although some of it was no one's land in particular (Kerridge, 1967: 24).

As for the replacement of bare fallows with fallow crops, typically turnip and clover, Kerridge claims that one cannot simply equate bare fallows with a retrograde system and fallow crops with modernity. The former technique was revisited even after the adoption of new husbandry, and in some regions it was only partially replaced by fallow crops (Kerridge, 1967: 27-28). Turnips could be only used when the soil allowed for them: it could not be excessively light but it could not be heavy, either. Often, other crops were used in their place, for instance, in lighter soil, cole-seed, carrots and cabbages. Before this new crop rotation, farmers usually allowed seeds of local grass and clovers, called hay seeds or hay dust, to grow freely with similar results (Kerridge, 1967: 29). Clover usage cannot be used as a hallmark for the agricultural revolution either, as farms boasting a natural abundance of hay and grass did not have a valid reason to begin planting this crop (Kerridge, 1967: 32).
Finally, selective breeding had been employed for a long time, especially when it came to Midland pasture sheep (Kerridge, 1967: 322). As Kerridge sums up:

> Of the conventional criteria of the agricultural revolution, the spread of the Norfolk four-course system belongs to the realm of mythology; the suppression of oxen by horses is hardly better; the enclosure of common fields by Act of Parliament, a broken yardstick; the improvement of implements, inconsiderable and inconclusive; the replacement of bare fallows, unrealistic; developments in stock breeding, over-rated; and drainage alone seems a valid criterion. The failure of historians to locate the agricultural revolution has thus arisen, in part at least, from mistaken notions of what form an agricultural revolution could have taken. (Kerridge, 1967: 39)

Thirdly, and most importantly, he argues that some revolutionary changes took place long before the 18th century, dedicating chapters of his book to up-and-down husbandry, fen drainage, floating the water meadows, fertilisers and new stock (Overton, 1996: 5).

New crops

Of the new crops introduced in the 15th century, tobacco is the most well-known. It

flourished in the Middle Vale starting from the 16th century for about a hundred years, until the government banned its production. Weld, known as dyer's weed, was also new and it was usually planted either under oats or barley, or together with clover. It was popular because of its multiple purposes: it could be fed to sheep and it could dye cloth yellow (Kerridge, 1967: 268). Another revolutionary crop was carrot, sometimes used in the four-crop rotation to substitute turnips. It could be cultivated both in fields and gardens with hot and sandy soils. By 1590, carrots were so established in some regions that they began being exported. They made for excellent horse feed, and with time they were also widely grown in kitchens and market-gardens for human consumption (Gentilcore, 2015: 117). Turnips, on the other hand, rarely made it to the table (Dolan, 2020: 51). However, there were some exceptions. The brown and sandy loams of the Chalk Country and Burbage were perfect for root crops such as peas and turnips (Kerridge, 1967: 270), to the point that physicist John Aubrey (1626-1697) felt the need to remark that they were "the best that I ever did eate, and are sent for far and neere: not tough and stringy like other turnips, but cutt like marmalad" (Aubrey, 1846: 36). When the soil proved too shallow or too heavy for the common turnip, dwarf rape (a fine-stemmed forage rape) proved to be a great solution. Cabbages also could replace turnips in heavy soils, when flies became too much of a pest, as was the case in High Suffolk, or when the land was affected by droughts. As a downside, they were somewhat more difficult to grow than turnips and needed to be planted earlier, which is why at times Swedish turnips were used instead (Kerridge, 1967: 277).

The potato used to be considered a kitchen garden vegetable, but its production slowly increased, and by 1690 the practice of planting it in extensive fields was well established. It was usually fed to farm animals, and when it was eaten by humans, its consumption was usually limited to the very poor (Gentilcore: 2015: 133-136; Kerridge, 1967: 277-278).

Although it was not the first artificial grass to be implemented in the rotation, sainfoin was the first to find a regular place into the practice of husbandry. It did not need to be tilled regularly and it made convertible sheep sleights and pastures possible as well as profitable, allowing a further extension of arable land in the country (Kerridge, 1967: 278). White and red clovers were also introduced, often added to other

seeds for leys but also grown as an individual crop. Red clovers were preferred for short hay leys, while white were used for long grazing ones (Kerridge, 1967: 280).

Spurrey (an annual weed) and lucerne (a perennial pasture legume) also became new crops. The former was occasionally used for the winter feed of animals, particularly sheep, while the latter was fed to horses without being dried first (Kerridge, 1967: 288).

The aforementioned crops listed were introduced in different parts of the kingdom. Their regular adoption required time and was never universal. A crop is considered "adopted" when the average farmer knew and fully accepted it as an ordinary cultivation, even if they did not personally include it in their rotation (Kerridge, 1967: 289).

Up-and-down husbandry

Central to the agricultural revolution was the notion of converting permanent grassland into a stable, arable land in which both tillage and grass leys to be used as pasture were grown in turns. This system now goes by numerous names: it is called ley farming, convertible, alternate or field grass husbandry. Historically, it was named up-and-down husbandry (McArthur & Cunningham, 1895: 178). The reason why this system was not thought to be in use during the Early Modern period by many historians is attributable to the fact that, at the time, it still did not have a name, making it hard to detect in sources (Hall, 2014: 88; Kerridge, 1967: 289). Bearing in mind that medieval categories for land were just arable, pastures and meadow, much less descriptive than modern terms in use today such as tillage, temporary leys, grassland and rough grazing, it is easy to understand how documents have to be accurately interpreted (Kerridge, 1967: 182). Upon closer inspection, it is clear that such system was well established in numerous counties by the beginning of the 17th century. For instance, in some Midland surveys up-and-down land appears under the name "arable or pasture". In the countries where formal terminology was still used, it is common to find explanatory notes specifying that one part was plowed, while the other used as pasture. Similar evidence is present in particulars, law and equity pleadings, and anti-depopulation legislations (Kerridge, 1967: 184, 188-189). All these documents seem to indicate that, in the early 16th century, up-and-down husbandry was mainly implemented in the North-West. After

1560, this practice began to spread rapidly, especially during the period between 1590 and 1660, and by the last quarter of the 17th century it had completely conquered production and took over more than half of the farmland, substituting permanent tillage and grass for the most part (Kerridge, 1967: 194). The advent of up-and-down husbandry led to a change when it came to the selection of crops. The two main cultivations were barley and oats, then came peas, rye and maslin, which is a mixture of different types of grain. At times, dredge - a mixture of oats and barley, bigg - four-rowed barley, and beans were used as a substitute. On the whole, the system brought to an increase in production of oats and wheat, while barley and pulse diminished (Kerridge, 1967: 198). Up-and-down husbandry greatly benefited corn production and it also led to better quality grass, resulting in improved livestock (Kerridge, 1967: 204, 207). On the whole, the system proved successful because it required half the costs for double the produce, making total unit costs four times as high in common fields as up-and-down land (Kerridge, 1967: 209).

Fen Drainage

Fens are marshes, moors, mosses of various kinds. In coastal areas, farmers waited for tides to recede and then proceeded with walling to drain the land and prepare it for cultivation. These lands were also used as sheep pasture for improved fertility (Kerridge, 1967: 222-223). In cities away from coasts, fen drainage was more challenging and expensive, but it was more frequent than anywhere else (Kerridge, 1967: 225). The majority of the draining activity was in operation between 1590-1653 (Kerridge, 1967: 234). When the land was not drained properly it became infertile, and commoners were forced to seek pastures elsewhere. Too much humus had a negative effect on fertility and had to be burned in order to dry the land and get it ready for cultivation and kill pests (Kerridge, 1967: 235). The main cereal crop grown on drained land was oats. After reaping, the land was either covered with twitch, burned to cleanse it or kept fallow for a whole year in order to restore its fertility. Even the best fen-mould could not be kept active for more than eight years, and some would be exhausted after three or four years (Kerridge, 1967: 236). In the best fen-moulds, the rotation generally started with a repeated cole-seed crop, then it was sown after two fallow stirrings, most

times after wheat and before a last crop of oats (Kerridge, 1967: 237). Fen drainage did not affect forage and fodder, because temporary grass was plenty in the summer and the cole-seed produced in the fens was fed to animals during the winter. Therefore, sheep, veal and pigs flourished, as did cheese and butter production (Kerridge, 1967: 238).

Floating the watermeadows

Grass either came from dried or upland meadows or from wet water meadows. As wet meadows were more productive, the water stream was sometimes directed into trenches to irrigate. Winter flooding was especially beneficial as it prevented lays, but the water could not stay on the ground too long (Kerridge, 1967: 251-252). A further improvement consisted in drowning or floating upwards: by making a dam and floodgates across the river, the water overflew out of the mead and was penned up and forced back over the meadow. The meadow grass resulting from this method was particularly loved by pigs and so strong it had to be cut using a pea-hook (Kerridge, 1967: 253-254). In some particularly cold areas it solved the problem of winter fodder. This system offered an optimal source of nutrition for cattle, especially lambs and ewes, and this in turn affected the quality of barley (Kerridge, 1967: 260).

Fertilisers

The best manures for fertilising purposes were sheep and horse dung. Near the coast, seaweed was used. Nothing was thrown away, be it fishes such as sticklebacks and pilchards, sea-sand, sludge, peat (decomposed vegetables), turves (dead plants), pond mud, soot, wheat chaff (husks surrounding the grain), rape-cake (residue from rape-seed oil production) and even old clothing and footwear. When it came to extraneous fertilisers, lime, chalk and marl were the most popular because of their efficacy (Kerridge, 1967: 240-41). Manure and human urine were used to aid the seeding process. Fern, turf, straw and cow waste were used as fuel, similarly to cheap coal when firewood was not readily available. Soap ash, tanner's muck and stone chippings were all waste products used as fertilizers. In the increasingly urbanised cities could be found rags, furriers' clippings, horn shavings, sheeps' trotters, leather shreds, bones and all other sorts of waste which were used for the same purpose. Of course, fertiliser usage

varied according to location, for instance sea-sand, lime and marl were more used in coastal locations (Kerridge, 1967: 243-244).

New stock

At the core of the agricultural revolution is the need to improve fodder both in volume and range, which inevitably results in changes and helps improvements in the health of sheep, cattle and horses. Eight breeds of arable sheep were formerly stocked in England, each with its own peculiarities in weight, length and wool type that made it suitable for the terrain it roamed (Kerridge, 1967: 311). During the course of the agricultural revolution, sheep began to be selectively bred, and specific breeds such as the Midland Pasture sheep gained shorter legs as well as a stronger and fleshier carcass. Chalk Country sheep, as a result of floating the watermeadows, became far larger, supplying meat with a higher amount of fat content. Superior feed on the whole resulted in coarser, longer wool and fattier meat (Kerridge, 1967: 321-322).

Cattle could be bred to be either longhorn, middlehorn, or shorthorn. Longhorn cows were mainly employed in cheese-making, middlehorn breeds were well suited to the yoke and for beef production. Shorthorn breeds boasted high prices because of their outstanding milking qualities (Kerridge, 1967: 316-317).

Among ponies and horses to be used in farming, the Suffolk Puch and Great Sandlings began to be bred because of their high resistance (Kerridge, 1967: 320).

1.3 Colonial Conquests and Discoveries

England, owing to its strategic position, felt protected against foreign attacks by a wall of sea. This allowed the Early Modern ruling class to dedicate its energy in the new direction of explorations and colonial conquests. This pivotal moment in English history coincided with a turning point in European economic and political life at large: the centre of the continent shifted from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic Ocean, seen as a treasure chest of new worlds and riches. Since the Mediterranean was far away from the British Isles, this new direction greatly favoured England as a nation, allowing it to develop the fundamental conditions of modern nationhood (Kohn, 1940: 69-70).

Some historians consider this period an important step towards the rise of the nation-state: as the State grew more powerful, the monopolisation, rationalisation and bureaucratisation of the political system intensified. Governments became increasingly involved with individuals, organising and ordering their lives, arbitrating disagreements and enforcing settlements (Albala, 2002: 217).

During the 16th century, the European population increased by 30 percent, and even more in some areas. Food expenses also rose noticeably (Dursteler, 2012: 91). The general population suffered from frequent famines, which led to an exodus from the countryside towards the cities (Pullan, 1988: 178). One observer noted in 1596 that "the crowds of poor in the streets were so great that one could not pass through" (Kamen, 2000: 176).

Both the general public and institutions started to draw distinctions between the deserving and undeserving poor, with the latter considered so dangerous that their punishment and reformation was deemed necessary to restore social order. The charity system was no longer able to fix poverty and hunger, which resulted in frequent civil unrest (Dursteler, 2012: 91). Ecclesiastical and political élites began working on new systems and policies to address the issue, which were "marked by a centralization of efforts, the passage of hospitals to lay control, the establishment of special offices and magistracies to aid the poor, the repression of beggars and vagabonds, and the imposition of a tax on the community at large for poor relief" (Muto, 1990: 232).

Nonetheless, it remains fundamental not to see these changes as a total revolution, as

old forms of poor relief remained active. These individual and ecclesiastical efforts to contain poverty and hunger were still essential, and improved with the passing of time (Dursteler, 2012: 92-93). The fundamental change of the 16th century mainly consisted in "willingness to devise new solutions to old problems, and an increased role of states in supervising, coordinating and rationalizing efforts in an attempt to expand the scope of poor relief and to confront changed economic and demographic exigencies" (Pullan 1988: 182, 201) .

An example of such measures in England is provided by the Elizabethan Poor Relief Act of 1601, devised to deal with economic depression, unemployment and famine (Warde, 2017: 45). These laws distinguished between three main categories of poor individuals: the vagrant, the voluntarily unemployed and the helpless. The local government was invested with the power of electing an overseer of the poor who was in charge of executing the law. It could raise taxes and delegate funds to the construction and maintenance of almshouses. Additionally, it could provide financial and material relief to the aged, handicapped and worthy poor (Coll, 1969: 5).

The government also directly regulated food production and consumption. England, still reeling from the crop failures of 1586-7, in 1594 was grappling with new food shortages which would have lasted three years. The Queen and the Privy Council were forced to devise proclamations in the 1580s and 90s in order to control the use of foodstuffs (Bassnett, 2016: 23). The first *Orders deuised by the especiall commandement of the Queenes Maiestie, for the reliefe and stay of the present dearth of Graine within the Realme,* first issued in 1586 and revised in 1594, repeated warnings against exporting, hoarding and price inflation. It also monitored the commercial use of grain: for instance, it restricted the use of barley in malt-making, while it encouraged the use of grains typically consumed by the lower class, such as "Rie, Barley, Pease, and Beanes", in the production of bread to contrast food shortages, famines and crop failures (Bassnett, 2016: 23). In order to avoid food waste, the proclamation prioritized the needs of people over that of animals or commercial enterprises, stating: "no expense of any Graine meet for bread to feede men, be wasted vpon feeding of dogges or other beastes, neyther that any bee spent in making stuffe called Starche" (Privy Council in Bassnett, 2016: 23). The Orders were reissued again in 1595 and further extended

government control to butter and cheese, suggesting that grain shortages probably resulted in underfed cows and, ultimately, in a shortage of milk (Bassnett, 2016: 23). As dire as the situation might have been, it still did not deter the government from implementing additional restrictions regarding animal feed: “the feeding of sheepe with Pease or Beanes [...] be specially forbidden, because in time of dearth the same may serue the poorer sort to make bread of” (Privy Council in Bassnett, 2016: 23-24).

In 1596 and 1597 other proclamations warned engrossers and exporters of grain against valuing revenue over humanitarian causes and England's security, stability and national welfare. Similar messages were reiterated during the yearly Lenten appeals to abstain from killing and eating flesh. They did not only remind subjects of their duties as citizens and Christians, but they also tried to control market prices and regulate the amount of animals that could be killed by licensed purveyors, such as poulterers, butchers and fishmongers. Even when the worst years were officially over, the government reminded citizens not to take prosperity for granted (Bassnett, 2016: 24). As for international trade, in 1591 a directive banned the export of military supplies and food to Spain, thanking God for the plentiful harvest, juxtaposed to the shortages suffered by Spain in the same period: “our dominions haue by Gods goodnesse, plentie, for the recouerie whereof he [the King of Spain] is forced to expend great treasures to get Corne” (Elizabeth I in Bassnett, 2016: 24). The document expressed relief that God's favour remained on the English side, yet in doing so it inadvertently highlighted the inability of the ruling class to effectively manage food supply and demand without God’s blessing. Madeline Bassnett poignantly suggests that “in a national economy heavily reliant on domestic agricultural production, the weather had as much, if not more, impact on a good harvest as did diligent labour and good farming practices” (Bassnett, 2016: 24).

The tendency to reform and rationalise public administration coincided with the development of a heightened national consciousness, resulting in a growing concern over international political matters and a desire to distance the national eating habits from the strange customs of foreigners and the new foods brought to Europe from Asia and America (Albala, 2002: 224).

1.3.1 Reception of New World foods

English and French authors appeared particularly fearful of strange foreign foods, and at times would rather promote national customs over opposing humoral theory. They criticised their European neighbours as well as those in the regions conquered by the nation-state but still considered ethnically foreigners (Albala, 2002: 225-226). For instance, Early Modern physicians Thomas Cogan (1545?-1607) and Andrew Boorde (1490-1549) were disgusted by the idea of people eating frogs, associating such customs with the Lombards, known for eating them whole, guts included (Boorde, 1870: 187; Cogan, 1589: 140, 146). English writers also heavily criticised the French, and their desserts, dainties and complex kickshaws, and in particular their habit of eating fruit at the end of a meal (Vaughan, 1617: 95). Boorde also condemned the Irish, who were considered barbaric for boiling meat in its skin, the Norse and Icelanders for eating raw fish and other "fylthy thinges". The Germans are not spared either, because of their habit of eating maggots, nor were the Spanish, described as boastful and hot-tempered garlic-eaters (Boorde, 1870: 131– 60; Albala, 2002: 227). These examples of national stereotypes related to food reveal a heightened consciousness of foreign customs as well as a fear of changing habits, advising readers to stick to a traditional diet devoid of foreign ingredients (Albala, 2002: 228). Foods that used to be recommended for their humoral qualities were shunned in order to stick to national custom. For instance, Mediterranean preferences, including veal, kid, olive oil, wine, figs and raisins lost relevance in Northern Europe over the course of the 16th century (Albala, 2002: 231).

This shift begs the question of how new foods coming from the Americas were assessed, whether and how they were appraised according to the humoral system and where such ingredients were successfully adopted.

Both Christopher Columbus and Amerigo Vespucci wrote accounts of their discoveries, which included spices, dyes and new foods they brought back to Europe. Columbus in particular was desperate to find valuable ingredients, sometimes misidentifying local plants as cinnamon and nutmeg, which was what he expected to find in the Indies (Johnson, 2016: 11). Through the explorers, Europeans encountered sweet potatoes, tobacco, maize, chilli peppers and a variety of other new products (Northrup, 2015: 88).

Botanists and natural historians enthusiastically started studying these new fruits, vegetables and animals. Many American plants were soon planted in European botanical gardens (Stearns, 1970: 47). By the mid-sixteenth century all these new foods were familiar to scholars all throughout Europe, even if they did not become part of the average diet right away (Albala, 2002: 232). It is sometimes difficult to understand the pattern of adoption of these new ingredients, as some were immediately welcomed while others were merely deemed exotic curiosities. Their acceptance does not seem related to whether the climate was ideal for the growth of a specific crop, and neither does it seem related to dietary advice from experts, as generally they did not approve of imports (Albala, 2002: 232). In contrast, in the previous centuries, foreign ingredients had easily found their way into nutritional theories. For instance, sugar and spices were commonly consumed and celebrated as ideal condiments (McCabe, 2008: 74; Albala, 2002: 233). Cauliflower, spinach, celery, rhubarb, lemon and even rice were easily accepted into the European diet (Scott, 2015: 327; Malanima, 2009: 306; Albala, 2002: 234). The reason why new foods were glorified in these earlier works, yet rejected in the latter Renaissance dietaries is ascribable only partly to xenophobia (Wall, 2016: 71).

It seems that ingredients considered similar to what already constituted the European diet or that could be substituted in recipes with analogous results were more readily accepted (Albala, 2002: 234). For instance, guinea fowl and turkey, coming from the New World and Africa respectively in the 1930s, were enthusiastically praised as the lightest and easiest meats to digest (Tannahill, 1988: 210-1; Findlen, 2021: 76). Turkey was even considered “worthy of a prince's table” (Moffett, 1655: 84).

Maize suffered from a more mixed reception. It came from the New World, travelling through Spain and Portugal to reach India and even China (Krishna, 2010: 241; Corbally & Sullivan, 2022: 31). It was a novelty for 16th century Europeans and the South of Europe quickly accepted it (Akçetin & Faroqhi, 2017: 279). It seems that it was especially popular in Northern Italy, Spain, and later in Romania, where *pulmetum*, or *polenta*, made from millet and barley was a staple food and corn proved a valid substitute for these regional recipes. Conversely, in Northern European regimens maize is practically never even mentioned (Albala, 2002: 234-235).

Unsurprisingly perhaps, beans coming from the New World were accepted almost

everywhere as they were similar enough to native species that they were commonly called *faseolus* or *fagioli*, the same name as the black-eyed pea or cowpea, which was the most well-known and widespread species before the New World discoveries (Albala, 2003: 27).

Capsicum peppers were similarly received. They were classified as hot and dry like black pepper. However, they were considered curiosities and were not eaten very frequently if at all in Europe, while they were consumed frequently in the far East (Janick, 2008: 74; Bosland & Votava, 2012: 14).

A few other new curiosities were mentioned in travel accounts. Cassava or yucca as well as New World citrus varieties, most likely limes and grapefruit, were sometimes described, although the information most of the time does not seem to derive from a first-hand account (Albala, 2002: 236). The fact that pineapple in Bertaldi's annotations of *Regole della sanita et natura de cibi* by Ugo Benzi is similar in nature to the artichoke thistle, seems to indicate that he had only seen a picture of the fruit (Bertaldi in Benzi, 1618: 177).

Surprisingly enough, cacao is absent in Early Modern dietaries. This proves that most new products took a very long time to diffuse and were usually rejected by dieticians (Albala, 2002: 236).

Two products that do sometimes appear in dietaries are tomatoes and potatoes. Dieticians' initial reluctance to recommend them probably stems from the immediate association with their Old World cousins in the Solanaceae family, such as eggplants, which were considered cold, moist and especially unhealthy, or with the nightshade family, which are poisonous. Additionally, many people who had ventured to taste tomatoes disliked them because of their peculiar taste (Albala, 2002: 236-237). Although they were grown and consumed in Europe in the 17th century, it was not until the 18th century that cookbooks did offer tomato recipes, although Northern European dietary writers ignored them for the most part (Albala, 2002: 237).

On the other hand, potatoes were highly praised by the English, while they were shunned by other nations. Potatoes were first encountered and described by the Spanish in the 1530s, although many writers in the Early Modern period commonly confused regular potatoes and sweet potatoes (Albala, 2002: 237). In England the potato appears

to have been accepted more quickly, and even dieticians approved of them from a relatively early date. Moffett notes that they are “now so common and known amongst us, that even the husbandman buyes them to please his wife.”, and later Venner finds potatoes “surpassing the nourishment of all other roots or fruits”(Moffett, 73; Venner, 141).

The reason behind such enthusiastic praise could be that the English associated potatoes with the English colony of Virginia, and so could consider them their own. They also agreed that English constitutions were well suited to digesting rough and heavy foods, and thus there was no real reason to refuse them (Albala, 2002: 237-239).

In fact, it could be argued that foreign foods were so heavily criticised in the first place because, in the beginning, English maritime activity was mainly confined to European waters (Appleby, 1998: 55). Only a few merchants and travel-writers who were inspired by the explorations and conquests of Spain and Portugal expressed interest in overseas conquests. This attitude would gradually change, leading the English colonial enterprise to reach a global scope, eventually bringing them to the Caribbeans, North and South America, Africa and Asia (Appleby, 1998: 55). In the latter half of the 16th century, it was firmly believed that England could obtain naval stores and fish from the Northern parts of America, while the South and the West could be useful to produce olives, wine and salt, which were goods that the English were forced to buy from Southern Europe (Beer, 1908: 250). Merchants did not intend to colonise America by founding settlements, rather they intended to erect trading posts which would facilitate commerce with native populations. However, extensive colonisation in America soon proved to be impractical and English traders realised they would have to permanently settle there, although their underlying strictly economic motives remained unchanged (Beer, 1980: 250-251).

The first early British colonial attempts were limited to the Americas and did not always succeed. For instance, the attempt to colonise Guiana in 1604 did not meet its goal to find gold deposits and was abandoned after a mere two years. The Caribbean colonies of St. Lucia and Grenada, respectively founded in 1605 and 1609, suffered a similar fate (Appleby, 1998: 71). The first successful attempt at colonisation was pioneered by John Smith, who founded Jamestown in 1607. Its success is largely

attributable to the management of the Virginia Company and the direct control of the enterprise by Elizabeth I (Grint, 2013: 69)

1.3.2 The spice trade

Spices were the most glamorous foodstuff of the Early Modern period, although they were not merely consumed by the higher social classes. Generally, the élite could afford to buy them in bulk: for instance, receipts show that the Duke of Buckingham, from 1452 to 1453, bought almost three hundred pounds of pepper and ginger to be consumed in his estate (Krondl, 2007: 81). On the other hand, the middling classes bought them by the ounce, as shown in 17th century paintings, depicting little paper cones filled with a few ounces of pepper, similarly to what might have been the norm a century earlier (Krondl, 2012: 47).

The spice trade was a profitable market: Alessandro Magno, a young Venetian nobleman, sold the spices he bought during his 1,500 mile commercial trip to Alexandria in 1561 for roughly twice what he had paid for them. This represented a fairly modest revenue, considering that a century earlier Venetian traders used to rely on spices for as much as 40 percent of their total net profit (Krondl, 2012: 46).

At first, the spices came from India and Indonesia on caravans, usually in the late fall, and were transported by merchants from the Mediterranean all the way to Europe, by mule train or oxcart across the Alps and by ship to England, the Low Countries, and as far as the Baltic (Krondl, 2012: 46-47). However, new discoveries and exploration during the Early Modern period helped change the trajectories of the spice trade:

> Over the years, the spice trade in particular had come to be controlled by fewer and richer merchants. But the real game changer for the pepper traders came in 1498 when Vasco da Gama returned from India, his ship loaded with spice. The change in the spice trade was simply one symptom of the shift in the power dynamics of Europe in the sixteenth century, from the south to the north, from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. (Krondl, 2012: 45-46)

Spices coming from the Far East were transported to European cities such as London and Augsburg, where they were bought in bulk by retail shops and finally reached the

general population through apothecaries and dedicated spice shops (Krondl, 2012: 47).

Sugar was another ingredient which was shipped across the ocean during the 15th and 16th century. It was originally considered a spice, and as such it was sold in apothecaries together with pepper (Krondl, 2012: 47). What set sugar apart from other spices was its production, as sugarcane was grown in slave-run plantations. Originally the Venetians merely traded sugar cultivated in the Middle East and Egypt, but in the 1530s the Portuguese first sent their slave ships to Brazil, thus starting a trade of human beings crossing the Atlantic to be exploited as a free labour force in sugar plantations (Krondl, 2012: 47). Cargo ships returned to Europe full of sugar to be sold on the European market. The Venetians soon after took over the majority of such trades, proving to be better businessmen than the Portuguese, who were better suited as sailors. Italian merchants initially traded sugar produced in the Middle East and Egypt, until they started their own slave-run plantations in Cyprus and Crete (Krondl, 2012: 47).

The discovery of new trade routes and ingredients resulted in an increasing variety of foods coming from all the corners of the world. This led to a rise in volume and distribution of goods as well as the desire for novelty. In England, for instance, dried currants grown in the Eastern Mediterranean became essential in Early Modern dishes favoured by the élite (Thirsk, 2006: 10, 26). Other spices, such as pepper, which originally could be afforded only by the higher classes, became cheaper and widely available (Wiesner-Hanks, 2022: 477). Urban élite families could even buy more expensive spices such as nutmeg, cloves and cinnamon on special occasions (Smith, 2012: 139). Sugar became frequently used in family cooking, owing to the substantial increase in the quantity available in the marketplace. In 1565 over 5,400 hundredweight (about 270,000 kilograms) of sugar valued at over 18,000 pounds was imported into England from Morocco (Maclean, 2005: 11). During the Early Modern period it was used to preserve fruit and sugared treats, such as candied seeds and nuts, which were an extremely popular gift to be exchanged among high-class families and served during parties (Smith, 2012: 139).

Unlike sugar and pepper, many luxury foods did not come from the East. For instance, saffron was an extremely expensive spice cultivated in many different regions of Europe. It was so valuable it had to be transported in vaults to keep it from being

stolen, and English saffron was highly prized during the Early Modern period (Krondl, 2012: 48). Other luxuries came from the South of Europe, such as almonds, dried figs, raisins and sweet wines from Spain and Greece. Cretan malmsey was especially sought after because of its sweet flavour and higher alcohol content, which made it easier to store for a long time (Krondl, 2012: 48).

On the whole, New World and Asian products and new foods do not appear to have had a major impact on European diet before 1650, with the exceptions of corn in Northern Italy and potatoes in England. The fact that dietary experts and cookbook authors largely ignored them seems to prove that they were not well-known even among learned élites in the Old Continent (Albala, 2002: 240). Even when writers did discuss these foods, they often exhibited a suspicious attitude which led to rejection, especially when these ingredients bore similarities to foods already disparaged by theorists (Albala, 2002: 240). It is impossible to say how much of an influence their opinions had in delaying everyday consumption of these products. It is possible that while tomatoes, maize, and chilli peppers were admired as ornamentals in European botanical gardens, people down the social ladder began to eat them anyway, despite all the warnings (Albala, 2002: 240). Then, they began to be routinely eaten when humoral theory began to lose authority among food writers. This may be a sign that the xenophobic attitude gradually gave way to an increasingly mercantile and cosmopolitan approach among the drinkers of chocolate, tea, and coffee in the following era (Albala, 2002: 240).

2.1 The Role of Food in Shakespeare's Life and Works

The earlier chapter has shown how food was an important object of discussion in the Early Modern period, both on a pragmatic and philosophical level.

On the one hand, the Early Modern period saw an innovation of farming techniques aimed at maximising productivity. Additionally, given the frequency of famines and the related risks of uprisings, monarchs were heavily involved in food legislation and politics, concerning both production within England and trade abroad.

On the other hand, food was also the object of a broader discourse, which invested it with complex medical, as well as philosophical, meaning. Through dietaries, food acquired specific characteristics. Not only were certain ingredients demonised because of their supposedly ill effects on the body, but food was also seen as directly linked to one's ethics and behaviour. A bad diet resulted in intemperance, which meant that it had an effect on how one acted towards others. This created a direct link between diet and ethics.

Given the centrality of food discourse at the time, it is unsurprising to find so many food references in Early Modern literature. Food was not included in plays merely for its scenographic value, but mainly because of its close relationship with ethics and philosophy: its complexity of interpretation proved to be well suited to Early Modern drama, and also made it a fertile base for all sorts of imagery and metaphors, allowing food to appear even in scenes where it is not consumed. Galenic theory was versatile enough to be able to have a central place in food discourse, since it managed to connect the inner workings of the body with environmental factors influencing health, and the natural world at large. It is to be expected, then, that references to humoral theory prominently feature in Shakespeare's work.

In Shakespeare's plays a character's preference for a specific food may be a sign of the predominance of a certain humour. References to humours, specifically choler, melancholy, phlegm and blood, are plenty (Fahey, 2008: 11). For instance, in *Twelfth Night*, Sir Andrew asks Sir Toby "Does not our / life consist of the four elements?" (2.3.10-11), to which Sir Toby answers: ''but / I think it rather consists of eating and drinking'' (2.3.12-13). Deriving pleasure from eating and drinking is a characteristic of

the phlegmatic type (Forth, 2019: 178). This scene also shows that both characters are aware of Galenic theory, according to which everything consists of the four natural elements of fire, water, air and earth (Anderson, 1966: 29). However, Sir Toby does not recognise that there is a connection between these four elements and the composition of the humours inside the body, which are so dependent on what one consumes, eats and drinks (Biewer, 2009: 17). This link, as seen in 1.1, was common knowledge among educated Elizabethans, who believed that the relationship between humours and diet was reciprocal: the internal composition of elements in an individual influenced the appetite, and what one ate also had the power to change their dominant humour, and therefore their passions and behaviour (Biewer, 2009: 17). For example, Feste in *Twelfth Night* says "[...] and ginger should be hot i'th' mouth too" (2.3.123-124), referring to the idea that ginger warms the stomach and helps with digestion. Ginger, similarly to the majority of spices, was seen as an intensely hot and dry ingredient. This meant that it was beneficial to people whose stomach was cold and moist, as it would help rebalance their humours. Its potency, however, made it counterproductive to individuals who already had a hot and dry stomach, as it would generate an excess of choler and harm their health (Albala, 2002: 210). In order for it to be consumed safely, it had to be balanced with other ingredients with opposing characteristics. (Albala, 2002: 129).

A play in which humoral theory becomes an important element of the plot is *The Taming of the Shrew*. Katherina is not allowed to consume hot, spicy or burnt food because it would worsen her temperament. In the play Petruchio tells her not to eat the supposedly burnt mutton and to fast with him (4.1.155-165). While it is possible that he is lying about the mutton, not consuming it because of its incompatibility with one's complexion constituted valid reasoning. People with a choleric temperament should also avoid meats such as venison (Whelan, 2017: 159), as well as condiments like pepper, mustard, salt and curry because of their hot and dry qualities (Singh, 2021:436). Their complexion should instead be balanced by the consumption of cold and moist foods, such as lettuce (Quinzio, 2018: 19). Later in the play, Grumio is unsure whether to feed her broiled tripe, mustard, or beef (4.3.17-30), which also shows preoccupation regarding which foods were best suited to her temperament. Choler is the only humour

mentioned in *The Taming of the Shrew*, and it was seen as the most aggressive (Appelbaum, 2008: 48). Petruchio and Katherine are both considered choleric individuals, which to the Early Modern audience would immediately have presented an association with a tendency to be proud, impatient, and short tempered (Appelbaum, 2008: 48). This is visible in the play when Petruchio beats his servants (4.1.143) and when Katherina mistreats her younger sister (4.1.22). Their choleric disposition also has an impact on their relationship, as it seems to work against them becoming a successful couple: they show cool detachment during their courtship and Petruchio is impetuous in wanting to wed quickly. Their similarity in humour explains why they initially do not get along: they cannot help it because it is part of their nature, although a good diet and lifestyle would help (Jackson, 2001: 487-488). Choler was valuable in warriors as it produced an angry and fiery disposition (Cowley, 1983: 52), but in the world of romantic comedy – and especially in women, it represents a social problem which must be remedied. Since Petruchio is a man, his choleric temperament is more socially acceptable: even though it results in disruptive and eccentric behaviour on his part, it still becomes his job to tame Katherine and make her "a Kate conformable as other household Kates" (2.1.270-71). His goal is achieved by removing the accumulation of hot and dry choler in her body – which includes a change in her diet.

Hamlet is another play which can benefit from being interpreted with dietetics in mind: Ophelia can be seen as the prototype of the melancholy virgin (Selway, 2009: 98) because of her overbearing father's commands and her isolation at court. Melancholy is a complex emotion, and this cold and dry temperament was considered the least desirable, but at the same time it was also associated with scholars and intellectual genius (Ruvdolt, 2004: 13). Violets were seen as a medicinal plant, and were particularly favoured by Flemish physician and botanist Rembert Dodoens (Dodoens, 1586: 168-171). The madness Ophelia suffers from would have been considered the result of an excessively hot and dry brain (Fretz, 2020: 159), and violets had cooling properties (Taylor, 2021: 393) which would have proved appropriate to soothe her – but since Ophelia is isolated no one prescribes her the flower. This makes the scene in which she says "I would give you some violets, / but they withered all when my father died" (4.5.183-184) very ironic and adds layers of interpretation to the play.

Dietetics is also used by Shakespeare to evaluate a character's capacity to love (Biewer, 2009: 19). Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing* takes some pain to describe Benedick's eating and drinking habits, as those of someone who belongs to the sanguine type, that is someone who is not capable of love. Orsino in *Twelfth Nigh*t refers to the excess of eating as surfeit—which according to the regulations of dietetics is condemnable, as you should not eat too much and only if you are hungry. Touchstone in *As You Like It*, in contrast, does not use food for a psychological description of love, but to refer to mere sexual desire (Biewer, 2009: 20). The need to eat and drink is seen here as on the same level as sexual desire, as both are basic instincts linked with the vegetative part of the soul. Touchstone is a representative of the sensual lover, whose love is not driven by understanding or imagination, but rather by the senses. Therefore, his words unsurprisingly contain a large number of references from the semantic field of food. (Biewer, 2009: 20).

In short, by knowing the dietetics of Shakespeare's time, we will find a new access to language and character in his works. Whenever Shakespeare introduces references to eating and drinking in his plays, these do not only add life to the characters, who, just like real humans, need to eat and drink. Everything the characters say serves a purpose, and food is no exception, as it helps build additional layers of meaning (Biewer, 2009: 31). This is why knowledge of dietetics is fundamental to a more thorough understanding of Shakespeare's language and characters. Semantic descriptions of food and metaphoric allusions mix in Shakespeare's depiction of foodstuff (Biewer, 2009: 31). When characters mention specific ingredients, such as pepper and vinegar, it is in reference to their disposition, but if love is ‘‘as hungry as the sea’’ and a lover ‘‘feedeth on those that love’’ then consumption is invested with a metaphoric meaning (Biewer, 2009: 31). The two usages are seamlessly mixed with each other. In addition, references to diet help show which characters are to be judged favourably or unfavourably, as it is connected to their drinking habits. Food and drink help us gain a deeper insight about a character, and even what a character says about other people's drinking and eating habits tells the audience more about their relationship with said person (Biewer, 2009: 32).

As for the specific foods Shakespeare mentions in his plays, a few food groups are

generally represented with peculiar characteristics.

Fruit, for instance, is often referred to as inferior or bad. In *The Merchant of Venice* Antonio describes himself as "The weakest kind of fruit" (4.1.115); in *As You Like It* Touchstone calls Orlando's verses "bad fruit" (3.2. 113); and in *Richard II* one of the gardeners complains about the state of the kingdom under Richard by talking about its "fruit trees all unpruned" (3.4.45).

It makes sense for Shakespeare to use fruit metaphors with a negative connotation, since as previously mentioned, dietaries at the time did not see fruit as nutritious – in fact it was generally considered bad for one's health (Albala, 2002: 84). In addition, eating fruit after a meal was seen as a French custom and dietary authors such as Vaughan were dismissive of similar habits (Vaughan, 1617: 95). The fact that Polonius says "Give first admittance to th' ambassadors. / My news shall be the fruit to that great feast (2.2.51-52)" in *Hamlet* not only references this custom of eating fruit as the last course of a feast, but also that – just like fruit – this news will do no good.

Among fruit and plants mentioned in the Bard's plays, apples, berries, and roots are particularly interesting. Apples are associated with the young and immature in Shakespeare (Fitzpatrick, 2010: 131). Dietary writers usually agreed that they should not be eaten raw or when they were not yet ripe, and that they should be corrected with spices, since they were considered difficult to digest (Fitzpatrick, 2010: 131). Orgel notes that crab-apples in particular were not considered fit for consumption when raw because "their sourness was proverbial" (Orgel in Fitzpatrick, 2010: 131). Thomas Cogan fittingly notes that, although not ideal for consumption, "unruly people through wanton appetite will not refrain them, and chiefly in youth when (as it were) by a naturall affection they greedily covet them" (Cogan 1636, N2v–N3r). Apples are associated with the young or immature twice in Shakespeare: in *The Tempest* Sebastian and Antonio make fun of Gonzalo when he claims that Tunis can be equated with Carthage. Antonio asks: "What impossible matter will he make easy / next?" (2.1.89-90), and Sebastian adds: "I think he will carry this island home in his / pocket, and give it his son for an apple" (2.1.91-92). Not only does this line seem to suggest that Gonzalo is naïve, but it could also be interpreted to mean that he would be willing to exchange an island for an apple, implying that he might be even more gullible than his son

(Fitzpatrick, 2010: 131). In *Twelfth Night*, similarly, Malvolio describes Cesario as a boy, not old enough to be considered a man yet, as “a codling when 'tis almost an apple" (1.5.158). The codling is a variety of hard apple, not suitable to be eaten raw; similarly Cesario is still “green”, like an unripe and sour apple. It is also interesting to notice that, while Shakespeare does refer to crabs, such word could refer to crab-apples rather than crustaceans (Fitzpatrick, 2010: 132): for instance Katherine in *The Taming of the Shrew* talks about the sourness of the crab, and Robin in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* talks about the tricks he likes to play:

And sometime lurk I in a gossip's bowl
In very likeness of a roasted crab,
And when she drinks, against her lips I bob,
And on her withered dewlap pour the ale. (2.1.47-50)

Apples are more likely than a crab to bob in water. Furthermore, Caliban in *The Tempest* says “where crabs grow” (2.2.175), which would be a more appropriate verb for an apple tree and less for an actual crab (Fitzpatrick, 2010: 132). The reference to crab-apples would imply an association with impetuous youth and an unruly and wanton appetite - also sexually speaking. The consumption of the raw fruit may also link Caliban to a certain resistance to culture (cooking apples) which results in him harming himself first by disrupting his temperament, which in turn harms others as it affects his behaviour (Fitzpatrick, 2010: 132).

Berries are also associated with animalistic or unsophisticated feeding. In *Titus Andronicus*, Aaron tells his child that he has to eat berries and roots as a part of his training to become a warrior, which could be interpreted as a way to build his resistance and adaptability as a future commander (Fitzpatrick, 2010: 132-133). *The Tempest* mentions berries twice, when Prospero offers Caliban “Water with berries in't” (1.2.334) and when Caliban offers to “pluck thee berries” (2.2.157): here again Prospero is associated with culture as the berries have undergone some kind of preparation resulting in a sort of fruit juice (Fitzpatrick, 2010: 132), while Caliban is closer to savage status, since he does not mention cooking or preparing them.

Eating roots also suggests simplicity: when Apemantus in *Timon of Athens* states

"Rich men sin, and I eat root" (1.2.70) he suggests that sinners eat fancy food, specifically dishes that have been cooked (Fitzpatrick, 2010: 133). Acorns also had a low status, since they were only used to feed animals, and people only ate them out of desperation during famines (Walter, 1991: 92). Their status would explain why Prospero telling Ferdinand to consume acorn husks constitutes a serious test to prove his love for Miranda.

Honey was regarded more ambivalently. On the one hand it constituted a medicinal ingredient, as “it not only cleanseth, altereth, and nourisheth, but also it long time preserveth that uncorrupted, which is put into it” (Elyot, 1595: H4r–H4v). On the other, it had to be consumed only by people with a cold and dry temperament, as it was hot and dry in nature, which made it unsuitable for choleric people (Bullein 1558, P7v). Shakespeare was also ambivalent about honey. It is often connected to women and sexual indulgence: in *Troilus and Cressida* Priam tells Paris that while he is distracted by Helen, others must fight: “You have the honey still, but these the gall” (2.2.145); in *Titus Andronicus*, Tamora tells her sons to get rid of Lavinia after they have had their way with her: “But when ye have the honey ye desire / Let not this wasp outlive, us both to sting” (2.3.131-132).

When it came to animal consumption, fish and red meat had different statuses. Meat constituted an important part of the Early Modern diet and a vegetarian diet was generally deemed unhealthy (Fitzpatrick, 2007: 7). One important thing to notice, however, is that meat holds “a more powerful position in theological terms than any attempt to regain the vegetarian innocence of Eden”, since such a diet signified human dominion over animals (Fudge, 2004: 75). Just like a vegetarian diet, fish was also considered inferior to meat, for two reasons. First of all, it was believed to be less nourishing, and in addition it was also associated with Catholicism in contrast with Protestantism. It was a Christian symbol and also connected to the story of Christ multiplying loaves of bread and fish, which was used as one of the reasons why Catholics claimed that eating fish was better than eating meat (Fitzpatrck, 2010: 137). In the second part of *Henry IV*, Falstaff tells Prince John that he is consuming too “many fish meals” (4.2.90), implying weakness. Denouncing Prince John for eating fish would be in character with his historical inspiration, the proto–Protestant martyr Oldcastle

(Richmond, 2003: 320).

An interesting feature in Shakespeare is that, at times, animal consumption extends to rare or exotic animals. In *The Tempest* marmoset (monkey) meat is mentioned and in *Hamlet* crocodile meat. In the first case, suggesting the consumption of monkeys could associate the character to savagery - since monkeys bear a resemblance to humans. As James Knowles points out:

> The ape raised questions about the boundaries of the human and animal, a highly uncertain and contested limen. There existed a real fear that men (and, more likely, women and boys) might easily continue the postlapsarian trajectory of decay and metamorphosis toward the animal. (Knowles 2004: 139)

Monkeys could also be associated with the unusual animal meat Europeans supposedly saw New World natives consume, which disturbed them greatly, and was seen as a "sure sign of their barbarism because by such unselective consumption the Indian revealed [...] his inability to recognise the division between species in the natural world and the proper purpose of each one" (Fudge 2004: 79).

In the case of Hamlet, he exclaims "eat a crocodile? / I'll do't" (5.1.270-71). Here Hamlet could possibly be referring to the fact that crocodiles cry when they eat, and he could possibly be doing the same at Ophelia's grave.

Intensity and perspicuity characterise the way in which individuals perceived food during the Early Modern period. This includes knowledge of the social, philosophical, and religious issues that eating and drinking involved – but also the sensations of foodstuffs—their taste, their smell, their texture and the digestive processes as a whole (Appelbaum, 2008: xiv). Literature made important the way food made people feel, from the moment they first smelled and tasted the food, to the end stages of digestion – which not only included bowel movements but also perspiration, hair growth, intellectual activity and overall feelings of vigour and well-being, or of "obstruction" and lassitude – not to mention dispositions caused by Galenic temperaments, which were also influenced by food: a "hot" temper, a coldly fear of water, a high-blooded sex drive (Appelbaum, 2008: xiv). Food had this ambivalent connotation in the Early Modern period precisely because it constituted a profound experience, which meant that

it was also commonly deemed a source of temptations, distraction and frivolousness. The experience of food impacted the individual deeply, reaching the vitalities of the genitals, the brain, and the soul (Appelbaum, 2008: xiv).

It is paramount to understand that the importance of food does not only lie in its materiality: part of the experience of food is inextricably linked to its act of consumption. Eating too much or too greedily as well as how, what and when one eats are in themselves invested with a variety of different meanings, at times specific to Shakespeare and sometimes part of the culture of food at large that was so vital in the Early Modern period. Given its connection to philosophy and ethics, it is unsurprising that sometimes food was judged ambivalently, especially in regard to excess consumption. Therefore, it is important to analyse not only food in itself, but also the variety of apparently contradictory meanings attributed to food consumption, occasions in which food is central and fantasies built around food excess. Two apparently contradictory ideas emerge, which is particularly interesting considering this thesis engages with a single writer, and thus a singular sensibility. On the one hand one could identify a "comedy of food" (Appelbaum, 2008: xiv) in William Shakespeare: it celebrates, consumes – sometimes devours. On the other hand, there is also a "tragedy of food" (Appelbaum, 2008: xiv), in which consumption is connected to mourning, nausea, and being devoured. Shakespeare, then uses food to represent both the joy of living and the foulness of the world.

2.2 Food Plenty: The Banquet

In order to properly analyse banquet scenes, it is crucial to define what a banquet is first. The Oxford English Dictionary lists three definitions of banquet:

> A feast, a sumptuous entertainment of food and drinks; now usually a state feast, followed by speeches.
> A slight repast between meals. Sometimes called a running banquet.
> A course of sweetmeats, fruit, and wine, served as a separate entertainment, or as a continuation of the principal meal, but in the latter case usually in a different room. (OED)

Banquet or *banket*, as it was sometimes spelled, owes its etymology to the French *banc*, bench, corresponding to *banchetto* in Italian, which is a diminutive of *banco*, a board or table used to display and serve food. The usage of the word was not unambiguous back in the Early Modern period. While the word usually brings to mind a lavish feast to the modern reader, in the 16th and 17th century the latter two meanings reported in the dictionary were more commonly in use, although there are exceptions (Meads, 2001: 8). For instance, Simon Forman (1552-1611), after visiting the playhouse to see *Macbeth*, wrote about his reaction to the scene, which the Folio editors later designated as a banquet. Forman declared himself impressed by Macbeth's "supper with his noblemen whom he had bid to the feast" (Forman, 1974: 303). His inaccurate definition of what contemporary cookery books and etiquette guides clearly defined as a banquet constitutes a clear indication that the popular usage of the word might have been less well-defined and scrupulous. The fact that the term commonly occurs in plays during this period seems to suggest that banquets were popularly understood as a celebratory event during which food was served (Meads, 2001: 9-10).

Banquets were common in important occasions such as baptisms and weddings, but also victory celebrations or visits of ambassadors or foreign princes. Sometimes they could be organised to celebrate smaller events such as receiving a doctorate or even being ordained. However, banquet guides usually indicate that banquets were most commonly held for public receptions of princes and magistrates, establishing the explicitly political nature of such events (Albala, 2007: XII). Of course, how many

members of the audience could boast first-hand experience these occasions largely depended on the acting space involved, as well as the upbringing of the individuals. However, since theatre inevitably has to balance credibility with dramatic licence, there would be no reason why playwrights would insist on defining such occasions banquets unless the practice was commonplace outside playhouses (Meads, 2001: 10).

In cookery books and etiquette guides, on the other hand, banquets are defined as an after-dinner dessert course, or alternatively a sumptuous refreshment after a spectacular performance taking place in the evening: for instance a masque or a party. Both kinds of banquet presented foodstuff in common, especially heavily spiced or sugared dishes designed to impress. Seated banquets were commonly associated with a more general public feast of some kind, while refreshments were considered informal "running banquets", and were served in more intimate, as well as amorous, settings (Meads: 2001: 10, 12). Dishes included sweet puddings, alcohol and raw fruit, which was considered unhealthy for children and an aphrodisiac for adults (Dobson, 2009: 66). In larger settings, indulgent culinary displays were accompanied by entertainment, while in smaller and more intimate venues less spectacular aphrodisiacal "dainties" and sweetmeats were served to set the mood for an amorous tryst (Meads, 2001: 2).

They were often served in a different venue from where the rest of the meal was consumed. The room - commonly referred to as the "withdrawing room" - was designed to be as opulent as possible, in order to signify the wealth of the host (Lupton, 2016: 208). In Elizabethan and Jacobean times it could also be in an entirely different building, which was reached by walking through gardens, to guarantee the utmost privacy and peace. Banqueting houses or dessert rooms could also be built on the roof, as is the case of Longleat's "little domed banqueting turrets", which could hold a maximum of six guests each (Lupton, 2016: 208, Dobson, 2009: 66). The only surviving example is at Whitehall and even today it is commonly referred to as the Banqueting House (1617). Shakespeare's company was extremely familiar with the venue, although they performed there only after his death (Dobson, 2009: 66).

Food was not the sole focus of the banquet: an itinerant Englishman by the name of Fynes Moryson, writing about English eating practices, described "the English custome first to serve grosse meates on which the hunger spares not to feed and then to serve

dainties which invite to eate without hunger, as likewise the longe sitting and discoursing at tables (Moryson, 1617: 150). The conversations at banquets were equally, if not more important than food, and constituted a reason for the interest playwrights had towards this particular setting. A static scene could easily be made dynamic by portraying through dialogue the tensions in this formal and public context (Meads, 2001: 2). It also offered the possibility to portray different functions of the event, the extravagance of public display and conspicuous consumption, as well as the visual opportunities for spatial metaphor (Meads, 2001: 2). The food presented constituted text itself, "its richness, its extravagance suggesting figurative possibilities, even emblematic or symbolic ones" (Meads, 2000: 269). Figures and tropes associated with food in such scenes range from mere double entendres intended as comedic, to complex symmetric structures built around words such as "appetite" (Meads, 2001: 2). Allusions and figurative play-by-play often serve the purpose to consolidate themes, characters or contents of the play (Anderson Jr., 1964: 422-32). Additionally, banquet scenes on their own constitute a topography of bourgeois ideals and royal power on display, and the simple act of sitting down for a formal meal dictated social models of order and degree, either as self-fashioning statements or as a threat (Meads, 2001: 2). Lastly, banquets were easier to represent on stage compared to feasts as they were more easily portable (Dobson, 2009: 66).

Banquets were frequently portrayed between 1585 and 1642, from Shakespeare's advent until the closure of playhouses (Meads, 2001: 1). The banquets on stage contained food and drink, but also sex, revenge, violent disorder as well as harmony, flattery, self-fashioning and reconciliation. They could either be portrayed through stage direction, reference in dialogue, or by virtue of the foodstuff being served (Meads, 2001: 1). Ninety-nine plays from the period survived containing such scenes. It is interesting to note that, earlier in the 16th century, before the Shakespearean period, there are only two surviving plays containing banquets. Of the ninety-nine plays written between 1585 and 1642, thirty-four are tragedies and only six of these contain more than one banquet scene, while there are sixty-five non-tragedies, of which nine have more than a single banquet scene. In total, there are 114 banquet scenes, demonstrating how versatile the setting was to portray an array of different characters, emotions and

situations, but also how indebted playwrights were to each other, as the banquet scene can be considered an identifiable dramatic tradition of those years (Meads, 2001: 1).
In this period, the use and development of such scenes is varied and long. The origins of such topoi before 1600 made it clear how advantageous banquets are in representing intimacy as well as public formality, deceptions, seductions, self-indulgence, discord, subterfuge and retribution. The versatility of the banquet as an event made it possible to be included in all kinds of genres (Meads, 2001: 6).

In William's Shakespeare's work, heavy onstage meals are generally associated with distress and anxiety. Meals in general appear unappealing when the audience is not hungry, which was the case of Early Modern audiences, mainly because people who could afford to spend their money to go to playhouses likely had enough to eat (Dobson, 2009: 64-65). In practice "onstage feasts exclude and repel spectators; they are meals which are not appropriate to us, marking the action of the scenes in which they occur both as elsewhere and physically troubling" (Dobson, 2009: 64). Additionally, it seems that play-going and dining were strictly related activities, as plays were generally performed either in the remaining daylight after a mid-day meal (likely at an ordinary in Southwark), or by candlelight before supper at a tavern. Feeling content after a meal sets the ideal mood for conversation or dialogue, as it is referred to in drama (Dobson, 2009: 65).

2.2.1 Banquets in Shakespeare's comedies

Comedies usually follow the rule of "turbulenta prima, tranquilla ultima", which means that they begin with trouble and end in peace (Heywood, 1963: 224). This final peace, as twentieth-century critics have noted, can be signalled by a closing or wedding feasts which marks the establishment of a new society (Frye, 1971: 163-164). Wedding feasts are particularly prominent in Roman New Comedy. However, the representation of food and drink on stage generally does not occur at the end. On the contrary, in Shakespeare's comedies feasting is rarely comedic while being comic for the most part. Meals on-stage are to be found in *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Pericles* and *The Tempest*, while in other plays they are implied (Teague, 1991: 64).

In *The Merry Wives Of Windsor*, onstage characters drink wine two times before Act 3, and after that scene there is a complete lack of such moments. Off-stage feasting is present in Act 1 Scene 1 of the *Folio* text, when Anne Page carries wine to dinner and Slender is taken in for a meal after a long dialogue. In both versions of the text, Falstaff drinks before and after the escapade with the buckbasket, respectively in Act 2 and 3, while conversing with Master Ford or Brook (Teague, 1991: 64). One could easily draw an association between drinking and being an amorous fool, as in *Macbeth*, in which the Porter also notes how drink "provokes the desire, but it takes away the performance" (2.3.28-29; Teague, 1991: 64-65). Although an audience might laugh at a character who is out of control because of drinking or love, such comic action is not to be associated with comedic closure. In fact, when a feast at the end of the play suggests that the community came together to end the previous dispute, the audience might not see it represented on stage. In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, for instance, the community comes together for a meal in 1.1 and then again at the end of the play, but such events take place off-stage. A similar situation is to be found in Scene 3 of Act 1 of *The Comedy of Errors*, when the dinner between the Syracusan Antipholous and Adriana is not represented on stage, as is the case of the final feast promised at the end of the play (Teague, 1991: 65).

Furthermore, the majority of Shakespeare's comedies, with the exception of *Love's Labour Lost*, *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure* and *Troilus and Cressida*, end with the celebration of a wedding, or with the community looking forward to weddings or honeymoons. However, except for *The Taming of the Shrew*, such celebrations are off-stage. One reason why similar scenes are not usually included in the finale could be due to the fact that they are awkward, and the actors could have difficulties eating or drinking while acting without accidents. Yet, this argument does not hold when one looks at the entirety of the Shakespearean canon, especially the history plays. Characters drink in Falstaff's scenes, *Henry VIII* and *Richard III*. Richard eats before dying in *Richard II*, and in *Henry IV* Falstaff even consumes two meals on stage, while other characters eat herbs and leeks (Teague, 1991: 66). Feasting scenes also occur frequently in the tragedies: *Macbeth* and *Titus Andronicus*, for instance, include famous feasts (Leland & Baragona, 2016: 175).

The Taming of the Shrew

In *The Taming of the Shrew*, characters eat and drink four times throughout the play, and feasting is always suggestive of a marriage. In the introduction, Cristopher Sly is offered a cup of sack and some conserves together with a loving wife, but both the refreshment and the woman turn out to be false (Teague, 1991: 66). The bridegroom in the play, Petruchio, fakes a choleric temperament by rejecting the mutton he was about to share with Kate, on the pretence that it is over-cooked and would make him choleric (Appelbaum, 2008: 48-49):

I tell thee, Kate, 'twas burnt and dried away,
And I expressly am forbid to touch it,
For it engenders choler, planteth anger,
And better 'twere that both of us did fast
(Since of ourselves, ourselves are choleric)
Than feed it with such over-roasted flesh. (4.1.157-162)

The refusal, in reality, is part of his plan to tame his wife (Dutton & Howard, 2008: 62). When Katherina eats as much meat as she can get from Hortensio, the meal shows the result of his plan, as she was forced to ask politely for the food. The final banquet at Bianca's wedding is a symbol of the success of the grooms' plans to get their wives (Teague, 1991: 66). The three meals before the wedding feast are nothing but grotesque: Sly is a drunkard yet he is treated as royalty, Petruchio's threats of violence and insane humour manage to surprise both the audience and his wife, Katherina is so hungry she submits in order to obtain food, only to lose it to Hortensio's greed. These meals are not intended to feed, but rather to manipulate. When looked at in the same light, the final feast can also be seen as similarly grotesque. At the very least, the audience is invited to look at it ambivalently, if not ironically (Teague, 1991: 66).

The Tempest

In *The Tempest*, after causing the shipwreck of the vessel in which his deceiving brother Antonio was travelling, Prospero the magician orchestrates a vanishing banquet.

Whether it be in a forest or on an island, the banquet is turned into a metaphor of rituals, manners and court lifestyle (Meads, 2001: 181).The fact that Ariel is an Harpy is of course directly linked to Book III of Virgil's *Aeneid*, where harpies foul the food the crew is about to eat and punish Phineus by tantalising him on the behalf of the gods (Kallendorf, 2007: 117). Shakespeare uses the legacy of the banquet scene built by other playwrights in order to make his dramatic point (Meads, 2001: 181). It is telling that this scene is followed by Prospero's masque featuring Iris and Ceres, symbols of the marriage that will bring about the final reconciliation typical of comedy (Leach, 2013: 57). All the metaphors of abundance, good harvest and harmony balance the hunger, vengeance and uncertainty of the previous scene. Similarly to how the harvest symbolises plenty, the banquet becomes the symbol of riches, appetite and sin (Meads, 2001: 181). The off-stage scene of Antonio's betrayal is presented as a banquet which is laid out and then taken away from the guests (Dasgupta, 2022: 10). Like them, Prospero also found his metaphorical appetite to increase after having his “food” taken away (Meads, 2001: 182). This event also links the play to banquet scenes in revenge tragedies, which is particularly meaningful in a play that carries some of the themes of revenge tragedies all throughout, yet ends in comedy (Guite, 2016: 209). Overall, like the play, the banquet scene is succinct without it taking away from its effectiveness (Meads, 2001: 182).

It is interesting to note how the scene was represented: the table-top had to rotate to reveal an alternative spread, an illusion that could be achieved using cloth drapes between table-top and stage (Loughnane in Purkiss, 2020: 272). John Adams, in 1938 and later in 1943 was the first modern scholar to hypothesise how the trick table scene might have been achieved on stage (Meads, 2001: 213). He claimed that a stage hand could hide underneath the table and lower a panel on its surface before quickly replacing it (Adams, 1938: 405-410, Adams, 1943: 319-322). Andrew Gurr, on the other hand, believed that they flipped a reversible table top with the feast props glued to the surface (Gurr, 1992: 192).

Pericles

Editor Edmond Malone (1714-1812) believed that Act 2 scene 3 of *Pericles* was

missing “A Banquet Prepared” in the stage directions, since the quarto possesses elements typical of a banquet scene (Meads, 2001: 113). The banquet follows Pericles' triumph in Pentapolis, celebrating the newly blossomed affection between the protagonist and Thaisa, the princess (McGahern, 2012: 33). During the feast, Pericles sits in the place of honour and Thaisa, King Simonides’ daughter, in an aside confesses her feelings for Pericles:

By Juno, that is the queen of marriage,
All viands that I eat do seem unsavoury
Wishing him my meat. (2.3.30-32)

As Thaisa is previously called “queen o' th' feast” (2.3.17), she is presented as the most desirable delicacy at the banquet. Linking appetite for food with desire for love is a deliberately grotesque concept, provoking an unsettling effect (Meads, 2001: 113-114). Despite the scene being called a “feast” by Simonides (2.3.7, 17), the “standing bowl of wine” and the “cates” (2.3.65; 2.3.29) signal the arrival of a banquet proper, further evoked by a single dance and “pages and lights” (2.3.109) taking the knights back to their lodgings for the night. Significantly, the banquet is the place where the mutual attraction between Pericles and Thaisa begins, preluding to marriage. Simonides obviously favours this union and invites the handsome and virile champion to her birthday celebration especially for this purpose (McGahern, 2012: 33). For Pericles, the banquet represents a temporary restoration of his fortunes after the difficulties which accompanied his first odyssey (Meads, 2001: 114). The three are extremely preoccupied with each other, as Simonides admits when calling him a “stranger knight” (2.3.68). Similarly, Pericles wonders if he will be able to drink when he is too busy thinking about the beautiful lady next to him: “these cates resist me, he not thought upon” (2.3.29). Thaisa also worries about Pericles, drinking and dancing with him. Overall, the banquet facilitates and renders their romance more believable (Meads, 2001: 114).

Compared to the negative spectacles offered by other banquets in Shakespeare, especially in his tragedies, *Pericles* constitutes an exception, as it celebrates the newly blossomed affection between the protagonist and the princess. It also emphasises the

girl's father's efforts to welcome and pamper his guests and daughter. As in the darker tragedies, however, the scene is paired, although with the riddle scene in which Pericles encounters King Antiochus and is attracted to his daughter. Owing to the pairing of the two fathers, the audience can not be sure whether Simonides is intended to be compared or contrasted with Antiochus, who turns out to be a secret monster (Teague, 1991: 108).

2.2.2 Banquets in Shakespeare's history plays: the case of Henry VIII

Depending on the nature of banquets and their size, scenes required different stages and had varying portability. For instance, a private banquet between lovers or a luxurious public banquet, such as the huge feast in *Henry VIII*, had completely different stage properties and directions (Meads, 2001: 40). *Henry VIII* also required a peculiar distribution of stage furniture, calling for “Hautboys. A small table under a state for the Cardinal, a longer table for the guests”. Surprisingly enough, this arrangement closely reflects a sketch of Henry VIII dining in his private chamber executed by Hans Holbein: he is sitting underneath a royal canopy in a roomy chair and before him, on the right, is a table. The stage directions clearly call for two tables, and a “state”, which is a throne-like chair popular among the elite from 1585 to 1640. If covered by a curtain, it could easily resemble the canopy in Holbein’s drawing. The state is also present in other stage directions: in *Macbeth*, for instance, the nobles are well aware of their own degrees and they sit down so that “both sides are even”. Lady Macbeth “keeps her state” and, unlike her husband, does not “mingle with society” (Meads, 2001: 42). The layout of the scene closely resembles Wolsey’s earlier banquet (Meads, 2001: 43) and its layout is described as :

The Council-chamber, with a chair of state and beneath it a table with chairs and stools.
'Enter LORD CHANCELLOR, places himself at the upper end of the table on the left hand; a seat being left void above him, as for CANTERBURY'S seat,- DUKE OF SUFFOLK, DUKE OF NORFOLK, SURRET, LORD CHAMBERLAIN, GARDINER, seat themselves in order on each side. CROMWELL at lower end, as secretary. Keeper at the door. (5.3)

Such exhaustive stage directions sometimes reveal wishful thinking on the

playwright's behalf, but a seasoned writer such as Shakespeare doubtlessly knew playhouse practice and he was sure that this conception could work on many different stages. In this case, Shakespeare directly indicated a seated arrangement for actors along the edges of tables parallel to the sides of the stage. It is possible that chairs were used for the most high-ranked characters, while the others used stools. These decisions were performed on the basis of the space available, keeping in mind that such scenes probably made use of the whole stage area, emphasising scale and grandeur of the setting (Meads, 2001: 43-44).

Henry VIII has one of the most elaborately staged banquet scenes of the period. It is based on the Holinshed chronicles (Meads, 2001: 182), describing Wolsey entertaining noblemen at a "solemne banket":

> The lord cardinall sitting under the cloth of estate, there having all his service alone: and then there was set a ladie with a noble man, or a gentleman and gentlewoman throughout all the tables in the chamber on one side [...] all which order and devise was doone by the Lord Sandes then lord Chamberlaine to the king and by Sir Henry Gilford comptroller of the kings majesties house. (Holinshed, 1957: 479)

A party of masquers enters, including a masked Henry VIII, who manages to playfully fool Wolsey into elevating Sir Edward to the estate under the cloth reserved to the King. When Henry finally takes his rightful place they all celebrate, eating and dancing. The amount of detail in the description manages to further dramatise the event (Meads, 2001: 182). The stage direction calls for many different characters: "Enter Anne Bullen, and divers other Ladies and Gentlemen as guests, at one door; at another door, enter Sir Henry Guilford" (1.4). Holinshed's influence shows in the arrangement of the furniture, but Shakespeare adds Anne Bullen, a character who is not present in the source. He also divides the part originally dedicated to the sole Lord Sands by adding the character of Lord Chamberlain (Meads, 2001: 183). Cardinal Wolsey enters, interrupting the conversation, and then "a noble troop of strangers" (1.4.55) is announced and chambers are sounded, adding to the dramatic quality of the scene. Since Wolsey believes them to be foreign ambassadors, he insists on getting the banquet furniture taken away to have the room available for their reception, which raises questions about the fluidity of the scene, given the substantial amount of stage

properties and furniture (Meads, 2001: 183). Once the stage is cleared, the guests start dancing and Henry asks Anne Bullen to join him, justifying the entirety of the scene and capitalising upon the romantic legacy of banquets in drama (Anderson Jr., 1964: 422-432). Nonetheless, the banquet scene stands on its own as it is an important moment in Wolsey's political career, and it is part of a pattern of downfalls to be found in the play (Knight, 1948: 256-336). It is ironic that Wolsey's banquet "containing the beauty of his kingdom" (1.3.55) becomes crucial to his demise, as Henry meets the beautiful Anne (Meads, 2001: 183). The amorous and somewhat lascivious characteristics of the banquet are also visible when Lord Sands, Lord Chamberlain and Sir Lovell demonstrate their interest towards Anne Bullen, although she wittily deflects their remarks, demonstrating her attributes as the future Queen and mother of Elizabeth (Meads, 2001: 32, 184). In the same scene Wolsey shows his arrogance, which is coherent with the traits he is given in the source (Holinshed, 1957: 481). He flaunts his affluence and generosity until the banquet is hastily "broken" (1.4.61), shifting the centre of attention physically from him to Anne, and visually relocating the scene to a privy chamber, robbing him of his privileged position "under the cloth of state" (2.4; Meads, 2001: 184). The association between love and banqueting is a typical topos of banquet scenes, and the theme of disrupted harmony is common in Shakespeare's history plays (Anderson, 1964: 422-432; Snider, 1877: 83). Overall the scene skilfully manages to display bombastic visual spectacle, while still managing to reveal inner truths about the characters' fortunes and hidden nature (Meads, 2001: 184).

2.2.3 Banquets in Shakespeare's tragedies

When compared to the comedies, Shakespeare's banquets represented in tragedies have a more complex and ambiguous meaning. As David Bevington in *Action is Eloquence* explains:

> Visual juxtaposition of true and false hospitality is a part of Shakespeare's dramatic heritage. [...] Shakespeare's use of two contrasting languages of the stage banquet, while indebted to the medieval tradition, shifts away from the morally absolute antithesis of religious drama to a stance of ironic complexity. The ceremony of feasting represents not so much God's gift of charity as a civilizing ritual of

reincorporation too often inverted into its very opposite. (Bevington, 1984: 158-159)

According to him, Shakespeare's banquet scenes are to be placed firmly within the native Christian tradition rather than classical New Comedy, although Shakespeare further complicates them by using irony (Teague, 1991: 102). New Comedy feasts usually appear at the end of a play to signal a wedding and symbolise the creation of a new society. In Shakespeare, such feasts rarely occur on stage as spectacular scenes, even in his comedies. When he does represent banquets, more often than not they are brimming with sin and guilt, which are admittedly more spectacular emotions than serene virtue (Teague, 1991: 103). Such scenes are generally well-suited to particularly dramatic and emotionally charged plays, which is why banquets feature prominently in his tragedies. When two banquets are displayed in the same tragedy, they usually are meant to show a contrast between an apparent visual perfection and the hidden negative motives of the characters. Additionally, Shakespeare sometimes contrasts a first banquet, where values such as hospitality and benevolence seem to prevail, with a second banquet where such values are overturned or, at least, ironically challenged. In this case, the pairing functions to contrast, as in *Timon of Athens* (Teague, 1991: 103-108).

This pairing can function to complement, as in *Macbeth*, or contrast, as in *Timon of Athens*. On the whole, banquet scenes in Shakespeare are more frequent in tragedies rather than comedies and bear a heavy association with violence and alienation rather than a strengthening of community bonds (Teague, 1991: 108).

Titus Andronicus

Scene 2 of Act 3, which immediately follows Titus's mutilation, shows a banquet involving his family. Although the scene is not conceived to be particularly spectacular, banqueting properties could have increased visual interest. It is also important as it helps establish context for later scenes of family banqueting. Most importantly, it shows a disconnect between the banquet represented and what an ideal banquet should be. A banquet should make people “merry with some pleasing tale” (2.3.47), allowing the family to gather. Instead, violence and lamentation dominate the atmosphere: the

vengeance desired by the Andronici kills any lightheartedness, and they sanction murder and mourning, disbanding the banquet because of their shared grief (Teague, 1991: 93). Moreover, the festive mood is absent due to the harsh reality of Lavinia's missing arms and face and Titus's mutilated hand (Meads, 2001: 74). The family is clearly feeling woeful and bitter, having been wronged by Aaron and Tamora, so the banquet is not the usual high point before a decline. The family's morale is low and overall this can be seen as a scene of lamentation, not celebration. It is the moment that marks their first step on the path to revenge, culminating in Act 5, during the second banquet scene, where the contrast between the ideal and staged banquet is reiterated (Meads, 2001: 75). The banquet is even more formal and splendid in order to impress the guests of honour, and is again presented as an opportunity for the next of kin to gather, but at the same time their preoccupation with revenge is highlighted by the great importance mutilation has in the scene, as it dwells on the difficulty the mutilated participants have when they try to indulge in the banquet's courses or when Lavinia tries to speak without having a tongue (Tricomi, 1974: 11-20).

Thus, it appears that the first banquet is presented as an ideal family celebration, which contrasts with the atrocious violation of family values and relationships that will occur, as the father will kill his daughter and the mother eat her sons. Moreover, the later scene portrays loyalty towards the family, as the father murders Tamora in order to avenge his daughter, and the son avenges his father by killing Saturninus. The banquet can be then seen both as denying and insisting on the importance of familial bonds (Teague, 1991: 94). The scene, like the tone adopted, is paradoxical: although the banquet should represent a joyous occasion in which guests are welcomed and offered entertainment, everyone is grieving. Moreover, while Titus demonstrates awareness towards his obligations as a host, he is also violating his role by being dressed as a cook. This character is an especially subversive figure in Western drama, as shown in Menander's Dyskolos and medieval guild plays which establish an association between cooks and Hell as a setting (Teague, 1991: 94; 204). Apart from his costume, Titus is hospitable, welcoming and wishing his guests well. However, his manners do not coincide with his real intentions, as he detests his guests and makes sure to feed them dishes that will disgust them, all the while plotting his revenge (Teague, 1991: 94).

Nonetheless, this scene is more complicated than it first seems, since Titus is completely sincere on some level, as he wholeheartedly welcomes his victims because, while driven by murderous intentions, he wants to entertain his guests knowing this will divert their attention. This results in a speech horribly balancing hospitality and hostility, achieving the playwright's ultimate goal to reach the audience, rather than the on-stage participants of the banquet (Teague, 1991: 94). The audience itself is confused about what is represented on the stage, since human flesh is not normally associated with a celebratory feast. Precisely like the banquet in Act 3, this celebration is touted as a joyous moment, yet all it does is evoke guilt and grief (Teague, 1991: 95).

Spectacular scenes are, by nature, reflexive. For starters, such scenes are more interesting to watch than to hear. The costumes and properties used are unusual and visually interesting, because of the stage furniture or symbols of identity used. The audience is enraptured by the spectacle and in doing so they realise they are in a theatre, watching a performance. In this sense, spectacular scenes both affirm and deny themselves (De Armas, 2022: 139; Teague, 1991: 96).

Spectacular scenes often manage to unite irony and literalness (Teague, 1991: 95, 96). For instance, when Aaron cuts off Titus's hand, the latter hopes the act will bring his family together, while the former makes an ironic promise to help him:

I go, Andronicus, and for thy hand
Look by and by to have thy sons with thee.
[Aside.] Their heads, I mean. O how this villainy
Doth fat me with the very thoughts of it! (3.1.201-204)

Aaron's promise fails when the heads of his sons are brought to Titus. However, ironically enough, the family is in fact brought together in the banquet of grief depicted in Act 3 (Innes, 2015: 33).

In Shakespeare's plays the banquet is not a comic feast, rather a grotesque and even tragic spectacle. The stage properties typical of a banquet (food, drink, tables and seats), which are initially neutral, can be charged with negative connotations once they are inserted in the context of a scene. In *Titus Andronicus* the table is used as a surface to kill flies and the food is a pie filled with human body parts. In such cases the traditional

connotations of a banquet - community, hospitality and celebration - are immediately counteracted by the negative - alienation, hostility and violence. The audience is also watching the attempts at reuniting a community knowing that such a society is completely fictional (Teague, 1991: 102).

Macbeth

In *Macbeth*, the two banquets represented are grim in nature. One occurs off-stage and is merely hinted at through stage directions in 1.7: “Hoboys, torches, Enter a SEWER and divers SERVANTS with dishes and sevice over the stage. Then enter MACBETH”.

His soliloquy that follows is meant to contrast with the positively busy atmosphere of the servants hurrying to prepare the banquet (Corcoran, 2018: 3). Offstage characters are planning to meet in celebration of the victory of their king, while on-stage Macbeth plots to subvert this joyous occasion. In his psychological battle with sin, he shows hesitation when he thinks that his actions will not only go against human and divine law, but also against the rules of hospitality and his duties as a host (Heffernan, 2014: 133). The preparations of the banquet in the background further highlight the opposition between what he is supposed to do as a good host and his murderous thoughts (Teague, 1991: 103). The contrast is even more marked in 3.4, opening with the directions: “Banquet prepar'd”. The dialogues imply the use of tables, stools, meat and drinking vessels. All these stage properties, together with the large number of characters on stage (at least ten), make the scene spectacular (Teague, 1991: 103). This scene demonstrates a deep awareness of dramatic spectacle, which is also heightened by its central position in Act 3 of the play, suggesting a sense of symmetry and balance (Williams, 1982: 16; Meads, 2001: 143, 145). Macbeth acts to consolidate his power, privately scheming to have Banquo and Fleance murdered, and publicly organising a formal banquet. There were probably two large chairs on stage, as suggested by the line “Our hostess keeps her state” (3.4.4), and a table, as specified by stage directions. The guests are seated on stools around the table in a symmetrical fashion (Meads, 2001: 143-144). It is important to note that the banquet would have been the last of the evening's events and displays of power of the new King (Tredell, 2006: 100). Macbeth is intimately nervous, although he

conceals it well by displaying good humour (Meads, 2001: 144). The fact that he insists on hierarchy and balance, as in “you know your own degrees” (3.4.1) and “both sides are even” (3.4.9), reveals that those concepts are threatened, and Macbeth's own decision to sit “ith'midst” (3.4.9) contributes to breaking the symmetry of the scene. As Chris Meads writes:

> The scene is a visual representation of this state of mind, a correlative of a similar nature to Lear's tempest, succinctly hypnotic and theatrically memorable, setting the ominous undercurrents of the supernatural, the murderous and the anarchistic against the facade of social normality or public demeanour. (Meads, 2001: 145)

The banquet intends to celebrate the newly appointed King Macbeth but also honour Banquo as his most precious ally (Teague, 1991: 103). Macbeth had earlier greeted Banquo as “our chief guest” (3.1.11) and Lady Macbeth specified that:

> If he had been forgotten
> It had been as a gap in our great feast,
> And all-thing unbecoming. (3.1.12-14)

Macbeth even personally requested that he be there (Teague, 1991: 103). His soliloquy right before the earlier banquet immediately made the atmosphere more sinister. In this scene the audience sees that the banquet is supposedly in honour of Banquo, yet he is killed right before it even starts (Teague, 1991: 104). Therefore, the atmosphere is not of suspense: what the audience expects to see as the tables and stools are arranged on the stage, is the joyous occasion ruined by Fleance entering the scene or the news of Banquo's death. Instead, they are as surprised as Macbeth is when the ghost interrupts the feast. The spectator is initially convinced to be watching the scene from the perspective of God, but in reality they share the same point of view as the guilty Macbeth (Teague, 1991: 106).

Yet, the scene begins cheerfully enough, with Lady Macbeth energetically greeting guests and them answering in unison. Once Banquo’s murderer enters, the speech, from public, becomes private as the two discuss what happened in the forest. The rowdy

atmosphere provides an even more marked foil to Macbeth's speech about guilt and the inevitability of death (Teague, 1991: 104). When the ghost of Banquo enters the scene, it is relevant to note that he sits in Macbeth's place at the table, suggesting that he does not have a chair of state to accompany his rule as a king. He is not sure of where to sit, even though his guests have reserved a spot for him, representing his insecurity as the new King. Secondly, the scene allegorically alludes at the fact that Banquo's offspring will eventually take Macbeth's place, in line with the prophecy of the Weird Sisters. Thirdly, the fact that the banquet is ruined shows that the community will never be able to come together under the new rule because at its heart it was established upon unrighteous murder. The two banquets are ultimately ruined because of the sinful ambitions and actions of the host, and they serve as a joyous public backdrop to further highlight his individual "unnatural" conduct (Teague, 1991: 105).

Timon of Athens

Timon of Athens also features two banquets, although in this case they contrast with each other, rather than share and amplify the same themes. The first, in Scene 2 of Act 1, is especially elaborate, much more so than any other banquet in the Shakespeare canon (Teague, 1991: 105). The stage directions are as follows: "Hoboys playing loud music. A great banquet serv'd in, and then enter LORD TIMON, the STATES, the Athenian LORDS, VENTIDIUS, which Timon redeem'd from prison. Then comes, dropping after all, APEMANTUS, discontentedly, like himself".

All the guests make their entrance and sit around the banquet table, except Apemantus (Weimann, 2014: 135). They engage in a discussion regarding the bread, meat and wine they prefer. Then, a tucket is played to announce masquers, who start dancing; soon after the guests join in. Timon welcomes everyone and gives out presents (Teague, 1991: 105). In this banquet, all the riches that could be shown, be them objects or actors, are physically presented to the audience. During the second banquet in 3.6, however, dialogues play a much bigger role, as actors enter to discuss recent news and the upcoming gathering (Teague, 1991: 105). The banquet proper starts in line 47, and it consists of stools, covered dishes and a table. The guests remember the riches of the previous banquet, so to them the covered dishes suggest a royal and particularly

exquisite surprise. However, what awaits them is simple warm water, with which Timon douses them (Teague, 1991: 105). The gesture is meant to cleanse his company of the excess and decadence they grew accustomed to, feeding off of their host. The two scenes contrast because, while the first is meant to show a society which values richness as worthiness, the second is as simple of a feast as can be. The guests mistakenly value the absence of pomp until Timon clears their vision by flinging water in their faces (Teague, 1991: 106). The banquets both aim to show the superficiality of the guests, although only the second openly condemns such behaviour by poorly repeating the spectacle in order to show its shortcomings. The banquets in *Timon of Athens* are diametrically opposed to similar scenes in the other tragedies, as the spectacle of the banquet is diminished, rather than increased to drive the point home (Teague, 1991: 106).

In *Timon of Athens* the banquet is used as a background to dissenting voices, that of Apemantus in the first and Timon's in the second. Apemantus sits by himself and critiques the greed and hypocrisy of the guests. He also eats a plain meal of root and drinks water, which contrasts with the expensive meat and wine Timon and the guests are enjoying (Teague, 1991: 106-107):

Grant I may never prove so fond,
To trust a man on his oath or bond;
Or a harlot for her weeping,
Or a dog that seems a-sleeping,
Or a keeper with my freedom,
Or my friends, if I should need 'em.
Amen. So fall to't:
Rich men sin, and I eat root. (1.2.62-70)

The contrast is not only visible between the meal he is consuming and the rich dishes that surround him. His honest opinion is also opposed to the empty flatteries pronounced by the other guests. Timon, as the audience, hears both voices and can choose which one to believe, although it is clear Apemantus is right (Teague, 1991: 107). During the scene, relationships shift. Apemantus falls silent between line 153 to

239, and Flavius replaces him as the foreground voice, talking to himself and complaining about extravagance, although unlike Apemantus he offers no contrasting visual display (Teague, 1991: 107). Timon, unlike the audience, appears not to be listening to him – which gives them an advantage on the character regarding what they know. During the following banquet, the foreground voice is Timon's. He mirrors Apemantus's prayer before the meal to further highlight his similar role to the audience, although his speech is much harder to understand, confusing both the viewer and the characters on stage, who expect a lavish meal. Everyone is surprised, then, when he reveals the water that the hidden dishes are concealing and flings it at the guests (Teague, 1991: 107).

The two banquet scenes in *Timon of Athens* are structurally a pair, the first establishing Athenian hierarchy and the second depicting a breakdown of that system. The second scene depends on the first in order to reach its full dramatic impact, while the first would just seem a lengthy and self-indulgent scene without the second (Meads, 2001: 147). The first scene is so long (250 lines) that, in fact, it is possible that it was reduced by having the servants come in to tidy up and having the masque start. Timon is established as the centre of Athenian society as servants come in with a “great banquet” and senators make their entrances to the sound of loud music (Meads, 2001: 148). Timon is clearly benevolent and generous, yet the festive atmosphere is somehow soured by Apemantus's complaints, aptly expressed in terms of food and drink:

I scorn thy meat; 'twould choke me, for
I should ne'er flatter thee. O you gods, what a number
of men eats Timon, and he sees 'em not!
[...] the fellow that sits next
him, now parts bread with him, pledges the breath of
him in a divided draught, is the readiest man to kill
him (1.2.27-39, 45-48)

This elaborate spectacle at Timon's palace of plenty makes an impression on the audience and is contrasted by the second banquet in Act 3. In this scene plates are covered, and Timon's parasitic followers eagerly wait for him to reveal elaborate dishes,

just to be thrown water in their faces. This is a broken banquet, an occasion which was supposed to be splendid and instead it becomes a place where propriety, social expectations and appearance are disrupted (Meads, 2001: 149).

2.2.4 Conclusions

As has been noted, Shakespeare, especially in his comedies, used banquet scenes in a peculiar manner. Although the popularity of banquet scenes in Early Modern literature is indisputable, banquets in comedies served the purpose to signal a newfound order and creation of a new, idyllic society. Such banquets are not to be found in Shakespeare's works, where they are charged with psychological tension and are sometimes interrupted, not managing to see a satisfactory end. This is the case of broken banquets, for instance the one staged in *The Tempest*, suddenly interrupted by Ariel, or in the *Taming of the Shrew*, where food is snatched away from Katherine. Banquets in Shakespeare are not characterised by a relaxing atmosphere, rather they are moments of peak dramatic tension and oftentimes include scheming. Far from being a resolution in the plot, they are strategically placed within the play in topical moments, with the intention of drawing the audience's attention to a crucial development of the story, be it a rising tension between characters, or the display of their hidden intentions. This change of pace was further emphasised by a change of scene: stage hands and characters brought in the stage properties typical of the banquet - a table, chairs, thrones and dishes. This brief break between two scenes helped the audience refocus and wonder about the future developments of the plot.

The unconventional use of love banquets also sets apart Shakespeare's production from that of his contemporaries. As one might expect, love banquets were usually associated with a sensual and intimate atmosphere. While banquet scenes in Shakespeare sometimes tend to represent a moment when two lovers meet, the setting is generally a sumptuous public banquet, where they are surrounded by other guests and, most importantly, there is always an unsettling note in their budding feelings, be it other characters' schemings or an ominous foreboding, as seen in *Pericles* with the association of Simonides with Antiochus. Additionally, when women prominently

feature in the banquet as the love interest, they seem to become food themselves, as is the case of Thaisa and Anne.

Banquets in history plays and tragedies share some of the same features, although it is in this genre that banquets are exploited in their full dramatic potential. Broken banquets are also common, as is the case of *Macbeth*, where the scene of conviviality is interrupted by a dramatic entrance that forces the banquet to come to an unsatisfactory ending. Banquet scenes in tragedies are among the most memorable moments in the canon, as in the case of the human pie in *Titus Andronicus* or the entrance of Banquo's ghost in *Macbeth*. The reason why these scenes are so important is because, in tragedies, onstage banquet scenes are strategically placed within the play in order to either be central or, when doubled, to represent crucial turning points in the plot. Doubling is part of a larger strategy to be found in the plays, and banquets represent one of the most spectacular and "visible" instances of it. In the same way, although the gap between appearance and reality constitutes a recognisable theme in many of the plays, banquets represent an especially spectacular, obvious and visible occasion to contrast the supposedly joyous atmosphere with a character's hidden turmoil, feelings and schemes.

2.3 Food Excess: Obesity in Shakespeare

Unfortunately, not many studies have been conducted on the topic of the perception of obesity during the Early Modern period. Modern art historians and activists have argued that tastes regarding beauty standards, including those related to body size, are continuously evolving (Bucholz, 2009: 253, 255). This idea implies that today's general preference for slender bodies is relatively recent and destined to change, as exemplified by Richard Klein, author of *Eat Fat*, who talks about "the current fashion for thin" (Bucholz, 2009: 255; Klein, 1996: 2022). When reconstructing Early Modern beauty standards, many scholars mention Rubens and other artists who clearly had a predilection for fleshy women, claiming that Early Modern culture was much more accepting of fatness than modern society. Others even talk about a golden age in which heavier bodies were celebrated in art and literature as well as everyday life (Bucholz, 2009: 255). Klein asserts that "in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, gluttony was widespread, even at the highest level of society," while in the eighteenth century "even thin was not so skinny" (Klein, 2001: 33).

Roy Porter makes a point for the psychosocial roots of the constructions of this perception: "In traditional, national, social and occupational stereotyping a certain stoutness was a positive property, betokening not just healthiness but the rock-solid strength of the gentleman, yeoman farmer, magistrate or citizen" (Porter, 2004: 39). However, there is a distinction to be made between a strong, robust body and what Porter calls "the truly obese". He argues that the latter "had always been objects of literary and artistic satire—for grossness bespoke greed, lack of self-control and the vulgarity of temper associated with low life" (Porter, 2004: 39). In fact, preoccupations concerning obesity are older than one might think: the first discourses regarding this topic date back to the 17th century (Albala, 2005: 169). They expressed their concern over the possible health implications of obesity, and in doing so they brought about a gradual shift in meaning of the word "diet" from general health regimen to weight-loss program. The disagreements in professional discourse only added to the urgency of the idea of losing weight, which then became fashionable (Albala, 2005: 169).

A general survey of contemporary sources seems to suggest intolerance towards

fatness, seen as lack of discipline, sign of surfeit and an excess of preoccupation with the physical (Bucholz, 2009: 255). This stance is evident from proverbs. Fat only had positive connotations when it was linked to land, as “fat” land meant it was fertile (Keyes, 1988: 100), or animals. On the other hand, Early Moderns compared overweight people to pigs, as in “fat as a hog”, porpoises, butter and sows (Bucholz, 2009: 255). One could claim that such associations might have been neutral in the context of the agrarian society prevalent at the time (Bucholz, 2009: 256). Even so, other sayings seem to establish a clear link between fatness and excess or greed: “A fat housekeeper makes a lean executor” (Cotgrave, 1611: 908).

In addition, anticlerical polemics in the late medieval and Early Modern period frequently reference “fat beneficed priests.” (Erasmus, 2023: 296). More significantly, ignorance, dullness and stupidity were commonly associated with fatness, for instance in the phrase “fat as a fool”, “the fat man knoweth not what the lean thinkith” and Shakespeare's famous quote in *Love's Labour Lost* “fat paunches have lean pates” (1.1.26; Lyly, 1579: 118; Herbert, 1640: no. 605).

For many writers, the main concern was the sin of gluttony, which was object of invectives against it both as a moral concern and a health issue (Albala, 2005: 170). Consuming too much food or doing so without any order or proper schedule was seen as a source of countless diseases. Yet, oddly enough, obesity was not one of them: while Hippocrates and Galen did talk at length about obesity, dietary writers of the Early Modern period did not have much of an interest in the topic (Albala, 2005: 169-170). Counterintuitively, they believed that gluttons were generally malnourished. Their internal heat, which aided digestion, was extinguished by the excessive amount of food they consumed, so that little food could be properly absorbed by the body (Albala, 2005: 170). Being overweight or obese was merely considered the result of a phlegmatic constitution, which was generally deemed a condition someone was born with. Such imbalance could be minimised through diet and lifestyle changes, but an excess of fat by itself was not viewed as an illness (Albala, 2005: 169). Morbid obesity constituted the exception to the rule, as an enormous body size could impair movement, circulation of fluids, breathing and reproduction (Albala, 2005: 169). It seems that this condition was somewhat rare, as medical writers mainly mentioned it as a passing curiosity

(Albala, 2005: 169-170).

Theologians considered gluttony a sin more closely related to lust and greed than any other kind of personal defilement, as it involved taking too much for oneself while others starved. The glutton in Luke (16.19-31) was committing a mortal sin because he preferred stuffing himself to performing acts of charity. As punishment for refusing to share his food, he was bound to fast forever in hell (Albala, 2005: 170). On the other hand, in popular consciousness gluttony could be linked to fatness, as evident in Hieronymus Bosch's depiction of Gluttony in the rondel of the Seven Deadly Sins. Even then, though, being fat by itself did not constitute a sin (Albala, 2005: 170).

2.3.1 Hamlet

In the majority of his plays, Shakespeare conveys the physical descriptions of his characters through dialogue. Thanks to the lines of other characters, we learn that Cassius in *Julius Caesar* has a “lean and hungry look” (1.2.194) and that the apothecary in *Romeo and Juliet* is reduced to skin and bones because of his misery (Smith, 2019: 116). However, while it is true that Shakespeare wrote his plays with the actors of the Lord Chamberlain's men in mind - and later the King's Men starting from 1603 - he valued their acting ability above their physical appearance (Smith, 2019: 117).

Sometimes the physical descriptions Shakespeare's characters offer are diametrically opposite to the image readers might have of the character, to the point that even editors tried to “manipulate the reference away as a misreading of some sort” (Smith, 2019: 116-117). This is the case of Hamlet, Shakespeare's renowned melancholic and pensive prince.

In many modern productions he is portrayed by actors with a lean body and introspective countenance. A line in the text, however, seems to hint at the fact that Hamlet could have possibly been canonically overweight. The line is present in the *First Folio* as well as the *Second Quarto* (Levy-Navarro, 2014), and is pronounced by Queen Gertrude during the final duel, when King Claudius turns to her and says that Hamlet will win, to which Gertrude replies: “He's fat and scant of breath” (5.2.285), before telling him “take my napkin, rub thy brows” (5.2.286).

Since there is no definitive text of *Hamlet*, most versions nowadays available to the public contain parts from different versions of the play. The earliest established edition (the *First Quarto* otherwise known as the "bad Quarto") of the play, for instance does not contain the line (Benedict, 1910: 103, Marcus, 2002: 138). It has been claimed that the differences to be found in *First Quarto* could have been caused by it being either a first draft of the play, pirated by an audience member who transcribed the play as it was performed, or it being reconstructed by one of the actors playing a minor role (Nance, 2022: 148; Tucker 2017: 150).

The absence of the line in the early version could also be attributed to the fact that Richard Burbage (1568–1619), Shakespeare's leading man and business partner, could have himself been a burly man who got out of breath in a pretend-duel, especially as he got older. Such claim seems to be supported by popular tradition, which holds that he weighed somewhere around 110 kilograms (Hunt, 2007: 3; Innes, 1958: 11). Collier, having proven that Burbage originally played Hamlet, specified that the actor "would seem to have become rather corpulent" by 1601, when he played the role (Collier, 1846: 52, 21). Furthermore, the actor, before playing Hamlet, had almost certainly played Brutus in *Julius Caesar*, a play whose eponymous protagonist famously does not trust Cassius because he is too thin, exclaims "Would he were fatter!" (1.2.198), and says "Let me have men about me that are fat" (1.2.192), implicitly suggesting that Brutus could also have been more on the heavier side (Gurr, 1996: 106).

Nonetheless, what we know about Burbage himself does not seem enough to assert with absolute certainty that he was visibly overweight. In the only known portrait of Richard Burbage produced in the early 17th century (perhaps a self-portrait), he looks of average build, although the painting shows his face only[1]. His sole certain physical characteristic is that his stature was "small", as written in his funeral elegy (Collier, 1879: 300).

The reason behind the entire controversy could be attributed to the fact that, according to a few critics, the actor who played Hamlet could also have possibly played played Falstaff, a robust man. George Steevens, an esteemed Shakespearean scholar in the 18th century, claimed that Shakespeare added the line "to apologise for the want of

1https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/portrait-of-richard-burbage

such elegance of person as an audience might expect to meet with in the representative of the youthful Prince of Denmark" (Steevens, 1887: 446). Other critics disagree – saying that, if the actor was indeed unfit to play the role of a thirty-year-old student, Shakespeare would have avoided deliberately calling attention to the fact, as it would have disrupted the audience's suspension of disbelief (Wilson, 2009: 255). It is now prevalently accepted among modern critics that Burbage did not play the part of Falstaff, which was written with William Kempe in mind (Wilson, 1979: 124).

Nowadays, very few people believe that Hamlet is doubtlessly described as fat in the source texts. Some think that the word must be a printer's error. It has been suggested for example, that "fat" is Shakespeare's truncation of "fatigate", meaning "weary" (Eric Johnson-DeBaufre, 2012), or of "fatigued" (Westenholz in Raven, 1936: 215). In another interpretation, Gertrude was actually meant to say "hot", the same word Claudius adopted when he described his plans to Laertes, who is supposed to ensure Hamlet is "hot and dry" enough to drink the poisoned drink, so the word "fat" would be the result of a misprint (Stoll, 1951: 299). Additionally, Jonathan Dixon suggested that "fat" could also be a misprint of "faint" (Dixon, 1865: 52). Moreover, it is worth noting that in Elizabethan times, fat also meant sweaty, which would make sense considering Gertrude offers Hamlet her handkerchief to wipe his face (Wilson, 2009: 255). From the usage of the word in other contexts, however, it appears that it was generally used to mean overfed and somewhat clumsy, with a hint of femininity. Even when it is indeed used to mean sweaty, it still bears reference to fatness (Spiro in Butler, 2015).

The most influential writer advocating for a fat Hamlet was Goethe, who noted that Hamlet's perpetual inner "vacillation", inactivity and melancholy are more suited to a plump blonde character than a fit brunette (Goethe, 2016: 557). According to an anonymous commentator, Hamlet was German by birth so he was naturally prone to indulge in the inactive habits of the "deep-thinking nation" (Anonymous in Williamson, 1950: 55). Professor Elena Levy-Navarro, author of *The Culture of Obesity in Early Modern Times*, documented how, during the Victorian era, scholars following Goethe's writings believed that Hamlet was fat, as it would have been a visible sign of his weak moral fiber (Levy-Navarro, 2014). For instance, Thomas Wade called Hamlet "aldermanic and asthmatic" at "but thirty years old", only to turn his lecture into a

lesson to promote temperance (Wade, 1855: 32). Similarly, the Victorian actress Euphemia Vale Blake wrote that Hamlet is “imprisoned in walls of adipose”, which “essentially weakens and impedes the power of the will”, leading to his inability to act decisively to avenge his father (Blake, 1880: 70, 61). According to her view, the adipose would be a “bulk” symbol of his lymphatic temperament, responsible for his procrastination and “fatty degeneration”, as evident in his line “How ill's all here about my heart” (5.2.210; Blake, 1880: 69-70).

Morris Tilley pointed out that a popular misconception in Shakespeare's day was that sweat was melted human fat oozing through the pores of the skin (Tilley, 1925: 315-316). Understanding fat as sweaty would make his wish that the “too too solid flesh would melt, / Thaw and resolve itself into a dew” explicit (1.2.129-130; Keyes, 1988: 92). This almost unintentionally humorous line might be the reason why some critics prefer to read “solid” as “sullied”, also supported by the spelling as “sallied” in the *Quartos*, which could be a legitimate variant of sullied (Bowers, 1956: 44-48).

The word “solid” is a part of the image cluster regarding mutability to be found in the play, and in Elizabethan times solid flesh was seen as a recognizable sign of melancholy (Weiss, 1959: 219-227). The blood of a melancholic individual “was considered to contain a surfeit or surplus of the earth or lowest element, and even tend itself to degenerate into heavy dregs or excrement” (Warhaft, 1966: 32). The cure was to balance such excess with heat, which would melt such earthy solidity and then cause it to evaporate (Keyes, 1988: 93). Both “solid” and “sullied” would be related to the images of physical decomposition and mutability in the play (Keyes, 1988: 93).

Hamlet definitely has melancholic traits. For instance, a melancholic individual could be prone to talking to himself, as breath keeps the heart from overheating. When mixed with blood or choler, a melancholic temperament could degenerate into madness (O'Hara, 1977: 57). Hamlet's promise to “eat the air, promise-crammed” (3.2.91), combined with the references to his “windy suspirations” (1.2.79) and Claudius toasting to Hamlet's “better breath” (5.2.269), all point towards the fact that he was “scant of breath” (5.2.285), either constitutionally or because he was poisoned by the “foul and pestilent congregation of vapors” (2.2.306) in Elsinore (Keyes, 1988: 94-95). Since fat was believed to be excess blood stored in the cold parts of the body, his condition could

have very well resulted in him being overweight and prone to illness and sudden death (O'Hara, 1977: 128-129).

Assuming that Hamlet is indeed overweight presents a problem, namely the accidental humour that results from Hamlet's references to his “distracted globe” (1.5.97), him complaining that he must “grunt and sweat under a weary life” (3.1.77) or him praying that his heart “hold” (1.5.93) and his sinews “grow not instantly old / but bear [him] stiffly up” (1.5.94-95). One could even see a reference to his size in his name, Ham-let (Keyes, 1988: 94). While at first the contradiction between a fat Hamlet and his equally substantial inwardness seems comical, it could be argued that it fits in a play that insists on the gap between appearance and reality (Keyes, 1988: 94). A reason why audiences and scholars alike have rejected the notion of a heavier Hamlet could be due to the fact that, in the history of literature, the beauty of the body and that of the soul have gone hand in hand, following the Greek concept of kalokagathìa: an internally beautiful person is necessarily beautiful on the outside and vice versa (Sofroniew, 2015: 54). A fat Hamlet challenges this notion, endowing the play's protagonist with the contradictory complexity of a real person, ultimately keeping audiences guessing about his real intent, motivation and complicity in the tragedy overtaking Denmark (Keyes, 1988: 95).

As Keyes notes, Hamlet being overweight can make poetic and dramatic sense, for three main reasons (Keyes, 1988: 95). Firstly, “being overweight correlates well with Hamlet's lethargy, irresolution and passivity. [His] physical bulk may explain that delay [and] inability to be successfully devious, as few physical traits are so difficult to disguise as fat” (Keyes, 1988: 95). Secondly, since women generally have more fat than men, his possible fatness could be linked to a problematic identification with his mother and a rejection of his father's throne and power (Keyes, 1988: 95). Wystan H. Auden notes that “fatness in the male is the physical expression of a psychological wish to withdraw from sexual competition and, by combining mother and child in his own person, to become emotionally self-sufficient” (Auden, 1948: 196). This notion would link obesity to the sexual disgust he feels towards his mother marrying Claudius (Keyes, 1988: 95). Lastly, an overweight Hamlet fits in the imagery of the play, brimming with disease, violation of boundaries, food as poison, the human body becoming food and,

most importantly, sacrifice – for which fattening is essential (Keyes, 1988: 95). As Maurice Charney notes, the play frequently employs the word “o'er” or “over”, indicating excess (Charney, 1969: 133-134n). Additionally, after Ophelia's death, Hamlet's mother compares him to a female dove:

Anon, as patient as the female dove,
When that her golden couplets are disclosed,
His silence will sit drooping. (5.1.280-282)

The image of him as a mother bird recalls the attempts of the lapwing to draw attention to itself when faced with a predator in order to protect her eggs. Similarly, he embodies Laertes' “life rend'ring pelican” (4.5.145), giving blood from his own breast to feed the nation. Such images not only highlight his feminine traits, but also add to the imagery of Hamlet as a sacrificial animal (Keyes, 1988: 96). Hamlet himself says: “We fat all / creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves with maggots” (4.3.21-22). The suggested image, then, is that of an animal raised in plenty only to be finally sacrificed to save its sick community (Keyes, 1988: 97). In a way, Hamlet can be seen as the embodiment of this same sickness, and he must be purged in order to restore Elsinore's health. Elsinore's air corrupts him to the point that he starts to decay even before death: his heart hurts, he gasps for air and his too solid body breaks into sweat (Keyes, 1988: 97). The same fatness that makes him fit for slaughter is also slightly comical when one thinks of a fat Hamlet, which is fitting, since in order to obtain scapegoat status one must bear enough similarities to those who outlive and replace him, but they must also be “alien” enough to be justified as a necessary sacrifice (Keyes, 1988: 97).

Even though he tries to reject associations, he bears resemblance to Claudius and Gertrude. Hamlet sees Gertrude as sexually corrupted (3.4.15-16), yet his adipose layers both make him the embodiment of the corruption that surrounds Elsinore and add to his feminine attributes (Keyes, 1988: 98). He refuses to drink the cup Claudius offers him as a sign of good will and generosity, and with it he seems to reject the appetitive lust that characterises the “bloat king” (3.4.182) in “the fatness of these pursy times” (3.4.153), yet his very body is what makes him similar to Claudius, enough to be able to kill him without offending the ideal of divinely appointed succession (Holmes, 1964:

174; Keyes, 1988: 98). Reading the plot this way makes fatness the play's mark of Cain (Keyes, 1988: 98). Once he accepts his kinship with both characters, Hamlet is finally free from his moral quandary and able to leave revenge to fate (Keyes, 1988: 99).

2.3.2 Mistress Quickly and Juliet's nurse

Especially in the case of Mistress Nell Quickly in *The Comedy of Errors*, Shakespeare's depiction of fatness can be linked to what Micheal Bakhtin defined as the grotesque body (Reimers, 2017: 148, Bakhtin, 1984). Such body is associated with primary needs, such as eating, drinking, sex and defecation. According to Bakhtin, consumption is especially important in its definition:

> Eating and drinking are one of the most significant manifestations of the grotesque body. The distinctive character of this body is its open unfinished nature, its interaction with the world. These traits are most fully and concretely revealed in the act of eating; the body transgresses here its own limits: it swallows, devours, rends the world apart, is enriched and grows at the world's expense. (Bakhtin 1984: 281)

In Early Modern literature, rather than being viewed pejoratively, the grotesque body often possesses almost carnivalesque and comic qualities which manage to question the order of the controlled and policed subject. Humoral theory also played a part in linking fatness and a jolly personality (Reimers, 2017: 158). In 1579, for instance, Laurent Joubert wrote that "fat people are very sanguine (if their stoutness comes, as we believe it does, from an abundance of blood) and such people are naturally joyous, foolish and laughing" (Joubert 1980: 55).

Such associations with mirth, idiocy, and the inclination to laugh oftentimes become juxtaposed in Shakespeare's depictions of fat characters. Nell or Luce in *The Comedy of Errors* is Shakespeare's only female character openly described as fat (Reimers, 2017: 158). She is a minor character, a kitchen maid who mistakes Dromio of Syracuse for her fiancé, Dromio of Ephesus. Despite her appearing on stage only in Act 3 Scene 1 and pronouncing merely seven lines scorning her master Antipholus, when he is locked out of his house by his wife, she is often the subject of discussion of other characters. In Act 3 Scene 2, for instance, Dromio and Antipholus of Syracuse describe her: "No longer

from head to foot than from / hip to hip: she is spherical, like a globe; I could find / out countries in her" (3.2.113-115). In the same exchange, Dromio uses and extends the same globe metaphor to describe Luce's body parts in grotesque detail: her nose is "embellished / with rubies, carbuncles, sapphires" (3.2133-134); "salt rheum" (3.2.128) runs from her nose and her hot breath comes from a mouth of diseased teeth: "I looked for the chalky cliffs, but I could / find no whiteness in them" (3.2.126-127). He suggests that her hair is receding, or falling out, because of a venereal disease, which also causes her to be riddled with scabs (Reimers, 2017:159). She also is described as sweaty and greasy: "she sweats; a man may go / over shoes in the grime of it" (3.2.103-104) and "her face [is] nothing / like so clean kept" as Dromio's shoe (3.2.102-103).

Her description perfectly fits Bakhtin's "exaggeration, hyperbolism, [and] excessiveness" connected to his definition of the grotesque body (Bakhtin, 1984: 303). What is interesting, however, is that despite Dromio's vivid description, Nell on the modern stage is very rarely depicted with blackened teeth, a warty nose and receding hair. The only depicted aspect of her grotesque attributes is her fatness. As Sara Reimer notes, "fat becomes a metonym for the grotesque" (Reimer, 2017: 159). One could argue that both today and in the Early Modern period fatness represents the antithesis of the idealized athleticism, discipline, and control of the white male body (Farrell 2011: 18). Consequently, fat tends to mark a body as animalistic, instinctive, and out of control. Helplessness, sexual voraciousness, and stupidity were all associated with overweight people (Kuppers, 2001: 180). Within this context, "fat women are [...] vilified and mocked in popular culture and theatre, most often used as a source of humour or farce" (Jester, 2009: 252).

Similar considerations can be made about Juliet's nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*. Although there is no direct reference to her being overweight in the text, she possesses some of the attributes associated with fat characters, which could be a reason why in some productions she is portrayed as fat. First of all, she has some features that could have been considered grotesque or overall unattractive. For instance, she jokes about the number of teeth she has left: "I have but four" (1.3.15). The Elizabethans would have considered her old, as she had had a daughter fourteen years prior, lacks "warm, youthful blood" (2.5.12) and is described as "ancient" (2.4.138) by Mercutio, though

realistically she would have been about forty years old (Guido, 1945: 298). The Montagues make various observations about her appearance. When she asks Peter for her fan, Mercutio jokes that it is “to hide her face, for her fan's / the fairer face” (2.4.103-104). Romeo famously exclaims “A sail, a sail!” (2.4.98) upon seeing her, which in addition to being a reference to her bringing news, could also be interpreted as a joke about her size (Parker, 2019: 89). Juliet also calls her “lame” (2.5.4) as well as “unwieldy, slow [and] heavy” (2.5.17) while lamenting the fact that she is taking a long time to come back, although admittedly it is in the context of comparing older people to the already deceased.

When she appears with her fan, she suggests the image of a conventionally unattractive, overdressed woman trying to achieve gentility, although her profession and countless bawdy jokes seem to suggest that she could not have been well-born (Guido, 1945: 299). Overall, her character presents some traits in common with Nell's: first of all, both of them are often represented as overweight on stage (Parker, 2019: 89; Reimers, 2017: 159). Moreover, they are conventionally unattractive, a trait often associated with fatness which becomes a source of hilarity when other characters make jokes about it (Parker, 2019: 89; Bate and Rasmussen, 2011: 113). Lastly, both make sexual jokes, even if sometimes they are unintended (Bly, 2002. 97; Kahn, 2013: 6). Sophie Duncan notes that “Shakespearean older women are often bawdy, as with Mistress Quickly, [...] or Juliet's nurse” (Duncan, 2023). This intense focus on sexuality constitutes a recognisable trait of the grotesque body, as identified by Bakhtin (Bakhtin, 1984: 353).

2.3.3 Gluttons, clowns and Falstaff

Among the most most renowned comic actors in Shakespeare's company, there were Thomas Pope and William Kempe (O' Connor, 2002: 389). Although some critics disagree, generally Falstaff's role is generally attributed to Kempe, as is Lancelot Gobbo's in *The Merchant of Venice* (Kuiper, 2012: 104; Dutton, 2018: 105). In favour of this thesis is certainly the fact that both characters are funny and stocky, as Will Kempe is generally believed to be (Farrell, 2003: 33), even though in Lancelot's case it is not an

integral part of his character and is only hinted in the text. For instance, he says: “Do I look like a cudgel or a hovel-post, a staff or a prop?” (2.2.56), thus suggesting he is not exactly thin, or alternatively he comically complains: “I am / famished in his service; you may tell every finger I have with my / ribs” (2.2.86-88). Even Shylock tells him “Thou shalt not gourmandise / As thou hast done with me” (2.5.3-4) and calls him “a huge feeder” (2.5.45). Even his name perfectly fits him, as fools love to gobble and they possess the gift of the gab (Leimberg: 2011: 79).

It has been speculated that Sir Toby Belch in *Twelfth Night* was played by Pope (Baldwin 1927: 228-229). He is another brilliant example of a comic figure associated with gluttony. In Act 1 Scene 3, Maria describes him as a “great eater of beef” (1.3.87) and a knight “dubbed with unhatched rapier / and on carpet consideration” (3.4.237-238), implying he is both overweight and lazy. His name and perpetual revelry suggest a resemblance to the allegorical figure of Gluttony (Brown, 1990: 317; Belsey, 2001: 200). Pickled herring was associated with gluttony and lechery, and Sir Toby Belch fittingly mentions the dish, wishing “A / plague o'these pickleherring” (1.5.118-119) since he finds it hard to digest (Dickson, 2015: 18). The term might have also carried additional theatrical connotations, as pickleherrings, other than being a fish speciality, were a European clown figure (Katrizky, 2013).

These two characters certainly validate the thesis that a connection exists between laughter, gluttony and fatness (Leimberg: 2011: 79), but the most brilliant example of an obese comic figure is without a doubt Falstaff, the fat knight.

The popularity of the first part of *Henry IV* was such that, even though it was initially meant to be enjoyed as a stand-alone, it produced a second part. The success of the play was to some extent indebted to a non-aristocratic character by the name of Falstaff, to the point that Shakespeare specifically wrote a comedy in order to fully take advantage of his comedic potential, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Smith, 2019: 114). Legend has it Queen Elizabeth herself was the one who requested a play featuring the fat knight in love, since she had enjoyed seeing him on stage in the history plays (Smith, 2012: 122). Some scholars criticise the character, saying he “has never uttered one sentiment of generosity, and for all his power of exciting mirth, has nothing in him that can be esteemed” (Johnson in Tomarken, 2009: 29), while others defend him claiming that he

Ashtonis “the most intelligent of Shakespeare's persons” (Bloom, 1999: 271). What is certain is that he has been for a long time at the forefront of Shakespeare's character studies and he eludes unambiguous interpretations (Smith, 2019: 119). It is unclear whether he was intended to be a Vice-like figure, a Lord of Misrule or whether, in a modern interpretation, he could be seen as a representative of the carnivalesque, or if he is just a merry old man. In addition, while for some he represents an alternative parental figure to Hal, others are more prone to believing he was merely exploiting the rich prince (Smith, 2019: 119; Levy-Navarro, 2008: 68).

In spite of this, Falstaff has been a beloved character of the general public as well, and a feature crucial to his characterisation is his obesity. The very first words pronounced by Prince Hal in the second scene of *Henry IV* address him as “fat-witted” (1.2.3) and there are countless references to his gluttony as well as his physical size: “fat guts” (2.2.30), “whoreson round man” (2.5.137), “fat rogue” (2.4.536), “gross fat man” (2.4.501) and “as fat as butter” (2.4.502) only to name a few (Smith, 2019: 115). Shakespeare's characters do not merely limit themselves to calling Falstaff fat, they also refer to him with a plethora of extremely creative epithets which create a comic effect: "gross as a mountain, open, palpable" (2.4.223), or "this bed-presser, this horsebackbreaker, / this huge hill of flesh" (2.4.240-241), "swoll'n parcel of dropsies" (2.4.442), a "huge bombard of sack" (2.4.443), a "stuff'd cloak-bag of guts" (2.4.443), a "Manningtree ox with the pudding in his / belly" (2.4.444-445). Falstaff is a standout character in Shakespeare's canon exactly because of his appearance is so central to his characterisation (Smith, 2019: 117).

His size is also interesting when compared to his historical inspiration, who was the Lollard knight Sir John Oldcastle. He was King Henry V's companion, who ended up being executed for heresy. He was considered a national hero in England because his story was reported in *Acts and Monuments* (also called the *Book of Martyrs*, published in 1563), which painted him as a hero who was willing to give his life for his religious beliefs (Smith, 2019: 115). It is possible that, in the first version of *1 Henry IV*, Falstaff's name was Oldcastle, as it would make sense with Hal calling him “my old lad of the / castle” (1.2.41-42). However, the Epilogue to *Henry IV Part II* both links and distances the character from the historical Oldcastle: “ [...]for anything I know […] /

Falstaff shall die of a sweat, unless already a' be killed / with your hard opinions; for Oldcastle died martyr, / and this is not the man" (Epilogue 28-31). In a way, then, Falstaff's fatness contrasts with Oldcastle's piety, as his self-indulgence and carnality contrast with the historical figure's asceticism and spirituality (Smith, 2019: 115). His fatness is not so much an individual characteristic as a metaphor, allowing him to surpass the limits of the individually human, to become more of a symbol (Smith, 2019: 119). This is evident in the contrasting characteristics associated with his and Hal's body.

In the play, different characters surrounding Falstaff perceive his body differently (Levy-Navarro, 2008: 67). For the lower-class characters, mostly those who frequent the taverns, Falstaff 's fatness is mainly a sign of his abundance of generosity, wit, and greatness. On the other hand, Hal represents an opposite corporeality who is looking to consolidate his authority, so to him Falstaff's obesity represents selfishness, lowliness, and appetite. In other words, these are all the traits Hal must renounce in order to become the new, virtuous king (Levy-Navarro, 2008: 67). Most interestingly, Shakespeare also pays attention to how thin bodies are constructed in relation to fat bodies: lower class characters see the slender bodies of the lawmen as a sign of mean-spiritedness, and they know at first glance that they will not be offered mercy from the law (Levy-Navarro, 2008: 94). In contrast, the young prince sees his lean body as the mark of his authority and privilege and control over his appetites. His body becomes proof that he possesses the self-discipline that is necessary to legitimise his power after his family usurped the crown, and in this sense can be read as innately virtuous (Levy-Navarro, 2008: 67).

On the other hand, Falstaff is proud of his weight and considers it something valuable to protect (Stockton, 2011: 29). His whole life is governed by mealtimes, and he uses food as a calendar: for instance, in *Henry IV Part I*, he willingly plans to exaggerate his part in the Gal's Hill robbery "at / supper" (1.2.179-180). He is perfectly aware of the place where the prince will dine and, when the Sheriff arrests him, he knows Hal will send word to rescue him by "tomorrow's dinnertime" (2.4.506; 1.2.184-185; Taunton, 2009: 98). Everyone else around him is so used to his gluttony that they know the only way to find him is to ask where he eats, and that they should spy on him

by waiting upon him “on his table as drawers” (*2 Henry IV*, 2.2.171). Mistress Quickly is thus able to inform the officers who are looking for him that he is at Pie Corner, in the “Lubber's Head”. When Falstaff manages to convince Mistress Quickly to drop her lawsuit, she invites him for a meal (Taunton, 2009: 98).

Given the importance he attributes to mealtimes, it follows that he is also concerned about maintaining his physical shape. For instance, after being humiliated at Gad's Hill, he is worried about possibly losing weight: “Bardolph, am I not fallen away vilely since / this last action? Do I not bate? Do I not dwindle? Why, / my skin hangs about me like an old lady's loose gown, I / am withered like an old apple-John” (*1 Henry IV* 3.3.1-4; Stockton, 2011: 29). In his mind, his fatness is inevitably connected to self-possession: as long as he remains fat, he is in control of himself. This establishes a comic inversion of the common association of fatness with a lack of self-control (Stockton, 2011: 29):

> Falstaff insists that he controls the significance of his own fat body, which corresponds not, as those around him see it, with uncontrolled excess —with the riot of sexual and consumerist pleasures that other members of Windsor’s community disavow—but with “thrift” and conservation. For the rest of Windsor, Falstaff ’s large waist signifies what Mistress Page calls his “wantonness of spirit” (4.3.182) and his “way of waste. (4.3.184; Stockton, 2011: 29)

It appears evident that Falstaff’s fatness can be made to represent the excesses of society which threaten its constituted order, in opposition with the self-discipline that is associated with Hal's thin body (Levy-Navarro, 2008: 67-68). Levy-Navarro notes that “by offering these opposing constructions of fat and thin bodies, Shakespeare makes it clear that their meanings are not the result of nature but rather of culture” (Levy-Navarro, 2008: 68). By banishing Falstaff, Hal sees himself as progressing, since he casts off his “former self” or the “thing I was” (*2 Henry IV*, 5.5.59, 57). Hal's maturation or “reformation” inevitably involves him rising above Falstaff, who is associated with gluttony, impure materiality, and baseness (Levy-Navarro, 2008: 84).

His attachment to materiality is also visible in his language. When he expresses his hopes for the future, they commonly include kitchen and food metaphors (Taunton, 2009: 92). For instance, Falstaff hopes that, when Hal becomes king, he will not have so much grace as “will serve / to be prologue to an egg and butter” (*1 Henry IV* 1.2.20-21),

meaning that he will keep away from Lenten traditions to fast (Eliot, 1593: 117). His culinary imagery usually is used to express his desire to replace the old and sterile king, putting himself forward as a possible parental figure and mentor to Hal. The prince, however, is well aware of Falstaff's unsuitability to play either role, and expresses his rejection by mocking his size, age and excesses: he is “surfeit swell'd, so old” (*2 Henry IV* 5.5.51), and the future king will grow to eventually despise him (Taunton, 2009: 92). His excesses act as a warning signal for his dubious morality: he is a “huge hill of flesh” telling lies as “gross as a mountain” (*1 Henry IV* 2.4.241, 2.4.222-223). Poins thinks he would sell his soul to the devil in exchange for some madeira and a cold capon's leg (*1 Henry IV* 1.2.111-113), defining him a devil disguised as an old man, or as Prince Hall calls him, a “white bearded-Satan” (2.4.454), who haunts the prince with the intent to mislead him (Taunton, 2009: 93). However, it is worth noting that Falstaff's character is not reducible to a polar extreme with the abstemious and upright king; rather, their excesses make them opposite ends of the same spectrum, and their relationship with food exposes their flaws (Taunton, 2009: 93).

Given the king's shortcomings as a father, it is not surprising that many critics have suggested that Falstaff works as a paternal figure to Hal (Smith, 2019: 119). At the same time, there are hints that suggest he is more similar to a maternal character. Valerie Traub argues that “Hal's subjectivity is constructed in relation to Falstaff, whose somatic iconography metonymically positions him as the fantasized pre-oedipal maternal, against whom Hal must differentiate” (Traub, 2014: 451). His body is frequently associated with metaphors of carnality and of female's bodies, making him akin to Luce in *The Comedy of Errors* or the nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* (Traub, 1989: 461). While other fools in the Shakespearean canon appear as disembodied voices, Falstaff is almost excessively corporeal, and his big stomach could resemble that of a pregnant woman (Traub, 1989: 461-462). Coppélia Kahn notes that Falstaff normally possesses a “curiously feminine sensual abundance” and highlights that “a fat man can look like a pregnant woman, and Falstaff's fatness is fecund; it spawns symbols” (Kahn, 2022: 72). In addition to the comments about his fat body, discussions in the play also concern the byproducts of his corporeality, as he is called an "oily rascal" (*1 Henry IV* 2.4.517), a "greasy tallow-catch" (2.4.225) who "sweats to death, and lards the lean earth as he

walks along" (2.2.106-107).

The attention to the protuberant and the bulging body, as well as his bodily secretions, firmly characterise Falstaff's body as grotesque in Bakhtin's definition (Traub, 1989: 461-462). Peter Stallybrass and Allon White reformulated Bakhtin's paradigm in the light of Early Modern studies, concluding that somatic concepts were perceived as binaries between the closed and the open, the high and the low, the classical and the grotesque, with the latter being:

> An image of impure corporeal bulk with its orifices (mouth, flared nostrils, anus) yawning wide and its lower regions (belly, legs, feet, buttocks and genitals) given priority over its upper regions (head, 'spirit', reason). […] The grotesque body is emphasized as a […] subject of pleasure in processes of exchange, and it is never closed off from either its social or ecosystemic context. (Stallybrass & White, 1986: 9, 22)

Falstaff's fatness in Hal's mind becomes fundamentally and threateningly amorphous and grotesque in nature, violating individual boundaries (Levy-Navarro, 2008: 80). The prince describes Falstaff's guts as characterized by a force pushing beyond the limits of the civilized body. More specifically, Hal says Falstaff's guts are "falling" (*1 Henry IV* 3.3.152), as if gravity was propelling him downward, towards death and even damnation (Levy-Navarro, 2008: 80). During the banishment scene in *Henry IV Part II* Hal warns, "Make less thy body hence, and more thy grace, / Leave gourmandizing, know the grave doth gape / For thee thrice wider than for other men" (5.5.53-55).

Not only is Falstaff presented as a grotesque body, but the play also contains many references to him as a pig: for instance, Hal addresses him as a "damn'd brawn" (*1 Henry IV*, 2.4.107), meaning pig or fatted swine. He also self-identifies as "a sow that hath overwhelm'd / all her litter but one" (*2 Henry IV*, 1.2.11-12), thus linking his abundance to femininity (Traub, 1989: 469). Additionally, after a brawl with Pistol, Hostess Quickly asks him "Are you not hurt i' th' groin? Methought a' / made a shrewd thrust at your belly" (2.4.207-208). Traub notes how Quickly's sentence "shifts the linguistic emphasis from the masculine 'groin' (in danger of castration) to the more feminine 'belly', the 'already castrated', vulnerable recipient and receptacle of a 'shrewd thrust'" (Traub, 1989: 469). It is also worth mentioning that Falstaff notably crossdresses as a fat lady, the "fat woman of Brainford" also called "Mother Prat" in

The Merry Wives of Windsor (Stockton, 2011: 31). Finally, Falstaff himself links his belly to femininity when replying to Knight Colevile's question, “Are not you Sir John Falstaff?” (4.3.10) with “I have a whole school of tongues in this belly / of mine, and not a tongue of them all speaks any other / word but my name. [...] my womb, my womb, my womb undoes me” (*2 Henry IV*, 4.3.18-20, 22).

Falstaff's whole character hinges on a structure of inversion of self-discipline protocols and normal hierarchies (Smith, 2019: 120). This is especially visible in his monologue at the end of Scene 5 of Act 1, which takes place in the middle of the battle between the King's forces and the rebels of Hotspur. Because of the way the scene is constructed, we expect him to renounce vice and embrace nobility, honour and courage (Smith, 2019: 121). Falstaff indeed starts by asking himself the great question: “what is honour?”. However, he then follows with:

> Can honour set to a leg ? no—or an
> arm? no—or take away the grief of a wound? no.
> Honour hath no skill in surgery then? no. What is
> honour ? a word. What is in that word honour ? what is
> that honour? Air. (*1 Henry IV*, 5.1.131-135)

Falstaff concludes by calling this speech his “catechism” (5.1.140), thus presenting his self-serving way of thinking as if it were a statement of belief. The humour of the scene, then, comes from setting up a rhetoric of conversion and piety, only to turn it around on its head and instead promote pragmatic and selfish concerns as if they were a holy truth (Smith, 2019: 121). Falstaff was so well-liked by the public precisely because he is unrepentant and unapologetically himself, embodying the anti-moralistic energy of plays produced during these years, aimed at opposing the attitude of preachers, who called theatres “Satan's synagogue” (Smith, 2019: 121-122).

2.3.4 Conclusions

It is hard to venture general conclusions about obesity in Shakespeare since only two characters, Nell and Falstaff, are openly described as fat. However, for the purpose of

this thesis, it will be assumed that the other characters described in this section are part of this category, as they are hinted as such and possess some of the same qualities that characterise the two canonly fat representatives.

It thus emerges that overweight characters in Shakespeare possess four main characteristics.

Firstly, overweight characters are comic in some way. It appears, then, that Shakespeare's depiction of obesity is - differently from that of banquets - closer to popular and literary tradition, as obese people were inevitably linked to comedy in the mind of Early Modern and even contemporary audiences: in the controversial case of Hamlet, one reason why he is still usually not accepted as fat is that it definitely adds a comical or ironic layer to his tragic character. Notably, jokes about obesity and gluttony are to be found indiscriminately in comedies, tragedies, and history plays.

Secondly, being overweight in many cases is associated with gluttony and lust. This connection is emphasised by mentions of food, eating and drinking on stage, and bawdy jokes, the latter usually made by or referred to women. All of these are manifestations of primary needs expressed by the grotesque body, as defined by Bakthin. Arguably, Shakespeare introduced grotesque bodies in his plays in order to provide either a comic effect or a visual representation of the nature of some characters.

Thirdly, as gluttony and lust are sins, obesity can be seen as a sign of spiritual sickness, both by the audience and by other characters. For example, if one reads Hamlet as overweight, the references in the play to his shortness of breath become symbolic of his "sickness". Moreover, Falstaff is asked to repent and renounce his gluttony altogether, as if his physical condition was a direct reflection of his morality: Shakespeare is able to comment on the moral qualities and behaviour of his characters through the perception of their obesity. However, obese bodies are subject to a variety of interpretations, which are also based on their relation with thin bodies: lower class characters tend to sympathise for overweight characters, as they perceive them as benevolent, in contrast with austere slender men. On the other hand, slender characters tend to consider their obese counterparts as lacking self-control, lazy and prone to excesses. Furthermore, their stances are sometimes dismissed by the opinion that obese characters have of themselves: for instance, Falstaff wants to protect his shape, because

he feels that controlling his weight means that he has control over his mind. These multiple layers of meaning indicate that Shakespeare not only avoided stereotypical representations of obese bodies, but was also able to add symbolic depth to his characters and, through the comparison with other bodies, to the relations between them.

Lastly, obesity in men can be associated to feminine characteristics, both in the case of Falstaff and Hamlet. Falstaff refers to his belly as “womb”, and Hamlet's mother compares him to a female bird, while his father-in-law calls his grief - which is such a fundamental part of his character - “unmanly”. Their sexual desire is contrasted with an ultimate impotency. In the case of Falstaff, not only does his name seem suggestive of it (Fall-staff), but he also fails to woo the two married ladies of the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, his size making it difficult for him to “hide” in all senses of the word.

In short, especially when it comes to male characters, it can be argued that their fatness can be interpreted as a multi-faceted symbol. On the one hand, it follows literary tradition, as it connects them to the realm of the grotesque, gluttony, and comedy. On the other hand, it also adds a layer of complexity to the characters and, ultimately, to the play itself.

2.4 Hunger Excess: Cannibalism

Fear is at the very basis of the literary representation of cannibalism. In fact, William Arens, in his 1980 book *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy*, characterises cannibalism as nothing more than the projection of fear-induced fantasies upon unknown others (Arens, 1980). The appeal of cannibalism to an Early Modern audience would have been in the mixture of fear and excitement it produced. These two emotions can only coexist if there is a safety distance between what is feared and the person who is feeling these emotions: in Aristotle, catharsis already implied a distancing, and Jauss further highlighted how "protective distancing" is crucial to the aesthetic experience of catharsis (Ercolino, 2018: 248). Book 2 of Lucretius's *On the Nature of Things* famously talks about a shipwreck, noting how the spectator is only able to empathise with the sailors precisely because "it is comforting to see from what troubles you yourself are exempt [...] when you have no share in the danger" (Lucretius, 2001: 35). This concept was further expanded by Burke, who claimed that terror can provide a pleasurable experience as long as it is removed from the source (Ercolino, 2018: 249). Cannibalism in Shakespeare can then be interpreted as "distanced" from the source in two different ways. The first one is the literal distance that existed between the audience and the faraway lands in which cannibalism was supposed to be practised by savages, and the second is the classic aesthetic distance between the stage and the audience, which also allows to derive pleasure from similarly violent actions, such as murders. It is unclear why Shakespeare's audience found violence on stage so appealing. It could be that they were desensitised or they found it cathartic, since the Early Modern Period was a violent era: traitors' bodies were broken on the rack, suspended from prison walls, or at public executions they were cut down from the gallows while they were still alive to be castrated and disembowelled (Hackett, 2013: 137). What is certain is that the Early Modern stage was no stranger to blood, acts of violence and dismembered body parts. When it comes to cannibalism, however, it has to be considered that it is not only characterised by its incredible violence, but also that it constitutes the ultimate taboo and violation of bodily boundaries (Meyer, 1996: 119). What is interesting about Shakespeare is that while he does mention cannibalism, an

actual representation of the act is present only in *Titus Andronicus*, while in all the other plays it is to be found as imagery, running theme or metaphor. Even in *Titus Andronicus*, the play provides no explicit stage direction for a literal act of cannibalism and thus seems to maintain a detachment from "true" cannibalism (Rice, 2004: 308). This reluctance to show man-eating on stage could be interpreted as another type of distance added by the playwright to make sure the terror inspired by the act could be "far" enough to allow it to coexist with pleasure. Alternatively, cannibalism could have worked better as a symbol. As Cottom notes, "the self-contradictory, self-consuming figure of the cannibal, confounding the distinction between self and other, stood for all the uncertainties in the [Early Modern] conception of the world" (Cottom 2001: xiv). In Shakespeare's case, it could be argued that cannibalism can either represent a fear of otherness or of change in the "natural" order of things.

These images achieve the goal of tainting the sacred, or at least the licit and socially sanctioned, introducing the realm of the sullied, illicit and profane (Rice, 2004: 298). In almost every occasion in which the playwright evokes the metaphorical image of eating human flesh, the invocation involves the debasement from a utopian ideal of a pure, symbolic, and transcendent order to a now tainted body. In other words, cannibalistic imagery symbolises the loss of such distinction, both in potentiality and actuality (Rice, 2004: 298). At the same time, these images are essential to the constitution of that same symbolic order: the repeated references to the consumption of human flesh prepare the space for community, which is the necessary basis of social order.

2.4.1 Caliban

Interestingly, the character who, thanks to his name, bears the closest associations with cannibalism, is not a cannibal at all. Shakespeare's names sometimes reveal something about the characters, especially in his comedies. For instance, in *The Tempest*, Prospero probably comes from the Latin "prospere" (to succeed or make fortunate), and Miranda surely reflects "wonder" (Vaughan & Vaughan, 1993: 26). Following this reasoning, then, Caliban's name has to mean something and reflect the symbolic roots and essence of a character that is so important in the play, as it is

exceedingly distinctive. However, the etymology of his name is quite obscure, and critics cannot seem to reach an agreement, even though they all hold the assumption that it represents a descriptive or ethnic label, a place name, or a foreign term (Vaughan & Vaughan, 1993: 26).

In the eighteenth century, the theory that Caliban's name is an anagram of cannibal became increasingly popular. Since the letters “l” and “r” are interchangeable in European transliterations of the unwritten Caribbean Indian languages (Vaughan & Vaughan, 1991: 26), it follows that “calib” could correspond to “carib” or even “canib”, which is the acknowledged etymology of “cannibal”. A simple anagram or rearrangement of the letters, called metathesis, can result in “Caliban” (Drabble, 1985: 159).

Anagrams may have been less popular before spelling was standardised, but the few anagrammatic Renaissance poems that survived, together with Ben Jonson's phrase “anagramatize our names” (Jonson in Vaughan & Vaughan, 1991: 27), seem to suggest that the practice was in use among writers (Vaughan & Vaughan, 1991: 27). Caliban, then, could be seen as an anagram of “Carib”, an American Indian from the New World who, although savage, was not necessarily a cannibal. In fact, Caribana later in the 16th century became a common geographic label printed on the northern part of South America (Vaughan & Vaughan, 1991: 28). Both etymologies could be plausible, as “Carib” and “cannibal” were widely used in English and continental publications, and presumably in conversations among scholars. The source of these words can be traced back to 1492, when natives told Columbus their enemies were “canibales” or “Caribes”. Since the population was believed to eat human flesh, “cannibal” gradually became synonymous with the word that was used prior to Columbus, “antropophagi”, the most depraved type of human, bordering on beastly. By the 17th century, “cannibal” had largely replaced the older term (Vaughan & Vaughan, 1991: 27-28).

Generally, cannibalism was merely seen as a sign of savagery. However, some of Shakespeare's contemporaries had more ambiguous or even radically opposite views of savages. Montaigne can be considered the modern origin of the movement of victimisation of savages, which leads to their glorification (Avramescu, 2009: 122). In his essay *On Cannibals*, he argues that their “wars are throughout noble and generous,

and carry as much Excuse and fair Pretence, as their human Frailty is capable of; having with them no other Foundation, than the sole Jealousy of Virtue" (Montaigne, 1743: 234). Montaigne claims that the excesses of Western civilisation are not necessarily less terrible than the lifestyle of the cannibals. He makes the case for cultural relativism, stating that Western populations are likely to call savage what they do not understand (Avramescu, 2009: 123), yet "we ought to call those wild, whose Natures we have chang'd by our Artifice, and diverted from the common Order" (Montaigne, 1743: 228). The cannibals live according to the "Laws of nature", in a happy State of Man (Montaigne, 1745: 229) devoid of property, vices or illnesses. They usually consume fish and meat, which is abundant in their land, and they "eat without any other Cookery, than plain Boiling, Roasting, or Broiling," and they dance all day long (Montaigne, 1745: 230). While he does recognise that American savages are capable of torturing and killing their prisoners in excruciating manners, Montaigne still warns about considering the Western population as superior:

> I am not sorry that we should here take Notice of the barbarous Horror of so cruel an Action, but grieved that seeing so clearly into their Faults, we should be so blind to our own: For I conceive, there is more Barbarity in eating a Man alive, than when he is dead; in tearing a Body Limb from Limb, by Racks and Torments, that is yet in perfect Sense, in roasting it by Degrees, causing it to be bit and worried by Swine […] under the Colour of Piety and Religion. (Montaigne, 1745: 233)

Shakespeare was without a doubt familiar with this essay, as Gonzalo's speech reports almost a part of its translation by John Florio almost word for word. The Tempest also contains references to imperialistic voyages of conquest (Orgel 1985: 54). Shakespeare was well aware of the link that was drawn between indigenous populations and cannibalism, as well as the budding meaning of the word cannibal to mean an anthropophagous individual, as is exemplified in the third part of *Henry VI*, which mentions cannibals as both hungry and bloody (Vaughan & Vaughan, 1991: 30), and even more explicitly in *Othello*, where the eponymous protagonist recounts how he wooed Desdemona thanks to his tales "of the cannibals that each other eat" (1.3.143) in faraway lands. In this regard, much like his contemporaries, Shakespeare seems to associate cannibalism with savagery and vice versa.

However, Caliban, despite his name and “savagery”, does not seem to have much in common with Montaigne's cannibals. On the contrary, his character is more closely based on the idea of the natural depravity of savages, as seen in Purchas and John Smith's accounts (Orgel: 1985: 54). Orgel notes how Shakespeare “dramatizes both sides of the debate and in the process renders a resolution to it impossible” (Orgel, 1985: 54). Montaigne talks about Plato's ideal republic with the intention of demonstrating how New World natives managed to create a real community that surpasses the philosopher's imagination. Yet, that community he talks about does not find its counterargument in Caliban (Orgel, 1985: 54). In true Shakespearean fashion, the islander seamlessly manages to mix savagery - for instance in his attempt to rape Miranda, or in his plan to murder Prospero, as well as in his multiple threats of violence - with one of the most poetic and moving speeches in the Bard's canon. His use of blank verse is especially surprising, as in Shakespeare it was usually employed by high-class characters. This has to be considered together with the fact that in *The Tempest* he could be interpreted to be the rightful owner of the island. Additionally, even what is known about his diet complicates the image we have of him. At first glance, Caliban's speech about his dinner (1.2.331-344) seems to be pronounced by a simple creature who only desires to satisfy his need to eat, but, as critics from Coleridge onwards have noted, his rational and poetic speech reveals a complex personality that goes beyond mere basic instincts (Fitzpatrick, 2010: 127):

I must eat my dinner.
This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother,
Which thou tak'st from me. When thou cam'st first,
Thou strok'st me and made much of me, wouldst give me
Water with berries in 't, and teach me how
To name the bigger light, and how the less,
That burn by day and night; and then I loved thee,
And showed thee all the qualities o' th' isle,
The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile -
Cursed be I that did so! All the charms
Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you;
For I am all the subjects that you have,

Which first was mine own king, and here you sty me
In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me
The rest o' th' island.(1.2.331-344)

Caliban seems in perfect harmony with the island and what it has to offer. Other than the berries mentioned in the speech, the text suggests that Caliban's diet might also include “apples, crabs and mussels, honeycomb and honey, nuts, roots, eggs, marmoset, fowl, fish, or even walrus” (Fitzpatrick, 2010: 129). Caliban himself, however, never mentions killing animals to eat for himself – as in “I'll fish for thee” (2.2.158), and his demands about filling his stomach are quickly followed with an eloquent and reasoned outburst against Prospero’s violence (Fitzpatrick, 2010: 133). The absence of mentions of red meat and its consumption in his speech can be linked to Shakespeare's general sympathy towards vegetarianism, or at least problematisation of the Early Modern belief that a vegetarian diet was not healthy (Fitzpatrick, 2007: 7, 79-80). Most importantly, it distances Caliban from the man-eating resonances suggested by his name and strengthens his ambivalence as neither clearly bestial nor cultured.

2.4.2 Othello

There is something primal about love, whether it be maternal or romantic. Cannibalistic imagery, then, can make sense. Cultural theorist Jan Verwoert, in an essay called “Masters and Servants or Lovers: On Love as a Way to Not Recognize the Other”, wrote:

To love the other, we believe, is the most intimate way to recognize the other […] But this is what this power is about, as well, when it manifests itself in structures of domination […] Consequently, radical love would be a love that goes beyond recognition, that is a love in which the lovers would renounce their desire to fully grasp the identity of the other and no longer insist on understanding who the other is. (Verwoert, 2009: 11)

According to this view, then Othello and Desdemona's love is bound to fail from the start, since they fall in love with each other precisely because of the image they have of

each other. Desdemona loves Othello because she is fascinated by his worldliness, and Othello falls in love with Desdemona because of her propensity to listen to his stories. The fearful implications of the stories of the cannibals may in fact have been effective aids in the wooing of Desdemona (Orgel, 1985: 41). Their love is primal, as they are consumed by passion, but it is based on a superficial recognition they have of the other. It is telling, then, that cannibalism mentioned two times when Othello explains to Venice's council how he and Desdemona fell in love. He refers to man-eaters both as “cannibals” (1.3.143) and “anthropophagi” (1.3.144): the references could be read almost as a foreboding of the cannibalistic consumption, intensified by Desdemona being described as “eager” (1.3.144) to greedily “devour” (1.3.150) Othello's discourse at the very start. Wortham notes how Desdemona in the beginning displaces Othello's power: Cassio refers to her as “our captain's captain” (2.1.74) and Iago a few lines later reiterates that “Our general’s wife / is now the general” (2.3.307-308; Wortham, 2015: 152). Far from the naive and sheltered girl she appeared to be at the start of the play, she becomes a dangerous threat to the “natural” order of things, the social hierarchy that exists between women and men living in a patriarchal society, especially in Shakespeare's time. Othello is “devoured” by passion and momentarily forgets about the power relationship that exist between husband and wife. This blurring of boundaries is typical of cannibalism as well, as it represents the moment where the line that divides the bodies of two people ceases to exist, and they become one. If cannibalism is against what is natural, then the same would have been said about a woman managing to subvert power dynamics related to gender roles.

Additionally, if one considers objects as a part of a person or an extension of the self (Simmel, 1950: 322), then a present can be seen as another instance in which boundaries between two people become indistinct, even more so when, as in Othello's case, the gift is a handkerchief, a particularly personal and dear item supposedly inherited by his mother. The handkerchief he willingly entrusts to Desdemona not only is a precious item that he has conserved all his life, but it is also supposedly magical, and most importantly it strengthens the play's associations with cannibalism, as it bears a connection to the medicinal and exoteric cannibalism, which was very popular in Shakespeare's time. The handkerchief contains dissected and embalmed hearts of

virgins that give it colour and pharmacological power (Noble, 2011: 134-135): “There’s magic in the web of it: / [...] it was dyed in mummy, which the skilful / Conserved of maidens’ hearts” (3.4.72, 76–77). The fact that the handkerchief was “dyed” links the object to death (Noble, 2011: 135), as does the fact that mummy was considered the “sovereign remedy” and “universal panacea” of Paracelsian homeopathy (Noble, 2011: 19). The presence of this substance in Early Modern literature is a sign of a cultural fascination with medical recycling of corpse matter (Noble, 2011: 2). Science and magic were not very far away: in fact there was not much of a distinction at all (Gaskill, 2010: 26). Mummy as a remedy was not only popular in Early Modern England, since its medicinal use can be traced back to ancient Arab traditions: Avicenna was one of the first advocates of the practice, promoting “mumia” (from the Arabic mumiya) as a medicinal preparation of the remains of an embalmed, dried, or otherwise “prepared” human body that had ideally met with sudden, preferably violent, death as a remedy for a plethora of different medical conditions. The influential Materia Medica of the Greek physician Dioscorides also helped popularise this ingredient (Noble, 2011: 19). However, the white and protective magic of the object can quickly turn into a curse (Gaskill, 2010: 26). The handkerchief is at first presented as a substitute self, an extension or metonymic memento of Othello that Desdemona keeps “evermore about her / To kiss and talk to” (3.3.297–98). He gave it to her as a promise of marital fidelity: the two shall become one flesh. If the handkerchief gets lost, Othello will stop loving Desdemona (3.4.71-79).

The handkerchief’s symbolic role is reinforced by the fact that it was produced by a sibyl in a moment of “prophetic fury” (3.4.75). Then, an Egyptian woman gave it to Othello's mother, who in turn gave it to him, and finally it made its way to Desdemona, who is the only non-African person who was ever in possession of the object (Smith, 2013: 11). Its origin also links it to a society which Europeans would have considered closer to “savage” status (where they felt unspeakable crimes such as cannibalism could possibly happen), or at the very least felt ambivalently about.

If in the beginning Desdemona seems to be the one more at risk of “consuming” Othello, we find out that this idea is merely a way men project their own cannibalistic urges. Noble notes that “bodily integrity is repeatedly reinscribed and the eater/eaten

boundary is constantly shifted, giving us a moveable feast" in the play (Noble, 2011: 133). Othello denies his own cannibalistic urges when he argues that he wants Desdemona in Cyprus "not / To please the palate of my appetite" (1.3.262); yet he later calls her "honey" and "sweet[ner]" to his "comforts" (2.1.202, 203-205). Iago, on the other hand, fuelled by his own sexual perversity and destructive appetite, sees the relationship between Desdemona and Othello, in which each is at once eater and eaten, as a cannibalistic sexual banquet which will soon turn rancid (Noble, 2011: 133), and predicts that:

> The food that to him now is luscious as locusts shall
> be to him shortly as acerb as coloquintida. She must
> change for youth: when she is sated with his body,
> will find the error of her choice. (1.3.348–351)

It is important to notice how the women are never the ones who actively identify as man-eating cannibals, rather it is the men who describe them as such. Othello himself identifies women as a whole race of "delicate creatures" whose "appetites" (3.3.271-272) men wish to contain.

A voracious "appetite" was considered to be a crucial component of feminine gender identity. It went beyond the limits of rational control, and ultimately it was situated among other irrational passions. Feminine desire, then, "simultaneously lacks more and devours more, and it is inconstant in its hunger" (Rice, 2004: 301). Orsino in *Twelfth Night* fittingly claims that a woman's heart can never be sated and it needs to be controlled by men. At the same time, it resists interpretation (Rice, 2004: 301). The patriarchal order constructs women's desire as simultaneously cannibalistic and inferior, and by doing this it can identify potentially disruptive behaviour originating outside the male community (Rice, 2004: 301).

Ultimately, men "reveal themselves to be the cannibalistic consumers who, in their downward spiral of insecurity, are imagined and imagine themselves as, eaters of the flesh of women" (Noble, 2011: 133). This is visible when Othello, fearing that Desdemona could be cheating on him, threatens to become a butcher and "chop her into messes" (4.1.199) as if she was an edible piece of meat. Additionally, Emilia, who has

just witnessed the handkerchief confrontation between Desdemona and Othello, well aware of the cannibalistic power men have over women in the world they inhabit, fittingly exclaims: “They are all but stomachs, and we all but food: / They eat us hungerly, and when they are full / They belch us” (3.4.108–110). Ultimately, then, it appears that women are the flesh consumed by men, “whose stomachs are the greedy zones of corporeal mediation and conquest— women’s nourishing goodness is greedily snatched, gnawed, swallowed, and ejected as wind” (Noble, 2011: 134). If the handkerchief is a symbol of Othello's body, he interprets her parting ways with it as a personal violation of his bodily boundaries. Simmel notes how "material property is, so to speak, an extension of the ego, and any interference with our property is, for this reason, felt to be a violation of the person” (Simmel, 1950: 322). It is as if Desdemona has had her fill of his flesh and discarded the rest to move on to her next victim. Of course, as Emilia eloquently points out, it is the other way round. She also links Othello’s jealousy - “Is not this man jealous?” (3.4.103) - with the cannibalistic hunger men feel for women's bodies in the play. The jealous paranoia Othello suffers from, then, “is a symptom of an obsessive cultural distrust of women’s sexual fidelity” (Noble, 2011: 134). In a society in which men are consumed by these fears, the cannibalism of women's bodies becomes a way in which they can be assuaged. It is relevant, then, that the handkerchief contains mummified hearts of virgins, as a way to control and preserve female purity (Noble, 2011: 134). In the play, at first cannibalism is seen as the ultimate blurring of boundaries typical of lovers, yet ultimately it becomes a symbol both of the fear men feel towards aggressive female sexuality and their anxieties concerning female chastity and fidelity.

2.4.3 Beatrice and Lady Macbeth

If disturbing images related to feeding feel right at home in the dark universe of *Macbeth*, it is surprising, perhaps, to see an echo of cannibalism in a bright and sunny play such as *Much Ado about Nothing*. Arguably, there is more cannibalistic imagery in the latter than in the Scottish play, although both contain numerous references to perverted feeding, and in both it is connected to unnatural behaviours. Ross, for

instance, compares Malcolm and Donalbain possibly killing their father to a form of filial cannibalism: “thriftless ambition that will ravin up thine own lives’ means” (2.4.28). The only literal connection to cannibalism in Macbeth concerns horse omophagia among horses and directly follows Duncan's murder:

OLD MAN: ’Tis unnatural,
Even like the deed that’s done. On Tuesday last
A falcon, tow’ring in her pride of place,
Was by a mousing owl hawked at and killed.
ROSS: And Duncan’s horses (a thing most strange and
certain),
Beauteous and swift, the minions of their race,
Turned wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out,
Contending ’gainst obedience, as they would
Make war with mankind.
OLD MAN: ’Tis said they eat each
other.
ROSS: They did so, to th’ amazement of mine eyes
That looked upon ’t. (2.4.10-19)

Owls killing falcons, a symbol of royalty, and horses escaping and eating each other are all signs that the natural order of things has been disrupted. Shakespeare frequently employs animal cannibalism as a forerunner of disaster and calamity. For instance, in *Coriolanus*, when Agrippa addresses the plebeians to defend Coriolanus, he adopts the comparison of an unnatural dam that will eat her babies to encourage them not to let their resentment give way to unnatural ingratitude. This is a particularly powerful metaphor in the case of Rome, since its symbol is a female wolf nurturing human infants. It is, then, used as a sign that chaos and confusion are ruling the city (Laroque, 1981: 28). Infanticide cannibalism, though especially brutal, is a phenomenon that does happen in nature, and it was even recorded by Pliny the Elder in the case of boars and sows (Laroque, 1981: 28). In *Macbeth* the witches fittingly use “sow's blood, that hath eaten / Her nine farrow” (4.1.63-64) to prepare their potion. They also use mummy and fingers of birth-strangled babe / Ditch deliver'd by a drab” (4.1.26, 29-31), further

connecting the play to human consumption.

It could be argued that a vast number of references to “unnatural” feeding are connected to a refusal of motherhood and femininity. Lady Macbeth famously claims that she would be willing to rip her own baby from her breast while she was feeding it and crush its skull. She also drugs the wine in order to get Duncan's guards to sleep.

While much lighter in tone, *Much Ado about Nothing* contains even more references to human cannibalism. Early in the play, Beatrice jokingly enquires about Benedick's honour as a soldier: “I pray you, how many / hath he killed and eaten in these wars? But How many / hath he killed? For indeed I promised to eat all of his killing” (1.1.39-41).

The play in general seems to be obsessed with feeding: there are multiple instances in which both Benedick and Beatrice metonymically become their mouths, or especially tongues. For instance, Benedick says that Beatrice stabs with the daggers she speaks, and she would kill everything within her reach with her breath if it was as nasty as the things she says (2.1.229-232). Claudio calls them two bears at risk of eating each other (3.2.71-72). The image of love as appetite and materialisation of what exits the mouth return later in the play, when Beatrice is afraid Benedick will eat back his words of love (4.1.273). Even more aptly, Benedick, upon seeing Beatrice, comments “O God, sir, here's a dish I love not–I / cannot endure my Lady Tongue” (2.1.255-256). The line contains a double link to feeding: Beatrice is represented by her tongue and is spoken of as a “dish” to be consumed, similarly to how Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra* is described as an Egyptian dish (2.6.125).

In the play, men are no strangers to objectifying women in general, as is the case of other Shakespeare's plays. For instance, Benedick asks Claudio if he is thinking about buying Hero, and Claudio talks about her as a jewel that is too precious and rare to be bought (1.1.172). Claudio also talks about her in food terms: when he thinks Hero is impure, he asks Leonato to take his daughter back, comparing her to an orange which is beautiful on the outside but rotting on the inside (4.1.31). It is telling that, later in the play, when Benedick is made to think that Beatrice is in love with him, Beatrice tries to invite him to dinner (2.3.241-242) and, when he refuses, she retorts: “You have no / stomach, signior–fare you well” (2.3.249-250). She does not realise that Benedick, thinking that she is in love with him, interprets it as being invited to the banquet that is

her. He himself notes how there is “a double meaning in her words” (2.3.252).

When the two finally confess their feelings for each other, Beatrice is afraid that he will eat his words back later, and Benedick swears that he will make any man who says he doesn't love her eat his sword (4.1.275-276). He adds that he will not eat back his words, not with any “sauce that can be devised to it” (4.1.278). Not only is the eating imagery pervasive in the play, but their mutual love is also represented as a tangible part of the self that can be eaten, almost an extension of their body. Beatrice, however, chooses to test Benedick's feelings by asking him to murder Claudio, to which he answers “Not for the wide world” (4.1.288). Beatrice, as a woman living in a patriarchal society, cannot help but feel angry and helpless and she wishes she were a man so that she could eat Claudio's heart in the marketplace. There is a link here to Lady Macbeth. Both of them desire to act, but are held back by their femininity. Their words are the only thing they have to express the part of themselves that defies gender norms: they recur to particularly violent speech, related to perverted feeding. Lady Macbeth says she would “Have plucked the nipple from his boneless gums / and dashed the brains out” (1.7.57-58), if it meant Duncan would be dead. It is one of the moments in which she willingly tries to renounce her feminine sensibility and replace them with masculine characteristics, in a world where men are violent and women are destined to succumb. The famous moment in which she invokes spirits also involves nurture becoming poisonous. She tells the spirits to “Come to my woman's breasts, / And take my milk for gall” (1.5.47-48).

In Beatrice's case, the sentence “O God that I were a man! I would eat his heart in the / market-place” (4.1.305-306) is particularly important, given the symbolic role of cannibalism within the play. As Raymond Rice notes, the cannibalistic theme of *Much Ado About Nothing* is made more complex by the interlocking of many different discursive traditions (Rice, 2004: 299). First of all, Beatrice uses the typical language of revenge tragedies, whose protagonists are motivated to act after recognising social injustice and in doing so manage to escape the culturally sanctioned. Feeling alienated is generally recognised as essential to the revenge process (Rice, 2004: 299). As Robert Ornstein explains: “the revenging hero almost invariably has no way of bringing his criminal opponent to justice, either because no proof of the crime exists, or because the

criminal is placed beyond the reach of justice, or because justice itself is a mockery in the hero's society" (Ornstein, 1960: 23). The revenger's inner struggle is not deciding what the retribution will entail but, rather, deciding whether to act in the first place. The dilemma results in a kind of alienation which pushes the revenger to the limits of the rational:

> The revenge tragedy form, with its obligatory madness of the revenger, presupposes that a commitment to the irrational limits the amount of truth which the psyche can attain to through the descent into the self, for the very reason that the irrational keeps one preoccupied with the self. (Rice, 2004: 299)

However, unlike Rice's argument, Beatrice's use of the revenge tragedy language does not make her irrational. In fact, it is through rationality that she manages to understand her condition. The frustration resulting from her inaction is not caused by an internal struggle, but rather by the overimposed system of the patriarchy and gender roles limiting her subjectivity. Once she realises she cannot remedy injustice only because she is a woman, she says: "I cannot be a man with wishing, / therefore I will die a woman with grieving" (4.1.321-322). Similarly to Lady Macbeth, it turns out that renouncing her femininity with words is not enough: Lady Macbeth slowly loses her mind and Beatrice has to ask Benedick for help. Multiple forces are actively at work to stop Beatrice from becoming the revenger in the play, instead forcing her to assume a "natural" feminine position of passive objectification and blind acceptance of the Law (Rice, 2004: 299). She cannot do anything else than use her language to express her frustration: unlike the archetypical revenger, her inaction is not caused by her indecision, but by the limits and gender hierarchies imposed by society. Her desire to eat Claudio's heart in the marketplace, which is a public and busy space, is not impossible because she lacks the "stomach" to become a revenger, but because her gender will not allow her to act upon her desires. The only thing left for her to do is talk, but she can only vent to the sympathetic Benedict, and not to the play's authority figures.

Her actions are also limited by her community, which "marks the limits of its constitution by the possibility of cannibalism […] but also by the simultaneous "rational" decision to deny or cross out that possibility, replacing it with the safety of

discourse's endlessly deferred satisfaction" (Rice, 2004: 300). If revenge is typically masculine, the constant invisible presence of cannibalism marks the ground upon which the activity is made possible (Rice, 2004: 300). Rational public discourse is presented as the product of community, an idea that as Carolyn Dinshaw noted, dates back to the medieval scholastic and patristic traditions. When "acts of writing and related acts of signifying—allegorizing, interpreting, glossing, translating" are linked to masculine activities of inscription and control, the "surfaces on which these acts are performed, or from which these acts depart, or which these acts reveal—the page, the text, the literal sense, or even the hidden meaning" are connected to the feminine (Dinshaw, 1989: 9).

The community of revengers is active and masculine, and women are excluded. Any attempt to change the status quo constitutes an inherently transgressive act. The gender-specific language used by the community becomes an identification mark for the bodies who use that language. Arguably, a body is not brought to existence by language only, but it is through that it assumes a role in society, becoming a social being. Addressing a subject as a revenger therefore assigns a label that marks the individual and makes them recognisable within their social context. However, this labelling process is always based on non-written rules, including those of gender roles. Members of a community are able to construct their identity because the Other; the symbolic order makes them recognisable as gendered bodies (Rice, 2004: 300). Beatrice's desire is transgressive because it is in open opposition to the gendered language that is supposed to define the members of the community (Rice, 2004: 300). As Catherine Belsey has noted, "subjectivity is discursively produced and is constrained by the range of subject-positions defined by the discourses in which the concrete individual participates" (Belsey, 1985: 5).

Proper male subjects can be defined only in relation to the "improper" subjectivity of women such as Beatrice, who questions her own position and at the same time is excluded by the revenger's community. In short, the ultimate legitimacy of the male can only be defined by the concurrent existence of the illegitimate woman, whose "literal" appetites are always in danger of escaping male definition and interpretation, disrupting carefully constructed and protected gendered positions. Beatrice's complaints are then doubly important to the ongoing redefinition of community and subjectivity. Her desire

to usurp “man’s estate” by performing her revenge, inevitably draws a distinction between “innate” masculine and feminine subjectivity (Rice, 2004: 301).

What Beatrice and Lady Macbeth have in common is that despite their desire to reject traditional femininity and their expression of this desire through their speech, they also end up reinforcing them end up reinforcing gender roles. Lady Macbeth asks her husband whether he is a man and questions his masculinity to get him to act (1.7.50), while Beatrice (though in a much lighter tone) says that men without beards are less than men and she could do nothing with them except dress them up in her clothes and pretend that they are female servants (2.1.31.36). On the one hand they taunt and question the potency of men who seem to possess traditionally female attributes, on the other they wish to negate their own feminine power.

Ultimately, it is as if their desire to defy gender norms has no possibility to turn into real action: although their words represent the only external manifestation of their dissatisfaction with the status quo, they both are so entrenched in their culture that, even though they recognise its unfairness, they cannot seem to truly fathom a world in which social expectations do not exist for both men and women.

2.4.4 Hamlet

A few final considerations must be made about one of the Bard's most imagery-rich and complex plays, *Hamlet*. The play itself is literally haunted by death, as the ghost of Hamlet’s dead father shows himself and asks Hamlet to avenge him. *Hamlet* brings cannibalistic imagery to its apex of sophistication, and by doing so it is never literal in its depiction of cannibalism, although Hamlet at one point threatens that he could “drink hot blood / And do such bitter business as the bitter day / Would quake to look on” (3.2.393-395), which fittingly is one of the most terrifying moments in the play.

Royal marriage and succession are ways in which bodily boundaries can be blurred. Hamlet himself calls Claudius his mother, saying: “father and mother is man and / wife, man and wife is one flesh, and so, my mother” (4.3.50-51). In the same way, when a king dies, he is replaced by his living offspring, which is a part of them. The idea of the dead continuing to exist inside the living finds expression in the practice of surrogation.

In *Cities of the Dead*, Roach suggests that “there is a deeper terror that lurks at the heart of surrogation as a cultural process: the fear of being replaced, a fear that plays out in tropes of monstrosity and especially cannibalism” (Roach, 1996: 112). According to the mythology connected to cannibalism, it is believed that whoever consumes a dead individual acquires their power and knowledge. Man-eating can then be defined as something that both creates and destroys (Loftis: 2009: 85). Hamlet's father is not able to live on through his son, since Claudius has usurped the throne. Thus, the theme of murder can be interpreted as a broken genealogy (Loftis, 2009: 85), a “most foul, strange and unnatural” (1.5.28) thing that inevitably has unnatural consequences on Hamlet's world. In Shakespeare, the murder of a king, as seen in *Macbeth*, brings about the most unthinkable and horrible events. Horatio recounts how even “In the most high and palmy state of Rome, / A little ere the mightiest Julius fell, / The graves stood tenantless, and the sheeted dead / Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets” (1.1.114-117). In *Hamlet*'s case, the murder also brings about a haunting, a duplication of kings which is in need of resolution.

The protagonist becomes obsessively and anxiously preoccupied with death: he ponders about the fragility of life and death as the great leveller between individuals. It does not matter if one is Alexander the Great or Yorick - the king of Denmark's jester - some time after death, every skull becomes identical and ends up “stopping a bunghole” (5.1.199), unceremoniously filling a hole in the ground. Hamlet also begins to show great interest in how his dead father can find life in new bodies, and this brings him to make considerations about the cycle of life. The way in which the dead can find new life is by their corpse being eaten by animals, which in turn feed humans. Various lines within the play suggest this theme, the most literal one being: “A man may fish with the worm that hath eat / of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm” (4.3.26-27). In the same way that a corpse will be eaten by worms, the body of a king metaphorically can end up feeding the populace, as observed with the body of Polonius, a father figure which in the play often trespasses the bodily boundaries of both King Hamlet and Claudius (Loftis: 2009: 85). Hamlet says he is “At supper [...] / not where he eats but where a' is eaten– / a certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him” (4.3.18-20), a clear reference to what is also happening to his father. Polonius and King

Hamlet's corpses constitute an example of how dead bodies come to be a part of the living through cannibalism. Adelman described Hamlet as a “grotesquely oral world” in which “everything is ultimately meat for a single table” (Adelman, 1992: 27). In fact, there are plenty of metaphors related to a sort of “banquet of death”: for instance Fortinbras, looking upon the dead bodies of Hamlet, Gertrude and Claudius, observes that “This quarry cries on havoc. O / proud death, / What feast is toward in thine eternal cell, / That thou so many princes at a shot / So bloodily hast struck?” (5.3.362-366). Hamlet's insistence on everyone becoming food, including kings, can be then seen as the way in which he resists the “imposition of patriarchal memory” (Loftis, 2009: 85), the pressure he feels to avenge his father in order to continue his legacy and make him part of the living again. If beggars and kings alike become food for the living and in this way get to live through them, this leads to a double conclusion. First of all, it fuels Hamlet's indecision to act decisively to avenge his dead father, as in a way the King is still part of the living. Secondly, it connects to the theme of death as the great social leveller, the ultimate crossing of boundaries between kings and beggars. It can be interpreted to suggest that there is no ultimate difference between individuals, as everyone is the same in death, “your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable / service, two dishes, but to one table – that's the end” (4.3.23-24).

Cannibalistic images are then doubly subversive: firstly because the king's physical body is stripped of its royal power and degraded “to the status as a beggar's corpse” (Loftis, 2009: 87) when it returns to be a part of the living through the cycle of life, and secondly because the play suggests that the body of a king “may go / a progress through the guts of a beggar” (4.3.29-30). This image is subversive not only because it suggests that the body of the king will be debased by the act of being eaten by a beggar, but also because the beggar is placed in a position of power - the eater - in relation to the king - the eaten. One could say that getting to live forever comes at the cost of being stripped of one's position of power and entering the cycle of life on the same level as everyone else. As Keyes eloquently summarized “the great chain of living is a food cycle, and in the end, Hamlet too must be consumed” (Keyes, 1988: 99).

Cannibalistic imagery in the play, then, ultimately links cannibalism to fear and, in particular, fear related to the crossing of boundaries, such as the one separating the dead

from the living. Fear of death is an integral part of the human experience and, apart from the inevitable uncertainty about what exactly awaits us after we embark on our final journey, a crucial part of the fear is connected to the moment in which we are forced to abandon the confines of our physical body.

Cannibalism becomes a way in which such fears are both brought to the extreme and assuaged, all at once. On the one hand, they are brought to an extreme because cannibalism suggests the image of a violent, unnatural and "savage" death. It involves a complete loss of control on one's physical body, which turns into a limp and lifeless corpse whose boundaries are violated in the most horrible way – by another human being, our brethren from whom we expect empathy and respect, especially in the crucially vulnerable moment that is death.

On the other, cannibalism can be used as a way to assuage and exorcise the same fear of death. Many cultures across the globe, for instance, practice endocannibalism, which can involve the consumption of relics in a mortuary context (Moberg, 2013: 276). Cannibalism can then appeal to the primordial instinct of human beings to make their deceased loved ones literally live inside themselves. *Hamlet* even goes a step further, suggesting that the dead inevitably become part of us through the cycle of life, although they are stripped of their individuality and social level – thus both assuring us that there is life after death and fuelling our fear of falling into oblivion, as all that is left of our body becomes unrecognisable food for worms.

2.4.5 Conclusions

It is apparent that Shakespeare employed more literal interpretations of cannibalism on the stage in his early plays, such as in *Titus Andronicus*, and while it continued to be a running theme, it gradually evolved into a more sophisticated imagery throughout his later plays. The pervasiveness of cannibalism in plays ranging from the light-hearted comedy *Much Ado About Nothing*, to ones with dark themes such as *Macbeth,* not only proves how effective and powerful cannibalism is as a metaphor, but also constitutes a testament to its versatility. Since cannibalism involves the crossing of both cultural taboos and of bodily boundaries, it is unsurprising how it can become a symbol of fear.

In the case of Caliban, his name is deeply related to the historical context of colonial expansion of the Early Modern period and the association of the act to savagery. The fact that Caliban is such an ambiguous figure seamlessly mixing bestiality and culture within his character invites the audience to reflect on the fears of the Other and its necessity to define the self: without savageness, order cannot exist. More importantly, *The Tempest* invites the reader to think about the themes of colonial expansion, territorial legitimacy and nature versus nurture.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that Shakespeare does not insist on the physical or metaphorical act of cannibalism in *The Tempest*, where Caliban would have been the perfect character to engage with it, yet fills other plays with such imagery, even if the characters who talk about cannibalism are definitely not savages. This proves that cannibalism was considered a taboo by the Early Modern audience, when it was not unusual to see other kinds of violence represented on stage and witness it in everyday life, but precisely by virtue of being a taboo, it proved to be particularly well-suited to the creation of powerful imagery.

Ultimately, one can find two different ways in which Shakespeare uses cannibalism as a metaphor.

In the first one, cannibalism becomes a way to explore the violation of boundaries within human relationships, especially those between men and women. Given the traditional association between the sin of gluttony and that of lust, it is unsurprising that appetite becomes a metaphor for sexual desire, and cannibalistic imagery serves to question the bodily boundaries that exist between two individuals. Additionally, it can be used as a symbol of fears connected to the violation of the boundaries of the constituted patriarchal order at large, which reflected the on-going debate on the topic of gender roles in the Early Modern period.

In other plays, such as *Hamlet*, cannibalism is used to explore the boundary between life and death, ultimately both evoking and exorcising the fear of death that is shared by all humans. Cannibalism contains multitudes: it represents violent death at the hand of other humans, as well as rebirth within others through the cycle of life.

Final conclusions

This thesis tried to identify what exactly reading Shakespeare from the point of view of food adds to the interpretation of his plays, especially for a modern reader.

It appears that an analysis of food in Shakespeare is undoubtedly informed by the context he lived in - so the playwright's texts and the work of dietary writers, as well as historical conditions, are all factors which have to be considered together. What results from the analysis is that the relationship Early Moderns had with food was complex and multi-faceted, involving economic circumstances, social aspirations, national identity, physical health, and self-worth. Given the complexity of discourse regarding food in the 16th century, events centred around food such as banquets were also invested with complex meanings. Such culture appeared to have influenced Shakespeare, as food consumption, its representations and events focusing on food also proved to be as important as food itself in his work.

A feature that emerged is that food was sometimes referenced literally and shown on stage, making it a device to keep the audience interested, as is the case of the banquet. More often, food was represented metaphorically, proving to be a versatile literary device to convey feelings belonging to the whole spectrum of human emotion, from grief to lust.

Regardless, in both cases, food in Shakespeare assumed an ambivalent meaning which not only reflects the attitude of the playwright, but also that of his culture at large. In its first interpretation, food is more comedic and becomes the fulcrum around which celebrations can be organised, as well as a consuming force, ideal to represent sexual desire and lust for life. Moreover, food can acquire a more disturbing meaning. Joyous celebrations such as banquets can be hastily broken or bring disorder. In the same way, hunger can be excessive and become greed or gluttony, or even turn cannibalistic. Obesity can provide a perfect example of Shakespeare's ambivalence of attitude towards food consumption: on the one hand it can be a source of hilarity, as seen in Falstaff's case, one of the most celebrated comic characters of the Bard's canon, but at the same time fat bodies are represented as grotesque and become the visual representation of the most unruly and repressed aspects of Early Modern society.

This thesis focuses on the past but also gestures towards the present: then, as now, theories of food and drink and food choices about eating and drinking are informed by physical health, self-worth, economic circumstances, social aspirations and national identity. It can, then, speak in a very real way to modern readers. Although we do not share many of the beliefs and values typical of Early Modern people, we resemble them more than we might think: like them, we believe that food can bring diseases or and health complications, but it also possesses the power to heal and influence our emotional well-being, which makes understanding what they thought all the more relevant.

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