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THE IMAGISTIC FEAST: FEEDING IMAGERY IN SELECTED PLAYS OF SHAKESPEARE

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FEEDING IMAGERY IN SELECTED PLAYS OF SHAKESPEARE

Nancy Glass Little

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THE IMAGISTIC FEAST:

FEEDING IMAGERY IN SELECTED PLAYS OF SHAKESPEARE

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Abstract

The Imagistic Feast:
Feeding Imagery in Selected Plays of Shakespeare

By Nancy Glass Little

Shakespeare's virtuosity often manifests itself through finely honed imagery--a fact well-documented by scholars. However, my study presents a sustained treatment of one image pattern--feeding imagery--that has received little critical notice. This study explores Shakespeare's comprehensive use of feeding imagery consisting of several complementary imagistic strands: predatory imagery (including beasts of prey, sexual appetite, and malignant disease), garden imagery, earth-mother imagery, and cannibal imagery. In addition, we look at the symbolic significance of banquets eaten and not eaten. Through the pervasive use of feeding imagery, Shakespeare examines the nature of man and the world of which he is a part.

The first chapter sets up the parameters of the study, explaining how eight plays are presented in pairs chosen to show feeding imagery linked to the theme of nurture and the human condition. In Chapter Two, Titus Andronicus and The Merchant of Venice illustrate the consistency of this image pattern in early tragedy and comedy, showing an array of

predators in the fictive worlds of Rome and Venice. Chapters Three and Four treat the tragedies of Shakespeare's greatest period: Hamlet and Othello show self-destructive appetite manifested in lust, disease, and poison while King Lear and Macbeth provide a context for discussing the effects of political hunger, with fruition achieved only at the expense of personal sterility. In Chapter Five, we examine how The Tempest, reversing the "feast-won, fast-lost" issue of Timon of Athens, provides a symbolic resolution to the literal feast. Together these last two plays make Shakespeare's most extensive statement on nurture, showing that physical sustenance is not the "bread" by which man ultimately lives.

Chapter Six concludes that feeding imagery comprises an important thematic statement on the nature of man and the nurture required for spiritual fruition and that Shakespeare's artistry progresses significantly from simple figurative language in the earlier plays to complex symbolism in the later works. Feeding imagery, I suggest, provides an important new imagistic perspective through which to view the selected plays and invites application to other plays of the canon.

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I wish to acknowledge the life-long inspiration of Dr. Margaret W. Pepperdene, Professor of English at Agnes Scott College, who introduced me to Shakespeare's bountiful feast through her sensitive presentation of King Lear. Also, I express appreciation to Dr. John N. McDaniel and Dr. Ayne C. Durham, who have led me to a more mature understanding of Shakespeare's works. Finally, to my husband, Herb, who has been incisive critic, insightful listener, and supportive friend, I express deep gratitude.

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Chapter One

Introduction

The banquet table is in readiness. The guests are gathered. Macbeth lifts his cup in a toast signifying concord and unity for Scotland under a new king. But the toast is interrupted by a murderer, blood still evident on his face. The new king cannot take his seat among the guests, for the stool reserved for Macbeth is auspiciously occupied--by the Ghost of Banquo, symbolizing his lineage securely planted on the throne. Lady Macbeth urges the guests to leave without regard for decorum. The banquet that began with pomp is aborted in chaos, the food never tasted. From this point on, Macbeth realizes that all his tomorrows are but tedious todays, a seemingly endless span of sleepless nights and bitter days during which he is excluded eternally from the community of man and the peace of self-integrity. In this pivotal scene, as in many others throughout the canon, William Shakespeare moves from literal event to figurative meaning. Over and over the playwright takes the simple act of eating--sustainer of physical man--to make a statement about spiritual man.

Throughout his plays, Shakespeare searches for a means to express the human condition. His search is not unique--indeed, his is the basic search of all literature. The

picture of man that emerges is the result of many variations on a single theme: Man is poised between beast and angel, physical and spiritual, balanced precariously between extremes that war constantly for supremacy. The uniqueness of Shakespeare's search to express the universal condition of man is in the complexity of his vision and in the imagination that gives impetus to the whole. Shakespeare takes a simple, everyday notion such as feeding and examines it from every angle, following the notion through its many connotations. Shaped by his imagination, the literal act becomes a simile, a metaphor, a symbol; and each repetition of the idea increases its ramifications until the cumulative word pictures convey the theme of the entire play. Not only does Shakespeare's imagination function in a single play to bring about this thematic unity sustained through the image pattern, but also his imagination spans from play to play and genre to genre, often extending an image pattern until it links groups of plays. Such a thematic pattern is the feeding imagery.

The consistent and pervasive feeding imagery in Shakespeare's works has been left virtually untouched through four centuries of indefatigable research into Shakespeare's dramatic art. We find a phrase here, a sentence there, occasionally a paragraph, rarely a few pages in the criticism directed at the work of the master playwright. Yet I am convinced that feeding imagery is a major pattern throughout the Shakespearean

canon. I believe that feeding imagery is due a full treatment since it is an overarching pattern and also an indication of Shakespeare's thematic and artistic development from early plays to fully mature ones. In addition to linking earlier and later plays, this pervasive pattern also links comedy and tragedy, making each less polemic. Indeed, the consistency of Shakespeare's developing thought and style is remarkable when we view it from this particular imagistic perspective. Many of the disparities between such apparently different plays as Titus Andronicus and The Tempest vanish--as if a Prospero had wielded his magic--when one looks instead at the similar concepts treated in the two. In like manner, these similarities exist throughout the Shakespearean canon. Thus, the present study focuses on an analysis of Shakespeare's feeding imagery within a selected group of plays.

While the basic feeding motif can be given a name, the pattern itself includes a number of complementary images: predatory imagery (including beasts of prey, sexual appetite, and malignant disease), garden imagery, earth-mother imagery, and cannibal imagery. In addition, banquets eaten and not eaten take on symbolic significance. Seldom does one type of image appear in isolation. In fact, the significance of feeding imagery lies in the intertwining quality of the several strands comprised by the whole. Rather than extricate each strand as a discrete unit, I have, therefore,

chosen to treat the total feeding concept in the context of a group of plays. This treatment is important since it allows us to see the consistency in Shakespeare's developing artistry as well as the underlying unity of image and theme. The eight plays to be considered represent early and late works as well as comedy and tragedy. Titus Andronicus and The Merchant of Venice are paired to show feeding imagery in the earliest tragedy juxtaposed to similar imagery in an early comedy. The cannibal meal in Titus Andronicus evokes our conventional response to horror; however, the implied cannibalism in The Merchant of Venice is at least as horrible, perhaps more so, since it appears in the guise of comedy. Timon of Athens revolves around feasting and fasting. Similarly, the disappearing banquet in The Tempest has a central thematic function while the anagrammatic cannibal, Caliban, is the eternally enigmatic character of the play and perhaps of the canon. The central chapters of my study treat the four great tragedies from the perspective of feeding imagery, pairing Hamlet with Othello and King Lear with Macbeth. Sexual appetite in Hamlet and Othello is an extension of the overarching feeding imagery. In King Lear and Macbeth, Goneril and Lady Macbeth are personifications of the earth-mother, "nurturing" their husbands in similar ways but with very different outcomes. The emphasis of my study is on tragedies because feeding imagery lends itself to a tragic

view of man's condition; however, the use of the same imagery in both comedy and tragedy is of itself an important fact that requires us to ask whether the difference between comedy and tragedy is not, after all, rather small. Feeding, either in tragic or comic mode, is inextricably linked to man's mortality; yet the concept of nurture is no less closely linked to man's spiritual immortality.

The primary characteristic of an iterative pattern such as feeding imagery is its flexibility. A wide range of suggestion can be conveyed within a single, comprehensive pattern. For example, feeding imagery can denote a character's nature, as it does so effectively with Shylock, for whom a pound of human flesh has no more value than an equal amount of the flesh of livestock. The same imagery can be applied as well to an entire society, like that of Hamlet's Denmark that metaphorically feeds itself on sensuality and custom. In like manner, Shakespeare extends the imagery to include Lady Macbeth, who offers gall in place of the nurturing mother's milk expected of her gender. In addition to depicting character or tone, an iterative image pattern can be a staple of plot development, a fact clearly illustrated by Timon of Athens--a play whose plot revolves around banqueting and fasting. Also, in Macbeth the banquet scene where Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost is integral to the plot, just as in The Tempest the disappearing banquet is essential.

At the thematic level, King Lear presents a picture of cosmic greed, man as predatory master. Examples of the versatility of feeding imagery are almost inexhaustible--clearly indicating both the need for and the difficulty with a comprehensive study of feeding imagery.

A second main characteristic of a repeating image is its subtle blending of divergent resources in order that the divergence ceases to be a factor. For instance, feeding imagery is a synthesis of thought from Classical through Elizabethan philosophy, encompassing both pagan and Christian traditions. The earth-mother imagery, for instance, with its emphasis on the paradoxical nurture and destruction of its own fruits, is clearly pagan in origin, reflecting Classical mythology with its stories of Isis, Demeter, Ceres, and others. Yet this same earth-mother imagery is implicit in the book of Genesis where the image derives from the story of the Garden of Eden. This biblical perspective is evident in Hamlet and Othello, too, where evil is sown and unweeded gardens produce perverse fruit. New Testament theology is represented as well by passages such as Timon's parody of the Last Supper of Christ. The predatory beast imagery that is a part of the feeding motif reflects the animal stereotypes and emblems of both Classical fable and the Medieval bestiary. Shakespeare frequently draws on the connotations of certain animals in his depiction of people.

Thus, it is easy to see that Shakespeare uses feeding imagery to synthesize his heritage from Classical, biblical, Medieval, and Renaissance thought. This blending of diverse resources within a central image pattern does not result in an unstructured, disordered work; rather it yields a carefully structured, highly ordered fictive world that is richer because of the allusions it embodies.

A final, and extremely important, characteristic of an image pattern is the artistic discipline it fosters. To sustain an image such as the feeding pattern throughout a complex work like King Lear, for example, requires a highly skilled creative genius; yet it must never seem overworked or obtrusive. Through feeding imagery, Shakespeare suggests but never pushes his point. We can read a given play and respond to its thematic content without being directly conscious of an iterative image pattern. We can even read an entire group of plays without conscious awareness of such a pattern appearing in different guise from play to play, situation to situation. But recognition of the pattern, whether within a single play or a group of plays, carries certain reward--for that recognition generally includes a heightened appreciation for the literary artist and his specialized tool, the word. Shakespeare selects a word for its denotative value, but he applies it so as to maximize its connotative value. In the first place, he uses a word

for the pithy image it conveys. In the second, he uses a word for its resonating potential: The single, well-chosen word or phrase contributes to a cumulative effect in which the whole is much greater than the sum of its parts. Certainly Shakespeare's feeding imagery exemplifies this cumulative quality with the resulting statement being a significant contribution to his moral vision.

Thus, Shakespeare takes a simple idea, that of feeding, and utilizes it in almost limitless combinations at both literal and figurative levels. Through this iterative imagery, he shows that man, the child of the earth-mother, can either nurture or devour his fellow man and himself as well. When man chooses to devour or when he allows himself to be devoured, he may be, in Hamlet's phrase, "the paragon of animals" but beast he is nonetheless. The Shakespearean canon reverberates, through both tragedy and comedy, with individuals who seem more beast than angel, more beast than man, in their choice of vengeance over virtue, of physical appetite over spiritual nourishment. Yet in spite of the generally dark tone of many of Shakespeare's plays, the final statement is Shakespeare's affirmation of man's nature expressed through Prospero, who takes away a physical feast in order to offer a spiritual one:

The rarer action is
In virtue than in vengeance.
(Tmp V.i.27-28)[1]

[1] All references to William Shakespeare's works are to The Riverside Shakespeare, 2 vols., ed. G. Blakemore Evans et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1974).

Chapter Two

Appetite and Inverted Nurture: Feeding Imagery in *Titus Andronicus* and *The Merchant of Venice*

A cursory reading of *Titus Andronicus* and *The Merchant of Venice* shows little similarity between the two: *Titus Andronicus* is clearly a tragedy while *The Merchant of Venice* is, at least in structure, clearly a comedy. However, the pervasive dark tone of *The Merchant of Venice* causes us to stop short, reread with an ear attuned to its mixed tonalities, and consider carefully the possible relationship between the two plays. Reading both *Titus Andronicus* and *The Merchant of Venice* from the perspective of feeding imagery with its wide range of suggestion reveals several interesting parallels between the two plays. In particular, feeding imagery conveys the focus of *lex talionis* (the law of retaliation) that is central to both plots. Furthermore, a primary issue of feeding imagery in both *Titus Andronicus* and *The Merchant of Venice* is that of man's nature and its bearing on his values. This image pattern also comprises the thematic issue of the natural world and its role in both plays. Finally, conveyed by feeding imagery in both plays and synthesizing other parallels is the ultimate ambiguity of any viable ethical system. Two conclusions emerge from the linking of *Titus*

Andronicus and The Merchant of Venice through this imagistic perspective: First, the contribution of feeding imagery to each play's organic structure becomes clear. Second, the line between tragedy and comedy becomes less distinct, resulting in an awareness that lines in life are rarely drawn in undeflectable form.

The Centrality of Lex Talionis

Titus Andronicus is a tragedy in the revenge tradition. As Madeleine Doran points out, in the Elizabethan drama, revenge is a "motive for opposition and counter-action out of which exciting conflict might come" rather than a separate class within the tragedy.[1] It is precisely this characteristic--revenge as motive--that gives impetus to both Titus Andronicus and The Merchant of Venice. However, it is the ambiguity within the revenge as carried out by Titus and by Shylock that provides significant parallels between the plays. Much of that ambiguity results from Shakespeare's insistent use of feeding imagery, a logical depiction of the lex talionis principle. Lex talionis, or the notion of retaliation commensurate with a given crime or injury, is based on a primitive concept of justice. Implicit in this

[1] Endeavors of Art: A Study of Form in Elizabethan Drama (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1954), p. 130.

concept of eye-for-eye and tooth-for-tooth is what Norman Holland calls "the law of the talon,"[2] recognizing the propensity of the law to the predatory beast. Shakespeare shows this concept of primitive justice operating in the fictive worlds of fourteenth-century Rome and sixteenth-century Venice, creating worlds that look remarkably similar and that share an unmistakable universality.

Titus Andronicus opens with a Roman victory over the Goths and with the election of a new Roman emperor in progress. Titus himself is not present in the first dialogue, but commendations of him as Roman military leader permeate the scene. When Titus appears for the first time, his oratory is both eloquent and mild. However, his ready agreement to sacrifice Alarbus, "the proudest prisoner of the Goths" (I.i.96) and son of the Gothic queen Tamora, signals an early instigation of the revenge plot. Lex talionis develops as no surprise once the sacrifice of Alarbus has taken place. Titus, who initially seemed so noble, now appears in a different light. Several serious errors quickly undermine his noble potential. The first error that Titus makes is his choice to support the request of Lucius, his oldest son, for blood:

[2] The Shakespearean Imagination (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964), p. 98.

> Give us the proudest prisoner of the Goths,
> That we may hew his limbs and on a pile
> Ad manes fratrum sacrifice his flesh
> Before this earthy prison of their bones,
> That so the shadows be not unappeas'd,
> Nor we disturb'd with prodigies on earth.
> (I.i.96-101)

Titus justifies the barbarous sacrifice as coming from religious motivation, a "sacrifice" in name only and a serious error in judgment, which is pointed up by the plea of the Gothic Queen Tamora for mercy on behalf of her son:

> Andronicus, stain not thy tomb with blood!
> Wilt thou draw near the nature of the gods?
> Draw near them then in being merciful:
> Sweet mercy is nobility's true badge.
> Thrice-noble Titus, spare my first-born son.
> (I.i.116-20)

Justice versus mercy: The essential theme of the tragedy is sharply outlined. Lex talionis, aligned with an untempered justice, propels the plot. Shakespeare introduces feeding imagery at this point with a single reference that gains in importance throughout its repetitions in the drama. Lucius makes the first reference to "feed":

> See, lord and father, how we have perform'd
> Our Roman rites. Alarbus' limbs are lopp'd,
> And entrails feed the sacrificing fire,
> Whose smoke like incense doth perfume the sky.
> (I.i.142-45)

If we now question whether the perfume is not more akin to the sulphurous fumes of hell than the fragrance of heaven,

subsequent events make the answer clear. It is equally clear that the feeding is destructive; what nurtures the sacrificial fire must, on the other hand, deplete the honor of the Andronici.

Juxtaposed to the sacrifice of Alarbus is the election of Saturninus as emperor of Rome. Again, as in his endorsing the sacrifice, Titus' affirmative voice is decisive in the choice. However, his endorsement of Saturninus is his second major error in judgment. His affirmation contains an echo of feeding imagery through its emphasis on "ripen":

> this suit I make,
> That you create our emperor's eldest son,
> Lord Saturnine, whose virtues will, I hope,
> Reflect on Rome as Titan's rays on earth,
> And ripen justice in this commonweal.
> (I.i.223-27)

Unfortunately, Titus' expectation is naive. Already Shakespeare has indicated that the fruits of Saturninus' reign will ripen at best as a perverted form of justice: lex talionis; for from the first, as Alan Sommers says, Saturninus is depicted in terms of "shifty self-will, ingratitude, vain prejudice, and rash injustice" while the other contender, Bassianus, is seen "as potentially the ideal ruler, by 'Roman' principles."[3] After the election, ensuing

[3] Sommers makes this point in his excellent study "'Wilderness of Tigers': Structure and Symbolism in Titus Andronicus, Essays in Criticism, 10 (1960), 275-89. The specific references are on p. 279.

developments make the negative conclusion overt. Saturninus claims Lavinia, Titus' daughter, as his bride; Titus affirms the selection; and Bassianus challenges the emperor's right to her based on a prior claim under Roman justice. In the fray that follows, Titus kills his own son, Mutius, in defense of the emperor's claim to Lavinia. Although Titus acts, supposedly, in support of justice as represented by his emperor, Shakespeare emphasizes the flouting of true justice and the release of chaos inherent in the son's murder. The folly of Titus' third error, defending the emperor's claim to Lavinia at the expense of murder, is further underscored when Saturninus eagerly changes his choice of bride from Lavinia to the Gothic Queen Tamora. At the first opportunity, Saturninus displays his fickle nature again as he names the once-revered Titus a traitor. With Titus disfavored and the protean emperor enamoured with Tamora, the new empress of Rome intensifies the revenge motif and its complementary feeding imagery through her suggestion to Saturninus:

> Dissemble all your griefs and discontents.
> You are but newly planted in your throne;
> Lest then the people, and patricians too,
> Upon a just survey take Titus' part,
> And so supplant you for ingratitude,
> Which Rome reputes to be a heinous sin,
> Yield at entreats; and then let me alone,
> I'll find a day to massacre them all,
> . . . . .
> And make them know what 'tis to let a queen
> Kneel in the streets and beg for grace in vain.
> (I.i.443-55)

Shakespeare's description of the new emperor as "planted" on the throne is significant, for it echoes the earlier reference in garden imagery to "ripen justice." However, by the end of Act I, there is no doubt that what has been planted is evil at the roots. The sacrifice of Tamora's son Alarbus not only feeds the sacrificial fire but also the incipient revenge motive, setting in motion the destructive principle of lex talionis that dominates the rest of the play in a cycle of revenge-counter revenge that ends, finally, in the cannibal banquet served to Tamora and Saturninus.

While lex talionis seems particularly appropriate to propel the plot of a tragedy such as Titus Andronicus, its relevance in a comedy such as The Merchant of Venice is less apparent. Nonetheless, the centrality of the eye-for-eye, tooth-for-tooth theme is as intentional in the latter as in the former. As in Titus Andronicus, lex talionis is depicted in feeding imagery of The Merchant of Venice.

From the beginning of this comedy to the end, a feeling of disquiet permeates the whole. Although the main plot is a fanciful love story culminating in multiple marriages, the second plot, that of Shylock the Jew, tends to overshadow the first. The link between the two plots is Antonio, whose generosity in aiding the love plot initiates the lex talionis motif of the Shylock plot. Thus, Shakespeare enmeshes the

revenge motive in the romantic frame story; however, the character of Shylock looms so large and is delineated with such a masterful stroke that his tragedy tempers the comedic atmosphere. The pervasive dark tone does not emanate from Shylock alone, as he himself points out. In Venice Christian is as vengeful as Jew:

> If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge. The villainy you teach me, I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction.
> (III.i.68-73)

Several examples of Christian vengeance are evident in the play. Time after time Shylock is baited or derided by the so-called Christians. Antonio acknowledges that he has spit on Shylock and will likely do so again, thus suggesting that Shylock is undigestible or unpalatable. And Lorenzo steals both Shylock's daughter and his ducats. Even Portia plays with Shylock, feeding his self-esteem only to undermine it subsequently. Undercutting the love story, then, is the notion of revenge or lex talionis justice. The most overt example is the flesh bond that becomes a fixed idea to Shylock, fleshing out Antonio's metaphorical spitting by reversing the insult. A close reading of the play shows that Jew and Christian alike are concerned with having a pound of flesh.

In keeping with the comic conception of The Merchant of Venice, most of the revenge is verbal rather than actual. Shakespeare uses feeding imagery to suggest the incisive meaning beneath the innocuous surface. Act I, Scene iii, exemplifies this verbal revenge. In this scene introducing Shylock, feeding imagery is used to develop his character. Just after the loan is discussed, Bassanio invites Shylock to dinner. Following a tirade on his aversion to pork, Shylock expresses his feeling against Antonio in an aside:

> How like a fawning publican he looks!
> I hate him for he is a Christian;
> But more, for that in low simplicity
> He lends out money gratis, and brings down
> The rate of usance here with us in Venice.
> If I can catch him once upon the hip,
> I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him.
> He hates our sacred nation, and he rails
> Even there where merchants most do congregate
> On me, my bargains, and my well-won thrift,
> Which he calls interest. Cursed be my tribe
> If I forgive him!
>
> (I.iii.41-52)

Shylock's phrase "feed fat" resonates moments later when he quips to Antonio, "Your worship was the last man in our mouths" (I.iii.60). A bit later, after Shylock tells the story of Jacob and the pied lambs, Antonio takes his portion from the verbal feast. He says of Shylock:

> Mark you this, Bassanio,
> The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.
> An evil soul producing holy witness

Is like a villain with a smiling cheek,
A goodly apple rotten at the heart.
(I.iii.97-101)

An "apple rotten at the heart" metaphorically suggests that Shylock stands for the opposite of sustenance. The cumulative effect of these feeding images is large; together they place feeding at the forefront of the play. When Shylock states the flesh bond, the context of feeding is already well-established, thus making the ramifications of the bond clear. He may say that the bond is proposed "in a merry sport" (I.iii.145), but the principle of lex talionis suffuses the scene.

The motive for revenge is not as clear in The Merchant of Venice as it is in Titus Andronicus.[4] Symbolically, it seems to emerge from two divergent world views, the parsimony of Shylock set against the largesse of Antonio and his world. Yet the issue is never defined, and ambiguity is its main characteristic. Antonio sees Shylock as a rotten apple, perhaps indicating an abortive source of nourishment. This idea is evident, too, in the complaint of Launcelot against the stinginess of Shylock's household:

My master's a very Jew.
Give him a present! give him a halter.

[4] For a recent account of the stubborn ambiguities and divided critical responses to The Merchant of Venice, see Norman Rabkin, Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 1-32.

> I am famish'd in his service; you may tell
> every finger I have with my ribs.
> (II.ii.104-07)

This same idea is repeated by Jessica when she bids farewell to Launcelot: "I am sorry thou wilt leave my father so. / Our house is hell, and thou, a merry devil, / Didst rob it of some taste of tediousness" (II.iii.1-3). Again the suggestion is that Shylock's fare is never satisfying to others. "Taste" is an unusual word to link to the mood of a household and, therefore, stands out sharply. The persistence of feeding imagery indicates a conscious effort on Shakespeare's part to display the Jew as one who feeds himself at the expense of others but who withholds a like nurture from his fellow man. If we view Shylock from this perspective, his parsimony is as vengeful as the flesh bond appears to show.

The largesse of Antonio's world is an irritant to Shylock just as the Jew's frugality also irritates Antonio and Bassanio. Shakespeare shows the Gentiles' expansive way of life in a number of ways, but one of the most interesting is related to feeding imagery. The Christians are constantly talking about an approaching mealtime. Where Shylock hoards nourishment, they apparently lavish it. Their every activity is stated in terms like "at suppertime" (II.ii.6); "soon at supper" (II.iii.5); "Return in haste, for I do feast to-night" (II.ii.171); "I'll end my exhortation after dinner" (II.iv.5); "We will slink away in

supper-time" (II.iv.1). Indeed, mealtime is used as a type of clock by which to measure all things. Also, while a feast never occurs on stage, several are discussed--a feast at Belmont for a suitor, a feast in Venice for Bassanio, a feast in Padua after Shylock's trial, a marriage feast for the two nuptial couples.[5] In a play equating human flesh with animal flesh, this emphasis on food is deliberate. To Shylock, the perpetual feasting of the Christians represents conviviality and food for the spirit--an alien way of life that he cannot stomach, just as he cannot abide Antonio's gratis lending of money, the "sound of shallow fopp'ry" (II.v.35), or an ingratiating attitude.[6] Although one cannot point to a specific issue or event in The Merchant of Venice--such as the sacrifice in Titus Andronicus--as a motive to set revenge in motion, within Shylock's mind a motive exists. At least Shylock points to several motives: "ancient grudge" (I.iii.47), rate of usance, spit and spite, Jessica's actions, and "a certain loathing" (IV.i.60). These motives we can name, yet neither one nor all are entirely convincing. If

[5] Leo Rocklas in "'A Dish of Doves': The Merchant of Venice," Journal of English Literary History, 40 (1973), 339-51, remarks on the frequent dinner invitations and related references, but he interprets their use differently. See especially p. 356.

[6] See Barbara K. Lewalski, "Biblical Allusion and Allegory in The Merchant of Venice," Shakespeare Quarterly, 13 (1962), 327-43, especially p. 330, for a similar interpretation of the contrast between the two ways of life.

motive Shylock has, it is much less conclusive than the murder of a son as in Titus Andronicus. The notion that begins as merry jest grows and focuses, becoming fullblown lex talionis. No longer is the pound of flesh a figurative bond; Shylock wants Antonio's life, as his words clearly show: "I will have the heart of him if he forfeit" (III.i.127).

Man's Nature and Its Bearing on His Values As Conveyed in Feeding Imagery

Shakespeare frequently uses comparison between man and animal to evaluate particular behavioral patterns and their significance. Most of these comparisons point up some derogatory quality in an individual or in a group. Therefore, the specific animal selected to convey the comparison is an index to the character to whom applied and, as such, provides a clear indication of how Shakespeare intends us to regard the character. Sometimes the character himself alludes to a type of animal, thus providing the clue. At other times, the clue appears in dialogue or description about the character. The references are seldom, if ever, random; they suggest from yet one more perspective the prodigious artistry and sense of unity in Shakespeare's plays. Clearly, the well-chosen animal emblems in both Titus Andronicus and The Merchant of Venice contribute to Shakespeare's central purpose. In both

man is depicted as predatory beast: Rome becomes a "wilderness of tigers" (III.i.54), and Venice is its analogue.

Audrey Yoder makes an important statement concerning Shakespeare's animal comparisons, observing that Shakespeare makes a distinction between "animal" and "beast." The first term, "animal," refers to any living creature of the natural world who shares that world in harmony with man. The second term, "beast," is derogatory and refers to a lack of reason. As Yoder notes, Hamlet's great apostrophe on man refers to man as animal in recognition that "A beast 'wants discourse of reason,' and it is men and women who abandon themselves to their passions that become beasts."[7] In both Titus Andronicus and The Merchant of Venice, the concept of man as beast is utilized extensively. This conscious use of the predatory beast analogy is one of the main ways in which Shakespeare signals how we are to regard a character such as Tamora, Aaron, or Shylock. In addition, in Titus Andronicus in particular, the allusions to non-predatory animals can provide insight into such characters as Lavinia and Bassianus. Shakespeare's deliberate selection of an animal emblem according to its predatory or non-predatory nature is a logical extension of the feeding image pattern.

[7] Animal Analogy in Shakespeare's Character Portrayal (New York: King's Crown Press, 1947), p. 61.

In Titus Andronicus, the most obvious animal emblem is that of predatory felines: the tiger, the lion, the panther. Other emblems coupled with these present Tamora, Aaron, and her sons, as Albert Tricomi says, as "savage carnivores preying upon the Andronici, who are the flesh and blood of civilized Rome."[8] Set against the predators, the emblems of the Andronici who "are depicted as the anguished human victims of an animal barbarism"[9] give us insight into the play's events. The dramatist uses the contrast to show intrinsically different natures, thus clarifying deeds that otherwise could be misleading.

The Gothic Queen Tamora is associated with feline predators in three instances. Indirectly, Shakespeare suggests that she possesses the fierceness of a lion although, unlike the lion, she never has her claws "par'd all away" (II.iii.152). The image more directly associated with her is that of the tiger. Lavinia uses this analogy when she pleads with Tamora:

> O Tamora, thou bearest a woman's face--
> . . . . .
> When did the tiger's young ones teach the dam?
> O, do not learn her wrath--she taught it thee;
> The milk thou suck'st from her did turn to marble,
> Even at thy teat thou hadst thy tyranny;
> Yet every mother breeds not sons alike--
> (II.iii.136, 142-46)

[8] "The Mutilated Garden in Titus Andronicus," Shakespeare Studies, 9 (1976), 99.

[9] Tricomi, p. 99.

A reiteration of the "tiger" imagery occurs in Lucius' words concluding the play:

> As for that ravenous tiger Tamora,
> No funeral rite, nor man in mourning weed,
> No mournful bell shall ring her burial,
> But throw her forth to beasts and birds to prey:
> Her life was beastly and devoid of pity,
> And being dead, let birds on her take pity.
> (V.iii.195-200)

Lavinia's words show that a woman's face conceals the predatory nature of the tiger. The allusion to mother's milk further conveys the malevolent nature and is a prototype of the description that Shakespeare later employs to characterize Lady Macbeth. This particular image implies the dual nature of the mother archetype who both nurtures and devours; it prepares for the cannibal banquet in Act V, where Tamora eats her own sons. At the play's conclusion, Lucius' reiteration of "ravenous tiger" serves to underline the consistency with which Shakespeare depicts Tamora. It is the woman who early states the play's justice-mercy theme in eloquent language; it is the beast whose deeds of prey reveal the hollowness of the words and the potential for such degradation in man. As always in the Shakespearean canon, what one does and is speaks with far greater force than what one says or purports to be.

In like manner, Aaron is depicted as predator. Tricomi observes correctly that the four creatures who comprise Aaron's

description are all "dark creatures of the earth"[10]: the adder, the raven, the fly, and the panther. Aaron applies the "adder" reference to himself. When Tamora misinterprets his brooding visage as amorous, he explains that the reason behind the look is vengeance and compares his "deadly-standing eye" to "an adder when she doth unroll to do some fatal execution" (II.iii.32, 35-36). Later, when the devious Aaron brings Titus the request for his hand in ransom for two sons, Titus refers to Aaron as "raven" (III.i.158), with apparent reference to his black color. In the fly-killing scene, Aaron is depicted as "black ill-favor'd fly" (III.ii.66). While Tricomi notes the relevance of these dark creatures to Aaron, he does not appear to notice two other qualities shared by adder, raven, and fly: All are small by comparison to the other beasts of prey depicted in Titus Andronicus, and all are swift in movement. Both the small size and the quick, darting motion are assets in the analogy. The relatively small size serves to obscure the deadly potential of each, just as the swiftness allows the mobility necessary to the manipulative Aaron. Like Ben Jonson's Mosca or Shakespeare's Iago (for whom Aaron is prototype), Aaron must be both unobtrusive and mobile to carry out his various tasks. The panther image is perhaps less imaginative

[10] Tricomi, p. 99.

than the other three since it complements Tamora's "tiger" primarily, but it serves well to convey darkness of color and deed.

Both Lavinia and Bassianus are characterized not only as non-predatory animals, but also as prey for the drama's rapacious beasts. Titus ironically initiates the association of Lavinia-as-deer when he invites Saturninus to hunt the panther and the deer.[11] The identification of Lavinia with deer is made explicit, however, by two references to her as "dainty doe"--the first by Aaron (II.i.117), the second by Demetrius (II.ii.26). Also, Marcus describes her wandering in the forest after the rape, "as doth the deer / That hath receiv'd some unrecuring wound" (III.i.89-90). The association of Bassianus-as-lamb occurs only once, when Martius falls into the pit devised by Aaron. Martius states the significance of the blood sacrifice, although he cannot know fully what it means:

> Lord Bassianus lies beray'd in blood,
> All on a heap, like to a slaughtered lamb,
> In this detested, dark, blood-drinking pit.
> (II.iii.222-24)

The "slaughtered lamb" is an appropriate emblem for Bassianus, who represents the Roman ideal that is threatened by Gothic

[11] Tricomi also makes this point. See p. 96.

barbarism.[12] The murder of Bassianus is, of course, integral to the revenge plot, but its importance here is in relation to the animal symbolism in the play. While the lamb suggests purity of ideal, the "slaughtered lamb" implies the sacrifice of that ideal, with the "blood-drinking pit" connoting hell itself. Thus, the sacrifice of Bassianus is an offering to the power of evil, an evil Shakespeare seems to associate with earth itself.

Throughout Titus Andronicus, the carefully delineated predatory imagery complements the depiction of lex talionis. The same is true, although in more concentrated form, in The Merchant of Venice. The emblematic depiction of Shylock helps to convey Shakespeare's intent in the play, focusing on Shylock's bestiality.

Shakespeare's portrayal of Shylock as canine is designed to evoke antipathy for the character. Although those around Shylock are not without their own guilt, their natures are not portrayed so savagely as his. Shakespeare's association of Shylock with the dog works well, for it allows Shakespeare to draw together several facets of his nature: his biting personality, his wolf-like savageness, and his understanding of man as physical being.

[12] See Sommers for an interesting treatment of this idea. Sommers does not discuss the slaughtered lamb emblem, however.

The association of man with dog draws on two traditions, as Audrey Yoder points out: the "Cynic" philosophy and the theory of metempsychosis.[13] The Cynic philosophy was characterized by a particularly biting form of satire; thus, this notion may have been part of Shakespeare's reason for associating Shylock with the dog. As Norman Holland observes, even Shylock's words bite as he "snaps out phrases, mouthing them over and over compulsively."[14] Many of the feeding images connected to him convey this biting or cutting quality. For example, Shylock refers to Antonio as "in our mouths" (I.iii.60) with an obvious double meaning. He also quotes Antonio as calling him "cut-throat dog" (I.iii.111), emphasizing the same quality. The cutting is also implied in the fish-baiting passage since the flesh would first be cut into pieces and used, as Shylock says, "To bait fish withal--if it will feed nothing / else, it will feed my revenge" (III. i.53-54). The same idea is repeated by Salerio: "Never did I know / A creature that did bear the shape of man / So keen and greedy to confound a man" (III.ii.274-76). Salerio's words are pregnant with meaning. "Creature" and "greedy" connote animality; "bear" may well be a pun suggesting beast.

[13] Yoder, pp. 34-35.

[14] Holland, p. 99.

Clearly "keen" connotes both savagery and incisiveness. Shylock himself seems to confirm the identification in his words to Antonio: "Thou call'dst me dog before thou hadst a cause, / But since I am a dog, beware my fangs" (III.iii. 6-7).

The theory of metempsychosis, or transmigration of souls, included the werewolf tradition involving the metamorphosis--voluntary or involuntary--of man into wolf.[15] The suggestion in some of Shakespeare's imagery is that Shylock has a man's body but a wolf's soul. Just before the Jew's trial begins, Gratiano addresses Shylock, alluding to a contemporary case where a similar transmigration supposedly occurred:[16]

> O, be thou damn'd, inexecrable dog!
> And for thy life let justice be accus'd.
> Thou almost mak'st me waver in my faith
> To hold opinion with Pythagoras,
> That souls of animals infuse themselves
> Into the trunks of men. Thy currish spirit
> Govern'd a wolf, who hang'd for human slaughter,
> Even from the gallows did his fell soul fleet,
> And whilst thou layest in thy unhallowed dam,
> Infus'd itself in thee; for thy desires
> Are wolvish, bloody, starv'd, and ravenous.
> (IV.i.128-38)

None of the implications of Shylock's portrait, with its emphasis on canine, would have been lost on the Elizabethan audience. Therefore, it is hard to imagine an authentic

[15] Yoder, p. 35.

[16] Yoder, pp. 35-36.

Shylock sympathetically presented on Shakespeare's stage. Shakespeare goes to great lengths to depict a character who evolves nearer and nearer to bestiality during the course of the drama. Shylock sees in man, including himself, a propensity to bestiality; he, therefore, envisions man feeding off his fellows just as others, in turn, view him as predator. This inclination toward beast is particularly evident in his speech "Hath not a Jew eyes?":

> Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions; fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, heal'd by the same means, warm'd and cool'd by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge. The villainy you teach me, I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction.
> (III.i.59-73)

This speech is so moving in part because it is so enigmatic. We feel in Shylock the tremendous struggle of man to find meaning in his life. Yet we feel just as strongly Shylock's inability to find any meaning beyond the physical level. Shylock lists eyes, hands, and organs as examples of likeness among all men, emphasizing physical likeness. However, he also names "dimensions, senses, affections, passions"--all of which hint at spiritual affinity among all men. But in

explanation of these more intangible spiritual qualities, he juxtaposes such an array of the physical that the spiritual meaning is undercut if not negated. Finally, he concludes this catalogue of shared qualities with a strong statement on revenge as the primary element in human nature. Shylock is ennobled through his struggle to find meaning in human existence, yet his ultimate determination to get revenge attests to his failure to grasp that meaning. Thus, Shylock points out a shared baseness, emphasizing a physical view of man as a whole and himself in particular. This speech epitomizes the ambiguity at the core of The Merchant of Venice, a complex drama that defies easy categorization. We can apply Norman Rabkin's assessment of the play as a whole to Shylock's speech on mankind's similarities:

> We can neither ignore nor answer the questions with which our reason is burdened. It is this quality of our existence that is ultimately suggested by our being tempted to and frustrated by the search for meaning in The Merchant of Venice, this conviction that the world makes sense but that the sense once abstracted no longer fits it. The attempt to state the meaning of the play is therefore not much more likely to produce an accurate account than an attempt to state the meaning of life. But to say that we cannot profitably talk about the meaning of life is not to say that life is meaningless. The Merchant of Venice is a model of our experience, showing us that we need to live as if life has meaning and rules, yet insisting that the meaning is ultimately ineffable and the rules are provisional.[17]

[17] Rabkin, p. 31.

Shylock cannot accept what is "ineffable." Although his speech suggests a faint awareness of something more, he locks himself into a purely physical view of man, and therein lies the poignancy of his speech.

In view of Shylock's perception of man's nature, it is no wonder that he is characterized as canine. At the beginning of the trial scene, in answer to the assertion that the court expects "a gentle answer, Jew!" (IV.i.34), Shylock emphasizes the folly of expecting such from him. He combines two motifs, bestiality and whim, inextricably linking the two. His conclusion is the inevitable result of that linking: His hatred of Antonio is based on whim or passion, not on reason. His statement "So I can give no reason, nor I will not, / More than a lodg'd hate and a certain loathing" (IV.i.59-60) implies a double meaning. Beneath the obvious meaning is a subtle use of "reason" in the Renaissance sense as the opposite of "affection / Mistress of passion" (IV.i.50-51). Shylock's statement can be interpreted, therefore, as his own acknowledgment that his hatred is motivated by passion only and not by reason. He thus implicitly denies his claim to the faculty of reason that separates man from beast. Shylock's motivation is as instinctual as inclinations in nature, as Antonio clearly states:

> I pray you think you question with the Jew:
> You may as well go stand upon the beach
> And bid the main flood bate his usual height;

> You may as well use question with the wolf
> Why he hath made the ewe bleak for the lamb;
> You may as well forbid the mountain pines
> To wag their high tops, and to make no noise
> When they are fretten with the gusts of heaven;
> You may as well do any thing most hard
> As seek to soften that--than which what's harder?--
> His Jewish heart!
>
> (IV.i.69-80)

The Shylock who stands ready to cut his pound of human flesh is the epitome of the beast in man, a truth Shakespeare emphasizes repeatedly through the cumulative feeding imagery.

While the portraits in Titus Andronicus result from a combination of words and deeds, the portrait of Shylock is concentrated more in words than in actions. He whets his knife, but he cuts no pound of flesh. Yet Shylock's world is a world without harmony just as surely as Titus' is. The pervasive dark tone of The Merchant of Venice is deepened by the shadow of the predator--man as predator. Titus' Rome becomes a "wilderness of tigers" (III.i.54), but the beast just as surely peoples Shylock's Venice; both are worlds where mercy is a scarce commodity.

The Paradoxical Natural World and Its Role As Conveyed in Feeding Imagery

Both Titus Andronicus and The Merchant of Venice lead us to ask: What is the source of man's predatory nature? Why is his social world characterized by the principle of

lex talionis? These issues are ontological, and answers can be projected only. However, within the Shakespearean canon, one answer seems to be that the prototype for rapaciousness can be found in the natural world itself. That this impulse for devouring might reside at a level outside man's control is a frightening concept--the essence of tragedy. The exploration of this issue in Shakespeare's work finds a logical vehicle in the feeding imagery. Although the exploration is larger and more overt in Titus Andronicus than in The Merchant of Venice, its presence, once we recognize it in the tragedy, is felt undeniably in the comedy as well. Within the overarching pattern of feeding imagery, three of its strands are particularly evident in Shakespeare's treatment of the ontological issue in the two plays under discussion: the earth-mother imagery, the garden imagery, and the cannibal imagery. One may occur without the others, but the three are complementary.

The metaphor of the earth as archetypal mother is a recurring analogy in Shakespeare's tragedies. Thus, the use of the earth-mother imagery in Titus Andronicus takes on added significance in anticipation of its subsequent use in Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth, and Timon of Athens.[18] Inherent

[18] John E. Hankins, Shakespeare's Derived Imagery (Lawrence: Univ. of Kansas Press, 1953), mentions the references in Romeo and Juliet (II.iii.9-12) and Timon of Athens (IV.iii. 177-79); however, he is in error when he states that "The reference to earth as the mother occurs twice in Shakespeare" (p. 157). I am aware of four instances in the tragedies, and

in the concept of earth-mother is the paradox of nurturing and devouring: The earth is personified as a universal mother who brings forth her children, nurtures them, but eventually devours them, reclaiming them to herself through a seemingly cruel death. Shakespeare would have been familiar with examples of the earth-mother concept from a number of literary sources. John E. Hankins suggests that he could have used Lucretius' De Rerum Natura or La Primaudaye's The French Academie for his immediate source.[19] Although Shakespeare may have found the prototype for his imagery in one of these, he could simply have found the idea in Genesis. In particular, Genesis 4:11-12 appears to be a likely source for the imagery in Titus Andronicus, for the biblical passage is in the context of the Cain-and-Abel story that depicts the first preying of man on his fellow man in terms of murder. Furthermore, in this passage the earth is personified as having a mouth and drinking the blood of Abel:

> Now therefore thou art cursed fro the earth, w[hich] hathe opened her mouth to receiue thy brothers blood from thine hand. When thou

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the figure also occurs in Richard II II.i.40-68, especially 50-51. Some variations exist, but the archetypal imagery is the same.

[19] Hankins, p. 157.

> shalt til the grounde, it shal not henceforthe yelde vnto thee her strength: a vagabonde and a rennegate shalt thou be in the earth.[20]

The suggestion of earth as devourer appears first in Titus Andronicus when Quintus finds his brother Martius trapped in Aaron's pit. Martius refers to "this detested, dark, blood-drinking pit" (II.iii.224), "this fell devouring receptacle" (II.iii.235). Quintus makes the association with mother, referring to "the swallowing womb" (II.iii.239). This last image bears the closest relation to the earth-mother notion since one associates "womb" with birth and nurture while "swallowing womb" suggests the opposite and even evokes the homophonic "tomb." A fuller interpretation of earth as devourer is expressed by Titus before the Senate:

> Let my tears staunch the earth's dry appetite,
> My sons' sweet blood will make it shame and blush.
> O earth, I will befriend thee more with rain,
> That shall distill from these two ancient urns,
> Than youthful April shall with all his show'rs.
> In summer's drought I'll drop upon thee still,
> In winter with warm tears I'll melt the snow,
> And keep eternal spring-time on thy face,
> So thou refuse to drink my dear sons' blood.
> (III.i.14-22)

These passages serve as preparation for the cannibal banquet in Act V. Titus prefaces the banquet with another reference to the paradoxical earth-mother, specifically linking Tamora

[20] All references to The Bible are to The Geneva Bible (Geneva: Rouland Hall, 1560).

to the archetype. Titus addresses Chiron and Demetrius:

> Hark, villains, I will grind your bones to dust,
> And with your blood and it I'll make a paste,
> And of the paste a coffin I will rear,
> And make two pasties of your shameful heads,
> And bid that strumpet, your unhallowed dam,
> Like to the earth swallow her own increase.
> This is the feast that I have bid her to,
> And this the banket she shall surfeit on.
> (V.ii.186-93)

Eating her own sons, Tamora becomes a human incarnation of the awful impulse of the earth as expressed in Genesis.

Although a prevalent line of criticism has seen an excess of horror in Titus Andronicus, Shakespeare deliberately prepares for the cannibal banquet, carefully integrating the concept of lex talionis, the predatory beast imagery, and the earth-mother imagery. This feeding imagery is appropriate even as the final banquet itself is appropriate. In the midst of many negative views of Titus Andronicus, A. C. Hamilton offers a convincing argument in support of this early play as a successful tragedy, citing Ben Jonson's praise of it as "best play" in its time.[21] I agree with this favorable view; rather than contributing to excessive horror, many of the horrors--as Hamilton points out--were viewed differently by the Renaissance audience with its understanding of the mythological allusions that also use the motif of devourer.

[21] "Titus Andronicus: The Form of Shakespearian Tragedy," Shakespeare Quarterly, 14 (1963), 203.

Hamilton states:

> Surely it is no historical accident that Shakespeare's most popular play imitates Thyestes, Seneca's most popular play, which in turn imitates the most popular theme of Greek tragedy, the boiling and eating of Pelops.[22]

Hamilton's study is helpful in tying together the various allusions to which Shakespeare was heir. In particular, Hamilton's explanation of why Shakespeare might have selected the name "Saturninus" is sensible and shows the intentionality behind the earth-mother context:

> Nothing more than sure dramatic instinct may have led Shakespeare to use the story of Pelops. Yet his choice of Saturninus as the name of the Emperor whose state the play projects suggests some conscious awareness. In Renaissance iconography Saturn was shown devouring his child. His wife was Rhea, the earth, and in the play Saturnine's wife eats her children "like to the earth swallow her own increase" (V.ii.191). In Ovid the story of Philomel follows the story of how Tantalus serves his son Pelops to the gods. The story of Tantalus would have led Shakespeare to a similar story of cannibalism in Ovid's first book. Since the story of Saturn was understood by the age as an allegory of the fall, its choice may have been inevitable for Shakespeare's first tragedy.[23]

In view of the obvious appropriateness of the allusions, it is difficult to understand how Wolfgang Clemen and others can see Shakespeare's mythological references in Titus

[22] Hamilton, p. 203.

[23] Hamilton, p. 203.

Andronicus as "wholly due to the desire of displaying knowledge."[24] Later scholarship, particularly that of Hamilton, Tricomi, and Sommers, has acknowledged the impressive unity and purposefulness of the whole work. The allusions are especially useful in establishing the concept of earth-mother as devouring her own--a logical precedent for the anthropophagy in Shakespeare's work.

Hamilton wisely does not pretend to know exactly what was in Shakespeare's mind; however, unlike Clemen, he sees the play itself as evidence of Shakespeare's unity of theme and expression. Certainly the explanation of Saturninus as Saturn and Tamora as Rhea-earth is logical. Shakespeare does not slavishly use the earlier story; he applies only those associations that would have been meaningful to his contemporaries, and he carefully integrates his source with his immediate purpose--yet another indication of the prodigious artist at work. The allusions are ideally suited to convey the story of Titus, who figuratively devours his children, and of Tamora, who literally devours hers. The allusions are an equally relevant expression of a Rome that has become a "wilderness of tigers," a savage wasteland where nurture is inverted and where man preys on man in almost endless procession.

[24] The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery, 2nd ed. (1951; rpt. London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1977), p. 26.

The earth-mother imagery in Titus Andronicus is closely linked with the garden imagery. Indeed, the prototype for both may be the first chapters of Genesis. Although some have projected Shakespeare's source to be La Primaudaye,[25] I believe the simplicity of the Genesis source gives it primacy. Shakespeare would, no doubt, have been quite familiar with the biblical accounts of creation, including the antithetical depictions of earth bringing forth good fruits and of earth drinking the blood of Abel and cursing man's sustenance. In like manner, Genesis is a viable source of the garden imagery: The Garden of Eden is the embodiment of the paradoxical impulse to both nurture and destroy since the potential for both is contained within the one setting. In a real sense, Shakespeare's treatment of the forest in Titus Andronicus develops the duality suggested by Genesis. Nicholas Brooke succinctly states the essence of this duality and its correspondence in man; Brooke sees the forest as "nature that is at once the paradise garden and a barren detested vale, as Man is at once noble and bestial."[26]

The fullest critical treatment of the garden imagery in Titus Andronicus is that of Albert H. Tricomi, who

[25] See especially Hankins, pp. 157-58.

[26] Shakespeare's Early Tragedies (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1968), p. 33.

acknowledges his debt to Brooke and Sommers. Tricomi's study tends toward overextension at times although he is entirely correct in his basic assertion that the play's "images create a thematic matrix . . . which governs the imagistic structure of the play, [and] culminates in a dialectic contrast between the play's predatory animal images and its cardinal emblem of the enduring but mutilated garden."[27] Tricomi continues, "Oddly enough then, the very qualities of language in Titus Andronicus that once excited critical contumely hold the potential for revealing the play's thematic integrity and imaginative power."[28] Indeed, it is in the language, especially in the feeding imagery, that the play's power resides.

The forest world of Titus Andronicus is analogous to the Garden of Eden, a world of duality. On the one hand, it is an idyllic pastoral scene fit for royal hunt or lovers' tryst. On the other hand, it is the site of the blood-drinking pit and the coiled snake. In this antithesis, Shakespeare presents the crux of the human condition: Man is the apex of creation, but he is also poised between beast and angel, endowed with free will to make his choice. The world of man, in like manner, is poised between antithetical principles;

[27] Tricomi, p. 89.

[28] Tricomi, p. 89.

it is both Edenic and evil. The physical locale with which man is inextricably bound is the macrocosm in which the individual is microcosm--a miniature of his earth and true son of the earth-mother. Earth contains within its conception the principle of nurture, as Genesis 1:29-30 makes clear:

> And God said, Beholde, I haue giuen vnto you euerie herbe bearig fede, which is vpon all the earth, & euerie tre, wherein is the frute of a tre bearing fede: that shalbe to you for meat. Likewise to euerie beast of the earth, and to euerie foule of the heauen, & to euerie thing that moueth vpon the earth, which hathe life in it selfe, euerie grene herbe shalbe for meat and it was so.

However, earth also contains within its conception the principle of destruction, as Genesis 2:8-9 makes clear:

> And the Lord God plated a garden Eastwarde in Eden, and there he put the man whome he had made. For out of the grounde made the Lord God to growe euerie tre pleasant to the sight, and good for meat: the tre of life also in the middes of the garden, and the tre of knowledge of good and of euil.

Genesis 2:16-17 states concisely the potential for destruction inherent in Eden:

> And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Thou shalt eat frely of euerie tre of the garden, But as touching the tre of knowledge of good and euil, thou shalt not eat of it for whenfoeuer thou eatest thereof thou shalt eye the death.

After Cain's murder of Abel, man is cursed by the earth-mother (Genesis 4:11-12):

> Now therefore thou art cursed fro the earth, w[hichl hathe opened her mouth to receiue thy brothers blood from thine hand. When thou shalt til the grounde, it shal not henceforthe yelde vnto thee her strength: a vagabonde and a rennegate shalt thou be in the earth.

Thus, in the tradition of Genesis, the fruits of the Roman garden in Titus Andronicus are assured when Saturninus is "planted" on the throne (I.i.44) and when Alarbus is sacrificed before the "earthy prison" (I.i.99). After the ruler and the once-honorable Titus are shown to have "ripened" into evil, the ontological issue is much sharper than if Shakespeare had shown decay among the barbarous Goths only. What first appears as paradise is later seen as hell. The earthly garden carries within itself the capability for nurture or destruction.

We are forced to ask the question: How can man stand against the "coiled snake" and the "swallowing womb"? In Titus Andronicus, Shakespeare's answer is in the form of a question: "Oh, why should nature build so foul a den, / Unless the gods delight in tragedies?" (IV.i.59-60). "Den" serves to underline the bestiality of the "wilderness of tigers." The world of Titus Andronicus is the world of the predator; even the paradisiacal garden conspires by concealing the predator in the form of coiled snake and blood-drinking pit. Implicit in this perspective is an impersonal universe where the only form of justice seems to be lex talionis.

When we turn to The Merchant of Venice, a similarly dark perspective is evident. While the feeding imagery is concentrated around Shylock, unaccompanied by the extensive predatory or earth-mother imagery typical of Titus Andronicus, the feeling of an impersonal if not ominous universe is definitely present. The consistent manipulation of one's fellow man is set against a backdrop of cosmic whim. Shylock expresses this capriciousness at great length when the trial opens:

> You'll ask me why I rather choose to have
> A weight of carrion flesh than to receive
> Three thousand ducats. I'll not answer that;
> But say it is my humor, is it answer'd?
> What if my house be troubled with a rat,
> And I be pleas'd to give ten thousand ducats
> To have it ban'd? What, are you answer'd yet?
> Some men there are love not a gaping pig;
> Some that are mad if they behold a cat;
> And others, when the bagpipe sings i' th' nose,
> Cannot contain their urine: for affection,
> Mistress of passion, sways it to the mood
> Of what it likes or loathes. Now for your answer:
> As there is no firm reason to be rend'red
> Why he cannot abide a gaping pig;
> Why he, a harmless necessary cat;
> Why he, a woollen bagpipe, but of force
> Must yield to such inevitable shame
> As to offend, himself being offended;
> So can I give no reason, nor I will not,
> More than a lodg'd hate and a certain loathing
> I bear Antonio, that I follow thus
> A losing suit against him. Are you answered?
> (IV.i.40-62)

Shylock's answer offers no assurance other than an acknowledgement that he shares the predatory instinct of the natural world. The series of comparisons in Antonio's subsequent

speech underscores the same point: Shylock's motivation is the human analogue of bare instinct within the natural world itself. Instinct has no element of reason, civility, or mercy, a point Antonio makes forcefully in response to Shylock's discourse:

> I pray you think you question with the Jew:
> You may as well go stand upon the beach
> And bid the main flood bate his usual height;
> You may as well use question with the wolf
> Why he hath made the ewe bleak for the lamb;
> You may as well forbid the mountain pines
> To wag their high tops, and to make no noise
> When they are fretten with the gusts of heaven;
> You may as well do any thing most hard
> As seek to soften that--than which what's harder?--
> His Jewish heart!
>
> (IV.i.70-80)

The central issue here is implicitly the same issue that is more overt in Titus Andronicus: The very nature of the universe contains an element of passion or whim, often resulting in instinctual self-destruction. From this perspective, man's world is that of appetite or of an inverted nurture.

The strongest statement Shakespeare makes on inverted nurture is through his emphasis on cannibalism, a central emphasis in both Titus Andronicus and The Merchant of Venice. In its usual denotation, cannibalism is the eating of human flesh by another human; however, the definition also includes the eating of its own kind by any animal. Northrop Frye offers an interesting interpretation of cannibalism, a

practice that he terms "demonic parody" of the "Eucharist symbolism."[29] In his discussion of literary applications of cannibalism, Frye relates Shylock's bond directly to that tradition:

> The imagery of cannibalism usually includes, not only images of torture and mutilation, but of what is technically known as sparagmos or the tearing apart of the sacrificial body, an image found in the myths of Osiris, Orpheus, and Pentheus. The cannibal giant or ogre of folk tales, who enters literature as Polyphemus, belongs here, as does a long series of sinister dealings with flesh and blood from the story of Thyestes to Shylock's bond. Here again the form described by [Sir James G.] Frazer as the historically original form is in literary criticism the radical demonic form.[30]

Although some critics would disagree with Frye's placement of Shylock in the cannibal tradition,[31] Norman Nathan appears to recognize the affinity without using the term.[32] Similarly, Norman H. Holland's interpretation of Shylock lends itself to the cannibalistic interpretation since Holland emphasizes the biting, tearing nature of Shylock as well as the symbolism of the Eucharist implicit in Antonio's sacrifice.[33] I have

[29] Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (1957; rpt. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971), p. 148.

[30] Frye, p. 148.

[31] See John Hazel Smith, "Shylock: 'Devil Incarnation' or 'Poor Man . . . Wronged'?" Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 60 (1961), 1-21, especially pp. 6-11.

[32] See Nathan, pp. 256-57.

[33] Holland, p. 99 and pp. 106-07.

difficulty seeing Antonio as a Christ figure, as Holland sees him; however, I do see a possibility that Shylock's bond represents what Frye describes as the demonic form of the religious sacrifice.

If Shylock's flesh bond is viewed in this manner, then it takes on a remarkable similarity to the mutilations and deaths in Titus Andronicus. This parallel is not unreasonable when one recalls the insistence of Titus on the religious or sacrificial motive behind the various flesh banquets he serves: the feeding of Alarbus to the sacrificial fires, the mercy killing of Lavinia, the serving of the "two pasties" (V.ii.189) to Tamora. Clearly, Lucius' killing of Saturninus also is in the same vein of purgative sacrifice. Throughout Titus Andronicus, human flesh is torn, fed, eaten--always consistent with the primitive justice represented by lex talionis. The final metaphor of the tragedy is of the broken body politic restored to wholeness through Lucius, Titus' last son. Marcus expresses the idea: "O, let me teach you how to knit again / This scattered corn into one mutual sheaf, / These broken limbs again into one body" (V.iii.70-72). Lucius summarizes the significance of his triumphant return to Rome, emphasizing present healing rather than past bloodshed:

> I am the turned forth, be it known to you,
> That have preserv'd her welfare in my blood,
> And from her bosom took the enemy's point,
> Sheathing the steel in my advent'rous body.
> (V.iii.109-12)

Set against this healing and nurture of Rome, however, a feeling of wounds reopened and sustenance denied forms the final chord of the dark tonalities of Titus Andronicus. The villainous Aaron is to be starved within the same earth that has devoured others throughout the play. And Tamora is given over "to beasts and birds to prey" (V.iii.198). The justice of Rome is, indeed, justice devoid of mercy. In such a state, it is no wonder that cannibalistic man is the human analogue of the predatory beast or the earth-mother.

In Titus' world, the human sacrifice can truly be viewed as a demonic parody of the Eucharist. What is true in Rome is also true in Venice. If we view Shylock's bond in like manner, the ontological statement of the comedy becomes even more disconcerting than that of the tragedy since it is concealed beneath the facade of comedy. In tragedy, one expects to be threatened; in comedy, one expects to be reassured. But the natural world in both Titus Andronicus and The Merchant of Venice is enigmatic. Lorenzo states the dark theme that emerges from the unresolved ontological issue:

> There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
> But in his motion like an angel sings,
> Still quiring to the young-ey'd cherubins;
> Such harmony is in immortal souls,
> But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
> Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.
> (V.i.60-65)

While many seem to sense a similar discord, Shylock is the most striking portrait of man who "cannot hear" the "harmony." So long as Shylock, or any man, restricts himself to a physical vision, he can neither see the spirituality nor hear the ineffable harmony that undergirds man's purpose.

The Ambiguous Ethical System in the Predatory World Clarified Through Feeding Imagery

An ambiguous ethical system is the inevitable result of a predominating predatory instinct. In Titus' Rome, we have difficulty distinguishing Roman from Goth, honorable from barbaric. In Shylock's Venice, the separation of Christian and infidel is similarly indistinct. Shakespeare asks: "Which is the Roman here? and which the Goth?" just as surely as he asks: "Which is the merchant here? and which the Jew?" (IV.i.174). The striking resemblance in ethical ambiguity between Titus Andronicus and The Merchant of Venice arises from the centrality in both plays of the justice-mercy theme. That resemblance is sustained through

the deliberately inconclusive events of the plays from beginning to end. Not only do these two plays explore events that evoke conflicting interpretations, but--fortunately--they also share definitive imagery. In particular, feeding imagery offers a clue to the response Shakespeare is seeking.

One key problem in defining the ethical system of Titus Andronicus and of The Merchant of Venice is essentially solved through an examination of the feeding imagery, especially that of the predatory beast. As we have already seen, the animal emblems associated with individual characters (and to some extent with groups of characters) clearly show how Shakespeare classifies a particular individual. The Andronici perform horrible deeds, bringing upon themselves the vengeance of the Goths; but Titus and his family are never described as predatory beasts. Indeed, they are often specifically depicted as non-predatory and even preyed upon by the ravenous barbarians. On the other hand, Shakespeare does not completely absolve the Romans. Rome can never be an ideal Eden, for Saturninus is her fruit. Titus can never be absolved completely, for his many flesh banquets are an inversion of the noble potential in man. However, the final flesh banquets do take on a quality that the previous ones lack. This quality is sacrificial purgation. The banquet served to Tamora is served by man to object. Not only does

Shakespeare contrast the ravenous tiger to the justice-seeking father, but also Tamora has further removed herself from the human condition by appearing to Titus as revenge personified rather than as woman. Titus, of course, is not taken in by her dissembling, but Shakespeare's point is clear. The playwright assures sympathy for Titus by dehumanizing Tamora as beast of prey, devouring earth-mother, and personified abstraction. Her development separates her entirely from her initial eloquent plea for mercy. In a similar fashion, Shakespeare manipulates the preference of Christian over Jew in The Merchant of Venice. Antonio might verbally bait Shylock, but it is Shylock who describes graphically how he will use Antonio's mutilated body as bait for fish. Also, the depiction of Shylock as dog, even as wolf, takes on added dimensions in contrast to Antonio as sheep. The wolf preying on the lamb or sheep is a frequent motif throughout literature to suggest innocence betrayed. Similarly, Portia toys with Shylock at the trial scene, not always exemplifying mercy, but it is she who later offers "manna" to "starved people" (V.i.294, 295) while Shylock is depicted consistently as either withholding sustenance or feeding off others.

Both the earth-mother and the garden images contain a dual perspective. While Shakespeare frequently employs them in these earlier plays for their negative connotations, implicit also is the potential for the positive. Therefore,

by selecting imagery that offers the dual view, Shakespeare suggests in essence that the positive could have dominated under certain conditions. Those conditions, of course, are directly related to man's free will. In Titus Andronicus, the Goths and Lucius are the human examples of the dual perspective. The Goths bring a degenerate barbarism that mutilates the Roman garden. However, the Goths also become the means of regeneration in Rome. Lucius, for example, initially demands the sacrifice of Alarbus, but he ultimately represents the regenerative principle. In both cases, the element of mercy makes the difference in shifting the focus from negative to positive. The same potential for the positive is also reflected in the feeding imagery of The Merchant of Venice. If the play is interpreted as the attempt to convert Shylock to Christianity in order that he can truly be "fed with the same food" (III.i.60) in the spiritual sense, then the regenerative principle is exemplified by what happens to him. Supposedly he, like the Christians, could potentially partake of the manna offered by Portia. Norman Holland suggests that "the beautiful mountain of Belmont is the bountiful mother feeding her dependents";[34] according to this view, Portia and Belmont are closely related to the positive, nurturing aspect of the earth-mother.

[34] Holland, p. 99.

The Merchant of Venice invites us to ask whether Shylock would ever be offered the manna; however, we do not receive--nor should we expect--a resolute answer. Dramaturgically, Shakespeare's purpose is to present the ambivalence we often find in life. We, as critics, must accept--as Norman Rabkin urges--"centers of energy and turbulence in a play without regarding them as coded elements of a thematic formula"; we must, in Rabkin's words, "fight against the urge to closure."[35] Similarly, in Titus Andronicus the final treatment of Aaron and Tamora excludes them from the regeneration newly planted in Rome. Thus, both Titus Andronicus and The Merchant of Venice leave the ontological question--what is the source of man's predatory instinct?--unresolved. The possibility exists that the unanswered question is Shakespeare's own. We can accept the ambiguity within the ethical systems of the dramas as the mark of the developing artist searching not only for means of expression but also for personal conviction. The didacticism of Titus Andronicus and The Merchant of Venice is clear: Shakespeare shows that revenge is wrong and equally self-destructive whether performed by Roman or barbarian, Christian or infidel. In both plays, feeding imagery is a primary vehicle for conveying Shakespeare's exploration.

[35] Rabkin, p. 25.

Attention to Shakespeare's careful delineation of values through feeding imagery is essential because Titus Andronicus and The Merchant of Venice do not utilize the soliloquy as the playwright's conventional means of indicating truth. In Shakespeare's later plays, especially the tragedies, the soliloquy reveals a character as he truly is. In the earlier plays, the frequent use of figurative language is particularly relevant as an indicator of the character's motivations. Wolfgang Clemen is mistaken when he asserts that the images in Titus Andronicus reveal an "inner disproportion" and an "unrestrained desire for expression over any real necessity for it."[36] Although Clemen is correct, of course, in recognizing an embryonic quality in Shakespeare's art compared to its later mature development, he underestimates the power of the early imagery, which is indeed organic and serves a necessary function in manipulating response to an otherwise ambivalent ethical framework. Feeding imagery gains power from its resonance throughout Titus Andronicus and The Merchant of Venice and provides a sound foundation for the great tragedies with their continuing exploration of the human condition.

[36] Clemen, p. 22.

Chapter Three

Lust, Disease, and Poison: Self-Destructive Appetite in *Hamlet* and *Othello*

A rare unity-in-multiplicity is the essence of Shakespeare's art. Nowhere is this intrinsic quality more apparent than in the feeding imagery that unifies the plays while exemplifying in multiple ways the physicality in man's nature. In *Titus Andronicus* and *The Merchant of Venice*, as we have seen, Shakespeare looks at man in relation to other men, selecting a wide-angle lens through which to view and record what man is. Thus, the focus is on mankind as predator, even cannibal--collective man following the example of a cosmic impulse to devour. In *Hamlet* and *Othello*, the angle of the lens changes. Rather than regard man through the wide-angle lens, Shakespeare focuses a narrow lens on individual man in *Hamlet* and *Othello*, looking not so much at what man does to destroy others, but at what he does to destroy himself. The imagery of these two plays retains the predator-prey relationship particularly characteristic of *Titus Andronicus*, but, especially in *Hamlet*, the prey is often more destructive than the predator. Perhaps this is Shakespeare's way of de-emphasizing the external predator in order to emphasize the internal one. Feeding imagery in *Hamlet* and *Othello* conveys an emphasis on self-destructive

appetite through the parallel motifs of lust, disease, and poison. Through this depiction of man's tendency to devour his own "pith of life," Shakespeare moves the impetus for man's nature from external to internal forces, concomitantly suggesting that man's destruction of himself is of greater spiritual import than his destruction by outside forces ever could be.

Both Hamlet and Othello utilize plots in which man's sexuality is a key issue. In Hamlet the issue centers on Gertrude and Claudius and on Hamlet's concern over their lust. In Othello the issue focuses on Desdemona's nature and on Othello's imagined cuckoldry. In both instances Shakespeare uses man's sexual appetite as a vehicle for exploring physicality and its consequences. He emphasizes the significance of lust by linking it with gluttony through feeding imagery.

Sexual Appetite as Devourer in Hamlet

In Tony Richardson's dramatization of Hamlet with Nichole Williamson in the title role, Gertrude is depicted at one point eating a piece of fruit while lounging in bed with Claudius.[1] Her action is natural, a nice bit of stage

[1] Tony Richardson, dir., Hamlet, with Nichole Williamson and Anthony Hopkins, London Roundhouse Production, 1970.

business. But the association of digestion with this sensually motivated queen is much more than a fortuitous stage gesture; it illustrates graphically one of Shakespeare's most insistent images in Hamlet, that of sexuality as appetite. In relating the sexual drive to eating, Shakespeare uses an image from man's universal consciousness, for the Judeo-Christian concept of man's fall from spirituality is based on Eden's fatal apple wielded by mankind's first temptress. Gertrude stands in a long tradition of temptresses, beginning with the biblical Eve and including Homer's Circe, Spenser's Acrasia, and Shakespeare's Cleopatra, to list only a few. These women not only share a strong female libido, but also they share the knowledge that food and sex are powerfully allied. Eve offers the apple to Adam, which results in their expulsion from Eden. Circe lures Ulysses' men with posset, cheese, and meal before turning them into swine. Acrasia tempts Guyon into the Bower of Bliss with seemingly luscious grapes and golden fruit that devour the spirit rather than nurture the body. Cleopatra, "a dish for the gods" (Ant. V.ii.274), causes Antony to give up a world for her. It is Cleopatra to whom one of Shakespeare's most memorable feeding images refers:

> Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
> Her infinite variety. Other women cloy
> The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry
> Where most she satisfies.
> (Ant. II.ii.234-37)

Gertrude no less than the infamous Cleopatra serves poison to the soul while she nurtures man's physical appetite. Although Gertrude offers Claudius no literal food, their lust is depicted consistently in terms of feeding imagery. Gertrude--along with her sisters Eve, Circe, and Cleopatra--is a temptress capable of making Claudius sufficiently hungry for "My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen" (III.iii.55) that he knowingly foregoes spiritual salvation to retain his earthly triumvirate.

Shakespeare underscores the sensuality of Gertrude and Claudius by linking two capital sins, lust and gluttony. The depiction of lust as "appetite" points up the physicality of one function by comparing it to another equally physical. Caroline Spurgeon observes rightly how Shakespeare expresses an instinctive "disgust at woman's wantonness"[2] by allying that wantonness with the physical appetite for food. "Appetite" in the Shakespearean canon is a disparaging term linked with man's baser nature. This disparaging sense is conveyed several times in Hamlet. In the opening scene of the play, Horatio describes the impetuous Fortinbras in terms of appetite, associating Fortinbras with the voracious shark:

[2] Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us (1935; rpt. Boston: Beacon Press, Inc., 1958), p. 320.

> Now, sir, young Fortinbras,
> Of unimproved mettle hot and full,
> Hath in the skirts of Norway here and there
> Shark'd up a list of lawless resolutes
> For food and diet to some enterprise
> That hath a stomach in't.
> (I.i.95-100)

Shakespeare's metaphorical shark takes on increased meaning when we remember that the Elizabethan military conscript depicted by Shakespeare is treated as a commodity, as mere fodder for cannon.[3] Hamlet introduces the lust-as-appetite motif in his first soliloquy, applying the concept to Gertrude and Claudius:

> Must I remember? Why, she should hang on him
> As if increase of appetite had grown
> By what it fed on, and yet, within a month--
> Let me not think on't! Frailty, thy name is woman!--
> A little month, or ere those shoes were old
> With which she followed my poor father's body,
> Like Niobe, all tears--why, she, even she--
> O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason
> Would have mourn'd longer--
> . . . . .
> O most wicked speed: to post
> With such dexterity to incestious sheets.
> (I.ii.143-51, 156-57)

Throughout Hamlet's speech, the emphasis is on woman as symbol of human weakness. Although Hamlet speaks about his mother, he distances her emotionally through the repetition of the impersonal "she" and through the

[3] J. W. Fortescue discusses the disparaging attitude toward the Elizabethan conscript, emphasizing the dehumanization of the individual, in his Life in Shakespeare's England, ed. J. Dover Wilson (1911; rpt. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1969), pp. 121-25.

personification of Frailty. He even sees his mother in unfavorable contrast to a beast who, lacking the human gift of reason, would nonetheless have mourned more deeply for her mate than Gertrude has. From Hamlet's perspective, Gertrude has sold her humanity into the slavery of bestial appetite. A. C. Bradley suggests a similar view of Gertrude, stating unequivocally that "she was false to her husband [King Hamlet] while he lived."[4]

Hamlet's opinion of his mother is supported by Shakespeare's delineation of Claudius, who seems the ideal mate for the sensual Gertrude. Depicted as satyr in Hamlet's speech, Claudius is characterized by goatish sensuality. His corrupt nature is amplified in the closet scene when Hamlet berates Gertrude, contrasting Claudius to King Hamlet:

> This was your husband. Look you now what follows:
> Here is your husband, like a mildewed ear,
> Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?
> Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed,
> And batten on this moor?
> (III.iv.63-67)

Again using feeding imagery, Hamlet compares Claudius to a "mildewed ear" of corn while he calls King Hamlet "wholesome." Similarly, King Hamlet is a "fair mountain," suggesting both beauty and strength, yet Claudius is a wasteland on which Gertrude has chosen to gorge herself. It is significant

[4] Shakespearean Tragedy: Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth (1904; rpt. New York: Meridian Books, 1955), p.136.

that Hamlet portrays Gertrude choosing Claudius over King Hamlet; surely Shakespeare implies this choice through the phrase "leave to feed." Gertrude leaves her marriage bed, the implication being before King Hamlet is poisoned. Claudius' carnal nature coupled with Gertrude's bestial appetite is deserving of Hamlet's harsh summary of their relationship:

> Nay, but to live
> In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed,
> Stew'd in corruption, honeying and making love
> Over the nasty sty!
> (III.iv.91-94)

The allusion to hogs is reminiscent of the classical story in which Ulysses' men are turned into swine following a feast on Circe's island. Appetite, whether related to food or sex, can sate itself to the point that man loses all vestige of humanity.

One of the first indications that Gertrude's marriage to Claudius was "o'erhasty" is in Hamlet's comment to Horatio as to why Gertrude's marriage followed so fast upon the burial of Hamlet's father: "Thrift, thrift, Horatio, the funeral bak'd-meats / Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables" (I.ii.180-81). Even in this seeming jest, the point is clear: Food at both literal and figurative levels is closely linked with the triangle of Gertrude, King Hamlet, and Claudius. However, the Ghost indicates

to Hamlet that such food is not nourishment but "garbage":

> But virtue, as it never will be moved,
> Though lewdness court it in a shape of heaven,
> So lust, though to a radiant angel link'd,
> Will sate itself in a celestial bed
> And prey on garbage.
> (I.v.53-57)

Maurice Charney suggests a logical juncture between the preceeding passage and Hamlet's unfulfilled desire to "ha' fatted all the region kites" with Claudius' "offal" (II.ii. 579-80).[5] According to Charney's interpretation, both passages suggest scavenging animals. Without a doubt, Shakespeare utilizes this repulsive image to underline bestial grossness in man and especially in Claudius. It seems to me that the passages above as well as others relating Claudius to the feeding imagery support the reading of Claudius as "bloat king" (III.iv.182) as opposed to the alternate reading of "blowt" meaning naked. Since this description is placed in the closet scene, either application is possible, but "bloat" seems more in keeping with Shakespeare's focus on feeding imagery. Shakespeare is insistent in his association of both Claudius and Gertrude with insatiable appetite.

Connected closely to the emphasis on food is a parallel emphasis on drink. The majority of the drinking images in

[5] Style in "Hamlet" (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969), p. 90.

Hamlet are associated with Claudius, indicating his gluttony from a second perspective. Claudius is an Epicurean at heart, a believer in a carpe diem philosophy. As such, he is the antithesis of Horatio, who epitomizes Hamlet's golden mean. Perhaps this is why Claudius is an irritant to Hamlet even before he hears the Ghost's story of his uncle's treachery. Claudius follows (evidently with great enthusiasm) the custom of the king's revels at which liquor is a primary attraction. Hamlet tells Horatio that this custom is "More honor'd in the breach than the observance" (I.iv.16), for it brings foreign censure on the Danish court. Claudius' insistence on keeping the revels proves his intemperate nature. Evidently his is the type of nature Hamlet has in mind when, in warning Gertrude against her lust for Claudius, he refers to "the fatness of these pursy times" (III.iv.153). Again linking feeding, sensuality, and depravity, Hamlet encourages Gertrude to practice virtue by abstaining from Claudius' bed; Hamlet suggests that practice will make perfect since "That monster custom, who all sense doth eat" (III.iv.161) works to support virtue in this case. When abstinence becomes customary, it becomes easier to sustain. Habit, contrary to its usual role, serves reason. Claudius and Gertrude are presented as a well-matched pair; throughout the play, Shakespeare depicts their separate and mutual appetite, suggesting that their lust is a cooperative

endeavor. Hamlet's admonitions to Gertrude suggest, however, that Gertrude may have charge--or at least that she is capable of taking charge. Such an interpretation is consistent with the view that Gertrude is a sister to Eve.

Shakespeare's feeding imagery invites an extended analogy between Hamlet's Denmark and the biblical Garden of Eden. Hamlet initiates the analogy in his first soliloquy:

> How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
> Seem to me all the uses of this world!
> Fie on't, ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden
> That grows to seed, things rank and gross in nature
> Possess it merely.
> (I.ii.133-37)

Because the garden imagery is juxtaposed to Hamlet's musing over his mother's appetite for Claudius, a connection is implicit. Through Hamlet, Shakespeare implies that bestial lust is one of the fruits of the unweeded garden. Later, when the Ghost confronts Hamlet, the former extends the garden analogy:

> Now, Hamlet, hear:
> 'Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard,
> A serpent stung me, so the whole ear of Denmark
> Is by a forged process of my death
> Rankly abus'd; but know, thou noble youth,
> The serpent that did sting thy father's life
> Now wears his crown.
> (I.v.34-40)

Claudius is equated with the serpent, thereby symbolizing evil incarnate. However, if Gertrude is Eve, by extension

of the analogy, Claudius must be Adam. Does the dual casting of Claudius as both Adam and serpent present a problem? I think not; for, by this dual casting, Shakespeare places the potential for downfall within man himself, emphasizing man's choice. This choice carries with it the possibility for man's self-destruction which, it seems to me, is one of the key concepts in Hamlet. Unlike Titus Andronicus, where the coiled snake is an external predator, Hamlet suggests that man is ultimately responsible for himself. Certainly, Claudius is aware of this responsibility; echoing the feeding imagery, he says that man is required to look at his faults in such detail that he sees even their "teeth" (III.iii.63). Claudius knows he could receive forgiveness through divine grace, but he cannot repent his crime; reason is devoured by appetite--the impetus behind crown, ambition, and queen.

Disease and Decay: Feeding "On the Pith of Life"

Coupled with appetite, which destroys through its insatiability, is disease, which runs its destructive course unabated. Rampant disease can devour the individual; through contagion, one of its chief tenets, it also can devour a society. Shakespeare depicts the ravages of disease at two levels, showing both individuals and a society

consumed by its effects. Like lust, a perverted form of love, disease is a perversion of health. Therefore, disease imagery implies the opposite of the optimal condition for man and society; disease becomes a variation on appetite, another outward manifestation of an inner spiritual corruption.

Much of the disease imagery in Hamlet is not directly related to the feeding imagery. While such passages as the play's opening scene expound the "sick-at-heart" theme, for example, these passages deal with illness but not with feeding imagery. In their reiteration of illness themes, they provide a general background against which the specific references to diseases feeding "on the pith of life" (IV.i.23) project in sharp relief. An examination of certain key passages will show the operation of feeding imagery as it relates to disease.

One of the most graphic images in Hamlet is presented by the Ghost when he describes his poisoning. Combining metaphors of feeding and disease, the Ghost emphasizes the effects of the poison on his body, stressing the literal act:

> Sleeping within my orchard,
> My custom always of the afternoon,
> Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole,
> With the juice of cursed hebona in a vial,
> And in the porches of my ear did pour
> The leprous distillment, whose effect
> Holds such an enmity with blood of man
> That swift as quicksilver it courses through
> The natural gates and alleys of the body,

> And with a sudden vigor it doth posset
> And curd, like eager droppings into milk,
> The thin and wholesome blood. So did it mine,
> And a most instant tetter bark'd about,
> Most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust
> All my smooth body.
> (I.v.59-73)

"Leprous distillment" suggests, in Maurice Charney's words, a "perverse medicine" that produces rather than cures disease.[6] The word picture painted by the Ghost is of a smooth skin encrusted with the scabs of leprosy, the outer effect produced by the deposit of poison within the body. Since leprosy is a disease characterized by the wasting away of bodily parts, the image is an apt one, not only to describe what happens literally to King Hamlet but also to foreshadow what amounts to a figurative wasting of the society in Denmark. In Hamlet many lives are wasted as a result of the figurative disease that invades the kingdom. This wasting of lives occurs literally through the multiple deaths in Hamlet. Of even greater significance is the wasting of the human spirit, of the "godlike reason" in man--a spiritual wasting of man by man, often of man by himself. Another image in the Ghost's description is that of curdled milk. Milk, frequently used by Shakespeare in its usual connotation of wholesome nourishment, also conveys a sense

[6] Charney, p. 76.

of purity by its whiteness and by its association with babies. The milk image, like the leprosy image, points up the disastrous effects of an insidious process. Both images focus on the change brought about: What is intrinsically smooth, wholesome, or white becomes a perversion of its former state.

A second passage combining feeding imagery with that of disease appears to foreshadow the Ghost's revelation. Placed before Hamlet's encounter with the Ghost, the "mole of nature" passage conveys many of the same notions. Talking with Horatio and Marcellus, Hamlet moves from a criticism of his uncle's noisy revels to an explanation of how a single fault overgrows all bounds and consumes what was "noble substance":

> So, oft it chances in particular men,
> That for some vicious mole of nature in them,
> As in their birth, wherein they are not guilty
> (Since nature cannot choose his origin),
> By their o'ergrowth of some complexion
> Oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason,
> Or by some habit, that too much o'er-leavens
> The form of plausive manners--that these men,
> Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect,
> Being nature's livery, or fortune's star,
> His virtues else, be they as pure as grace,
> As infinite as man may undergo,
> Shall in the general censure take corruption
> From that particular fault: the dram of ev'l
> Doth all the noble substance of a doubt
> To his own scandal.
>
> (I.iv.23-38)

Through imagery, Shakespeare equates "vicious mole," the leavening effect of yeast, and "the dram of ev'l," indicating that all three devour the "noble substance" which they attack by their insistent spreading throughout. Juxtaposing the action of yeast with that of the cancerous mole or a small measure of evil is significant. By this juxtaposition, Shakespeare shows that what seems as insignificant as a simple ingredient in bread can have an influence far out-distancing its own relative size. Thus, by extension, nothing is innocuous; a small disposition to evil can grow to mammoth proportions. If this passage foreshadows the revelation of the Ghost, then the "dram of ev'l" is like the "leprous distillment" that literally poisons King Hamlet and figuratively poisons the entire body politic of Denmark.

Closely connected through imagery to the two long passages discussed above are a number of shorter ones utilizing garden imagery coupled with that of destructive feeding or decay. In these passages, the disease that infests is related to the cankerworm. Early in the play, Laertes warns Ophelia of dangers inherent in her youth, using the canker image:

> The canker galls the infants of the spring
> Too oft before their buttons be disclos'd,
> And in the morn and liquid dew of youth
> Contagious blastments are most imminent.
> (I.iii.39-42)

His words suggest that Ophelia, like the rosebud, could be attacked by a destructive force that would wither her beauty before it is fullblown. Although Laertes refers primarily to chastity and warns against its loss, his words provide a foundation for other "rose" allusions in the play. Just after the nunnery scene, Ophelia also uses the "rose" analogy, calling Hamlet "Th' expectation and rose of the fair state" and bemoaning that his "blown youth" (fullblown youth) has been "blasted" (withered) by his madness (III.i. 152, 159, 160). During the closet scene, Hamlet presents a similar analogy to Gertrude when he says she is guilty of adultery, which is

> Such an act
> That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,
> Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose
> From the fair forehead of an innocent love
> And sets a blister there, makes marriage vows
> As false as dicers' oaths, O, such a deed
> As from the body of contraction plucks
> The very soul, and sweet religion makes
> A rhapsody of words. Heaven's face does glow
> O'er this solidity and compound mass
> With heated visage, as against the doom;
> Is thought-sick at the act.
> (III.iv.40-51)

Hamlet's images suggest that not only is the rose of love suffering from blight, but also heaven itself is made "thought-sick" because of Gertrude's incestuous lust. Looking at the cumulative force of these three "rose" passages, the rose seems to represent the same ideal

represented elsewhere by "noble substance." Thus, the cankerworm is to the rose what the "vicious mole" is to the individual: a devourer.

Of all the appetitive passages in Hamlet featuring worms and similar devourers, none is as graphic and unsparingly naturalistic as Hamlet's description of Polonius "at supper." This passage--a conversation but more monologue than dialogue between Hamlet and Claudius--describes in minute detail what happens to the body after death; the emphasis is on decay as natural process:

> King. Now, Hamlet, where's Polonius?
> Ham. At supper.
> King. At supper? where?
> Ham. Not where he eats, but where 'a is eaten; a certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him. Your worm is your only emperor for diet: we fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots; your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service, two dishes, but to one table--that's the end.
> King. Alas, alas!
> Ham. A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.
> King. What dost thou mean by this?
> Ham. Nothing but to show you how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar.
> (IV.iii.16-31)

No euphemisms for Hamlet! He is as direct as Lear's Fool--and just as accurate. He depicts death as the great equalizer but also as a purely physical process. It may be that no other passage in literature exposes the "skull beneath the

skin," in T. S. Eliot's phrase,[7] as this one does. Since the worm already has been associated in Hamlet with forces that oppose man's spirituality, the complete lack of spiritual relief is not surprising here. This encounter with unadorned death is a turning point for Hamlet and for the play. In many respects, this encounter is not unlike Lear's confrontation with "unaccommodated man."

We should view Hamlet's reaction to Polonius' murder in the context of an initiation experience. The initial reaction is both callous and callow: "I'll lug the guts into the neighbor room" (III.iv.212). At this point, Hamlet sees Polonius as a dead weight of skin, muscle, bone, and viscerage--especially the last. He displays an insensitivity that might be unforgivable if it did not also suggest the unfledged nature of one who has tasted of death but who has not yet digested the meaning of man's mortality. Hamlet's first exchange with Gertrude, in Act I, states his inability to accept death at the "particular" (I.ii.75) level. In fact, it is this preoccupation with individual death that Gertrude notes, stating that her son must overcome his obsession. Hamlet's digestion of this signal issue begins at a new level when he contemplates Polonius "at supper."

[7] "Whispers of Immortality," in The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry, ed. Richard Ellman and Robert O'Clair (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1973), pp. 452-53.

The digestive process is complete for Hamlet only after he returns from England and stands jowl to jowl with the skull of Yorick, then witnesses the interment of the lovely Ophelia. The "at supper" scene and the graveyard scene illustrate the "objective correlative" at its best. Only the young T. S. Eliot, displaying an immaturity not unlike that of Hamlet before he leaves for England, could assert that Hamlet lacks an objective correlative--an opinion that Eliot later regretted.[8] Could any playwright of any age have presented a more appropriate vehicle for showing the process of digesting or absorbing man's most enigmatic issue, that of human mortality? Through the completely naked, naturalistic portrayal of man-the-food-of-worms, Shakespeare was so far ahead of his time that it is left to our own to comprehend fully the scope of his vision. What we comprehend is not flattering or consoling, but it is inescapable in our attempt to reconcile "What is a man" (IV.iv.33).

Hamlet's digestive process is primed by the experience of Polonius's death. But before Hamlet can digest the range of the human condition, he must struggle through the figurative dark night of the soul. Shakespeare prepares him for this encounter throughout more than half of the drama.

[8] "Hamlet and His Problems," in The Sacred Wood (1920; rpt. London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1920), pp. 100-01. Eliot later reexamines this perspective, as stated in his preface to Essays on Elizabethan Drama (1932; rpt. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1956), pp. vii-viii.

During this time, Hamlet moves from being the sensitive scholar who sets up Horatio as his ideal to being the hardened warrior who admires the impetuosity of Fortinbras.

A major monologue offering insight into Hamlet's great struggle to digest the human condition is the "How all occasions do inform against me" soliloquy (IV.iv.32-66). Watching Fortinbras lead an army of men to death over "a little patch of ground" (IV.iv.18), Hamlet recognizes that man potentially is much more than a decaying mass, a diet for worms. Before he comes to that realization, however, he admires the strength of Fortinbras, who is motivated solely by honor. The echo of the feeding theme is still on Hamlet's mind as he muses:

> What is a man,
> If his chief good and market of his time
> Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more.
> (IV.iv.33-35)

Immediately Hamlet counters this naturalistic thought with a more humanistic, rational view:

> Sure He that made us with such large discourse,
> Looking before and after, gave us not
> That capability and godlike reason
> To fust in us unus'd.
> (IV.iv.36-39)

Hamlet accurately answers the question, then misinterprets his own answer; his reason is overcome by the "vicious mole"

in his nature, his desire for vengeance against Claudius. He assumes that "godlike reason" should make him kill Claudius since "honor's at the stake" (IV.iv.56). Once Hamlet adopts a martial ideology, he in essence loses the battle for his own soul.

Poison: "A Chalice for the Nonce"

In a play whose plot is motivated by a literal poisoning, Shakespeare's emphasis on poisoning at the figurative level is not surprising. Nonetheless, the playwright displays great skill in the subtle interweaving of physical and spiritual poison. Ironically, poison is both the impetus behind Hamlet's vengeance and the end product of it: In attempting to avenge his father's poisoning, Hamlet poisons his own soul. Through the blending of images of poison with images of lust and disease, Shakespeare adds to the general theme of decay.

Following "The Mousetrap," the play Hamlet stages in hopes of causing Claudius to show his guilt in the death of Hamlet's father, Hamlet's reason deteriorates; he may <u>seem</u> to be more rational, at least in his conversation, but he aligns himself once and for all with spiritual darkness. Just after Claudius' guilty reaction to "The Mousetrap," Hamlet is ready to "drink hot blood" (III.ii.390). At

this point his "godlike reason" is poisoned by a primitive cannabalistic motivation not unlike the lex talionis of Titus Andronicus. Following this venom-filled soliloquy, Hamlet encounters Claudius at prayer and deliberately refrains from killing him--the right action for the wrong reason. Claudius had killed King Hamlet when the latter was "full of bread" (III.iii.80), that is in a physical state without spiritual preparation for eternity. Hamlet declines to kill Claudius whom he assumes to be filled with spiritual bread or "seasoned for his passage" (III.iii.86). Of course, this assumption is erroneous, for Claudius is satiated with a diet of crown, ambition, and queen. Like the food of the day that--lacking the necessary seasoning for preservation--often poisoned the individual, what Claudius has served himself is his own spiritual poison. Hamlet, ironically, has served himself similar fare: In refraining from the murder, his own appetite for vengeance seats him at the same table as Claudius; both partake of a course that whets the appetite but poisons the soul. At play's end, Shakespeare shows protagonist and antagonist each impaled on a sword that is wielded, in a sense, both by self and by other; the two share a similar death even as they have shared a similar spiritual wasteland. Considered from this perspective, the prayer scene is a masterful foreshadowing of the spiritual import of that final scene of physical carnage, at the center

of which is poison. In Act III, Scene iii, protagonist and antagonist each condemn self to death while seeming to spare the other, at least temporarily, but for selfish purposes. Viewed in this way, Hamlet offers a significant commentary on the predator-prey relationship through the focus on the internal predator that works insidiously even as poison does yet with more power than any external force ever could exert. While on one level both Hamlet and Claudius are set on destroying each other, the ultimate destruction is of the self. The internal predator that poisons the soul is at the forefront of the prayer scene, emphasizing a theme that is at the heart of tragedy.

Shakespeare shows the extent of Hamlet's wasteland by mirroring his speech in that of Claudius, the acknowledged villain. Just as a struggling Othello takes on the language of Iago, pointing up similarities more than differences, so do Hamlet and Claudius share the use of feeding imagery in their separate but intertwined battles with darkness. Shakespeare's focus on Claudius contributes to an understanding of Hamlet, counterbalancing the ending of the play with its possibility of redemption. Shakespeare's audience over the past four centuries has seen Hamlet's struggle to the point that his agony has all but obscured the corollary struggle of Claudius. The parallels between the two are illustrated in their figures of speech.

After Hamlet has been sent to England, Claudius unknowingly echoes many of the protagonist's thoughts. In conversation with Gertrude, Claudius refers to Ophelia, noting that her condition results from "the poison of deep grief" (IV.v.75): "poor Ophelia / Divided from herself and her fair judgment, / Without the which we are pictures, or mere beasts" (IV.v.84-86). The King's recognition that to be human is to espouse judgment or reason sounds much like Hamlet's statement contrasting bestiality and "godlike reason." Also, Claudius applies feeding imagery, in particular the motifs of disease and poison, when describing to Gertrude Laertes' reactions upon hearing of his father's murder:

> Her brother is in secret come from France,
> Feeds on this wonder, keeps himself in clouds,
> And wants not buzzers to infect his ear
> With pestilent speeches of his father's death,
> Wherein necessity, of matter beggar'd,
> Will nothing stick our person to arraign
> In ear and ear. O my dear Gertrude, this,
> Like to a murd'ring-piece, in many places
> Gives me superfluous death.
> (IV.v.88-96)

The emphasis on "ear" is noteworthy since a literal poison poured into the ear is behind the entire plot of Hamlet. Also, the King's reference to "superfluous death" foreshadows his actual death. Death is as far-reaching and random in its selection of victims as the "murd'ring-piece" is in its firing. Divinity may protect a king, but divine intervention does not come between king and conscience:

Man's reason is free, and the King is, therefore, as free as any man to poison his own soul if he so chooses.

Both Claudius and Hamlet elect this self-poisoning since both misjudge the limits of man's reason and the uses to which it should be put. Claudius' misjudgment leads him to rationalize past sins and heap on new ones; Hamlet's misjudgment leads him to substitute public notions of honor and a soldier's perspective for his innate humanism. Neither Hamlet nor Claudius is intrinsically evil; yet both relinquish self-control to the clutches of darkness, thus poisoning the soul in an act more devastating than the physical death both share from poisoned rapier. One way that Shakespeare prepares for the shared death and its parallel implications is through the shared figures of speech, especially the images of feeding in its several aspects.

Poison, operating on the literal level in the opening scenes of Hamlet, has been converted by play's end to a symbol of the insidious appetitive forces gorging themselves on the state of Denmark, its people, and its ideologies. Hamlet himself embodies that symbol: The "expectation and rose of the fair state" (III.i.152) has feasted on a diet that poisons the "noble and most sovereign reason" (III.i.157), creating an individual insensitive to the poisonous decay of which he is both prey and predator. Hamlet can provide no antidote for the poisonous times, for his myopic view of the

poison within others has made him blind to its effects within himself. The peace of mind he seems to have achieved late in the play is not a peace born of a struggle from which one emerges the victor; rather it is a facimile of peace, an anesthesia that numbs then kills.

Hamlet never digests completely what it means to be man. Critics who focus on the "divinity that shapes our ends" (V.ii.10) and on "the readiness is all" (V.ii.222) as signs of a Christian theology fail to interpret accurately the closing lines of the play. Fortinbras, the complete military man, has the last word; and Hamlet, the scholar and symbol of man's mind, is given a soldier's burial. Shakespeare makes a point of introducing Fortinbras in the play's opening lines, characterizing him as shark. The playwright continues this characterization in Act IV, Scene iv, where Fortinbras feeds on the eggshell--a throwaway commodity--rather than on the egg. Fortinbras symbolizes the devourer, not the nurturer. By setting Fortinbras on the throne, does Shakespeare not plant weeds rather than fruit? Does he not restore Denmark to a military rule rather than to a regime of "noble and sovereign reason"--an act that must show how reason has been devoured by a destructive force? Horatio is to "speak to th' yet unknowing world" (V.ii.379) of Hamlet and his fate, but his tale will be one "Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts, / Of accidental judgments, casual

slaughters, / Of deaths put on by cunning and forc'd cause" (V.ii.381-83). Fortinbras summarizes what Hamlet himself must have finally digested about man:

> 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 strook?
> (V.ii.364-67)

In Hamlet, Death enjoys the final feast. Man's appetite may devour "the pith of life" in himself and others; but Death--whether in the guise of lust, disease, or poison--is the fruit of man's insatiable appetite, the ultimate devourer of man's spirit.

The Concept of Appetite in Othello

Othello, written in 1604, follows Hamlet by only two years; no other tragedy intervenes. Continuity between the plays exists on many levels, three of which are primary in relation to feeding imagery. At the center of Othello is the issue of lust, in particular the same concern with woman's sexual appetite that is at the core of Hamlet. Secondly, Shakespeare transplants the garden imagery from Denmark to Venice and Cyprus, showing another society decaying into weeds. However, the decay in the society of Othello does not result from a causal relationship where hero infects

society. In Othello the decay of Othello himself accompanies but is not the product of the social decadence. A third significant parallel between the two plays is the use of poison. Iago pours the pernicious poison of jealousy into Othello's ear, producing a feast for Death as sumptuously destructive as that motivated by a literal poison in Hamlet.

In spite of its surface simplicity, its polarity of black and white, Othello is anything but a simple play. As Frank Kermode points out:

> The richness of tragedy derives from uncancelled suggestions, from latent subplots operating in terms of imagery as well as character, even from hints of large philosophical and theological contexts which are not fully developed.[9]

Without a doubt, one of these "latent subplots" provides the basis for Iago's masterplot. Shakespeare supplies the building blocks from the raw material readily available to him; through Iago, Shakespeare builds the tragic edifice. Shakespeare had access to two strong and diametrically opposed views of woman operable in Renaissance society. Ironically, both derived from the Judeo-Christian tradition. The first view, as old as humanity, is the biblical view of man's

[9] Frank Kermode, Introd., Hamlet, in The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. G. Blakemore Evans et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1974), II, 1200.

temptation and fall through the guile of woman. Any Elizabethan who knew his Bible as Shakespeare knew his would accept these classical characterizations of Adam and Eve. Daily the Elizabethan would be reminded of this view of Eve, the temptress of mankind, for the same sentiments prevailed in the Book of Common Prayer. John Holloway points out that, because "woman" was considered synonymous with "frailty," the marriage service had the husband promise "to cherish and comfort his wife, but the wife to serve and obey the husband."[10] Holloway quotes a relevant passage from Latimer's First Sermon delivered before King Edward in 1549:

> Christ limiteth us to one wife only; and it is a great thing for a man to rule one wife rightly and ordinately. For a woman is frail, and proclive unto all evils; a woman is a very weak vessel, and may soon deceive a man and bring him unto all evils . . . . It is a very hard thing for a man to rule one woman well.[11]

As Holloway emphasizes, "the reference in this passage to a woman's deceiving her husband is not to her being unfaithful, but to her actually leading him into sin" as Eve led Adam.[12] The second Renaissance view of woman, reaching back into the Middle Ages, stems from the cult of courtly love with the worship of the Virgin Mary, symbolizing woman, at its core.

[10] The Story of the Night: Studies in Shakespeare's Major Tragedies (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1961), p. 39.

[11] Quoted in Holloway, p. 39.

[12] Holloway, p. 39.

In the courtly love tradition, the relationship between man and woman was, in essence, Platonic: The man worshipped at the foot of a pedestal on which he had placed woman.[13]

In depicting Desdemona, Shakespeare has built in a deliberate ambiguity based on these two prevailing views. To most observers, she is woman adored on a pedestal. But to an observer such as Iago with a penchant for manipulation, she is potentially the embodiment of Eve; because she is woman, she is capable of frailty. Othello, a professed Christian, can be counted on to know the prevailing views of women from an intellectual perspective. Thus, that Desdemona deserves his adoration is not unexpected, but that she later deserves his contempt is not unexpected either. In order to make Othello's fall believable, Shakespeare's first task is to incorporate a certain ambivalence in his characterization of Desdemona. She, no less than Gertrude or Ophelia, must seem deserving of the accusation "Frailty, thy name is woman." Shakespeare's second task is to characterize Othello as a potentially great man worthy of the Desdemona who is placed on a pedestal; yet Othello must also be uninitiated in the ways of Venetian society and, therefore, unable to evaluate for himself and reconcile the two antithetical views of

[13] C. S. Lewis has an excellent discussion of courtly love in The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition (1936; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1959), pp. 2-43.

woman. The imagery of feeding, suggesting a sexual appetite, is an effective vehicle for presenting the frailty of Eve that Othello becomes convinced exists in Desdemona. How can Shakespeare portray a frailty that, by all reasonable measures, does not exist? Skillfully, the playwright conveys an appetite for adventure in Desdemona--and skillfully Iago converts that appetite to imply sexual adventurism. The only other condition necessary for expediting Iago's plan is a credulous Othello, a foreigner not skilled in the subtleties of Venetian society.

Shakespeare overtly presents Desdemona's appetite for adventure through Othello's defense of himself before the Senate. In answer to Brabantio's charges that Othello has stolen his daughter and corrupted her, Othello recounts the course of his love for Desdemona and her obvious encouragement of that love. The words "greedy" and "devour" are well-chosen; they work for Othello's purpose, and they also work for Shakespeare's:

> It was my hint to speak--such was my process--
> And of the Cannibals that each other eat,
> The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
> Do grow beneath their shoulders. These things
> to hear
> Would Desdemona seriously incline;
> But still the house affairs would draw her thence,
> Which ever as she could with haste dispatch,
> She'ld come again, and with a greedy ear
> Devour up my discourse.
> (I.iii.142-50)

Shakespeare's characterization of Desdemona echoes that of Jessica in The Merchant of Venice. Like Jessica, Desdemona has been confined by her father and experiences a kind of starvation for a different lifestyle. Desdemona's appetite for adventure is clear: The secret marriage suggests it; Othello states it; and Desdemona's own plea to the Senate confirms it. She would be no "moth of peace" (I.iii.256); the role of "fair warrior" (II.i.182) is much more appropriate for this Venetian lady who does not hesitate to speak for herself in a man's world. Not only does Desdemona show an appetite for adventure, but also she shows her desire for Othello, pleading that she wants the full "rites" (I.iii.257) of marriage including the sexual aspect. Othello certainly understands what she is asking, for he replies to the Senate:

> Let her have your voice.
> Vouch with me, heaven, I therefore beg it not
> To please the palate of my appetite,
> Nor to comply with heat (the young affects
> In me defunct) and proper satisfaction;
> But to be free and bounteous to her mind.
> (I.iii.260-65)

Othello's choice of words--"the palate of my appetite"--points up the sexual issue at the core of the discussion; he, in effect, confirms that such appetite exists in Desdemona although he states that it has waned in himself.

Throughout these first scenes, Iago hears what is said and stores it away for future use. When Iago assures the gullible Roderigo that he will eventually replace Othello in

Desdemona's affections, Iago concludes his remarks in feeding imagery:

> The food that to him now is as luscious as locusts, shall be to him shortly as acerb as the coloquintida. She must change for youth; when she is sated with his body, she will find the error of her choice.
>
> (I.iii.347-51)

"Food," "luscious as locusts," "acerb," "coloquintida," "sated"--Iago's words begin to take on the connotations required to convert Desdemona's appetite for an adventurous life to an appetite for sex and foreshadow the skill with words that Iago uses to manipulate Othello. Of course, Iago perverts the evidence, but he does not invent it. Shakespeare provides the latent suggestions; Iago manipulates them, taking them piecemeal, one course at the time, until he has served up an entire banquet of poisonous delights. Act I appears to be a romantic story such as one expects in comedy; however, beneath that framework, as is his practice, Shakespeare lays the foundation on which to build the subsequent tragedy.

The courtly-love depiction of Desdemona is presented in Act I through Othello's description of his love for her. He has thrived on a life of adventure, and she has thrived on hearing his tales. In Othello's description of their courtship, no hint of passion is discernible: "She loved me

for the dangers I had pass'd, / And I lov'd her that she did pity them" (I.iii.167-68). Later, as discussed above, Othello denies that his own sexual appetite has anything to do with Desdemona's accompanying him to Cyprus; indeed, he denies that such an appetite exists. When he again accepts "the flinty and steel couch of war" (I.iii.230) rather than Desdemona's bridal bed, his denial of passion suggests a Platonic courtship and marriage, by implication giving a courtly-love perspective to the relationship. This implication is important, for it provides a framework for Cassio's hyperbolic descriptions of Desdemona in conventional courtly-love terms. Prior to her arrival on Cyprus, Cassio describes her:

> he [Othello] hath achiev'd a maid
> That paragons description and wild fame;
> One that excels the quirks of blazoning pens,
> Does tire the ingener.
> (II.i.61-65)

When Desdemona arrives on Cyprus, Cassio speaks again as the typical courtly lover:

> O, behold,
> The riches of the ship is come on shore!
> You men of Cyprus, let her have your knees.
> Hail to thee, lady! and the grace of heaven,
> Before, behind thee, and on every hand,
> Enwheel thee round!
> (II.i.82-87)

If Cassio ever desires more than to kneel before Desdemona, the epitome of chaste womanhood, Shakespeare gives no indication. Iago, on the other hand, can imagine no man--neither husband nor friend--whose physical appetite is secondary to some spiritual kinship with a woman. Therefore, when Iago observes Cassio's obvious worship of Desdemona, his manipulative mind seizes on a way to "ensnare as great a fly as Cassio" (II.i.68-69), thereby gaining retribution for the lost lieutenancy. Iago's plan works so well simply because of the dual view of woman operative in his society. All he must do is convince Othello that Desdemona is not a pedestaled paragon but a wanton Eve. Othello's error is that he can allow no middle ground: Between absolute purity and "cunning whore of Venice" (IV.ii.88), he admits no other position.

Shakespeare insists that a middle ground is necessary. Desdemona is not goddess. While her appetite for the physical is never promiscuous or unchaste, it is persistent. The persistence manifests itself in ways other than sexual, allowing Iago to manipulate the nature of the appetite to suit his purpose. For example, her penchant for the excitement of a secret marriage has already been mentioned along with her unreserved defense of herself and her stated desire for Othello before the senators. Throughout the play, she displays an appetite for discourse. Her repartee with

Iago while waiting for Othello's ship to arrive demonstrates an ease and pleasure in rhetoric beyond that expected of the typical Renaissance woman. She also seems at ease with, and certainly not put off by, the sexual innuendo that characterizes this dialogue. Later, she misuses her appetite for discourse, bombarding Othello with her requests for Cassio's reinstatement. Even this misuse of language is integral to her character, for it illustrates human foible and points to the middle ground that she comfortably occupies but that Othello cannot accept. Desdemona nags her husband almost shrewishly while believing she performs a service for both him and Cassio. What she sees as the role of a loving wife, Othello perceives as jarring discord--an irritant to his already over-wrought nerves.

A key scene showing Shakespeare's insistence of the middle ground is often ignored by critics.[14] In Act IV, Scene iii, the conversation between Desdemona and Emilia is a curious mixture of preparation for the marriage bed and discussion about adultery. The strangely juxtaposed conversation begins with an expressed interest in Lodovico:

> Emil. Shall I go fetch your night-gown?
> Des. No, unpin me here.
> This Lodovico is a proper man.

[14] For a similar perspective, see S. N. Garner, "Shakespeare's Desdemona," Shakespeare Studies, 9 (1976), 233-35.

Emil. A very handsome man.
Des. He speaks well.
Emil. I know a lady in Venice would have walk'd barefoot to Palestine for a touch of his nether lip.
(IV.iii.34-39)

The conversation continues, after Desdemona sings the plaintive "Willow" song:

Des. O, these men, these men!
Dost thou in conscience think--tell me,
Emilia--
That there be women do abuse their husbands
In such gross kind?
Emil. There be some such, no question.
Des. Wouldst thou do such a deed for all the world?
Emil. Why, would not you?
Des. No, by this heavenly light!
Emil. Nor I neither by this heavenly light;
I might do't as well i' th' dark.
Des. Wouldst thou do such a deed for all the world?
Emil. The world's a huge thing; it is a great price
For a small vice.
. . . . .
for all the whole world--'ud's pity, who would not make her husband a cuckold to make him a monarch? I should venture purgatory for't.
Des. Beshrew me, if I would do such a wrong
For the whole world.
(IV.iii.59-69, 75-79)

An issue raised by this intriguing scene, that of Lodovico, may never be resolved to the satisfaction of all. My interest is less with what Desdemona means by introducing Lodovico into the conversation and more with what the entire scene shows about Desdemona. I see this scene as another example of her appetite, illustrating both her interest in new ideas

and her interest in the particular idea of adultery. Interest, however, is not synonymous with intent.

In order to understand Desdemona's reactions in Act IV, Scene iii, it is important to note what conversations have preceded. The idea of adultery does not originate with Desdemona or with this scene. After the scene where Othello accuses Desdemona of losing the handkerchief that he has given her, Emilia discusses men's sexual natures in terms of appetite:

> 'Tis not a year or two shows us a man:
> They are all but stomachs, and we all but food;
> They eat us hungerly, and when they are full
> They belch us.
> (III.iv.103-06)

Emilia's comment is grounded in the metaphor of feeding, admitting only a sensual view of the sexual relationship. "Stomach," "food," "eat us hungerly," "belch us"--this is a concept foreign to Desdemona's idea of the relationship between man and wife. Ironically, just prior to the scene described above, Othello uses similar imagery to depict the marriage relationship, emphasizing the danger of woman's "appetite":

> She's gone. I am abus'd, and my relief
> Must be to loathe her. O curse of marriage!
> That we can call these delicate creatures ours,
> And not their appetites!
> (III.iii.267-70)

Othello further claims that even if the entire camp had "tasted" (III.iii.346) Desdemona's body, he could have endured that fact if he had not known of it. In other words, what destroys Othello is "discovering" (however false that discovery) that he does not own his wife's appetite. Iago expands on the same image, claiming that Othello is "eated up with passion" (III.iii.391) at the discovery. Thus, Emilia's description of appetitive man is at home in the general climate of the play. Juxtaposed to these scenes, which ring with the word "whore" both spoken and unspoken, is the scene between Bianca and Cassio--surely intended by Shakespeare to emphasize the concept of sexual appetite. Desdemona picks up on this climate. She, in effect, continues the conversation that has permeated the several scenes immediately preceding Act IV, Scene iii.

Desdemona's questions to Emilia in Act IV, Scene iii, concerning adultery grow from genuine curiosity. In many respects, Desdemona is as credulous as Othello: Just as he cannot accept her innocence, she cannot accept his loss of faith since infidelity has never occurred to her. Now, having been accused of whoring, she is disoriented; she must admit a world that has never had place in her thoughts, much less in her intentions. She does, indeed, mention Lodovico at a strange time. Yet her mention of him stems from a growing curiosity and uncertainty about woman's role. The

question she entertains is whether there are women unfaithful to their husbands, as she has been accused of being; she does not seriously consider herself with another man. I think Shakespeare inserts the conversation on Lodovico to remind us that Desdemona is human--but, more importantly, to show us that to be human does not include an intention to err from the marriage relationship. The scene sharply contrasts Emilia and Desdemona. To the latter, a husband is always the kind lord and object of total love. To the former, he is a creature of appetite mated to another creature of appetite. Emilia states her belief to Desdemona:

> Let husbands know
> Their wives have sense like them; they see, and smell,
> And have their palates both for sweet and sour,
> As husbands have.
> (IV.iii.93-96)

For Desdemona, marriage includes sensuousness; however, the love relationship is never based on sensuality. Desdemona alone of all the characters in Othello upholds this view; for her innocent adherence to this principle of a unified love that comprises both body and soul, she dies.

Shakespeare's Othello would seem both stupid and cruel were there no ambiguity present in Desdemona's characterization. The playwright provides her obvious appetite as a means for conveying this necessary ambiguity. To show the complexity of what Shakespeare is doing, a comparison of her

with Edmund Spenser's Britomart is fruitful. Spenser uses Britomart allegorically in the Faerie Queene to work through a similar issue and show a resolution of the complexities of physical love. Both Britomart and Desdemona are, of course, "fair warriors." Of greater importance, however, is the type of chastity, coupled with a commendable sexual appetite, they embody. Britomart, like Desdemona, represents faithful married love given of its own free will, not given out of lust or in acquiescence to force. Both Britomart and Desdemona are associated with images of whiteness and light, underscoring the purity of what they represent. Spenser makes clear that untried chastity is a lesser virtue than chastity that withstands trials. Britomart leaves behind drops of blood at Castle Joyous, but she also leaves behind the naiveté of innocent youth. In like manner, Shakespeare shows Desdemona's maidenhood on trial when, with psychological acumen, she defends love of husband over love of father in Act I, Scene iii. The subsequent deaths of Brabantio and Desdemona herself are evidence of the extent of Desdemona's trial. Britomart is contrasted with Malecasta, whose very name means "bad chastity." Britomart's love is also contrasted with the vulgar displays of unordered, irrational love at Castle Joyous and the House of Busyrane. Similarly, Desdemona's love is contrasted with that of Bianca and Emilia. Bianca represents a promiscuity like that at Castle Joyous.

Emilia represents love perverted by mastery, a disharmony of body and soul, like that depicted at the House of Busyrane. Neither Spenser nor Shakespeare suggests that chastity means a negation of physical appetite; rather both suggest that chastity includes physical love blended with spiritual love within the proper setting--marriage. Spenser shows this type of chastity through the union of Britomart and Artegall. Artegall responds to Britomart as if to a supernatural presence. Yet Spenser presents the lovers in this way to show a divine beauty that can unite the physical and spiritual elements of love.

Unfortunately for Desdemona and Othello, Othello is not able to allow this unity of physical and spiritual to occur; he sees only the "divine Desdemona" (II.i.73) turned into a kind of evil goddess whose hold over his soul becomes deadly. For Othello, a woman is either goddess or whore, never simply an admirable blend of the two. Thus, both Spenser and Shakespeare convey the didacticism expected by their era: Spenser illustrates the joys of chaste love in marriage; and by negative example, Shakespeare illustrates a similar point. If Othello could have accepted physicality in man and woman, if he could have seen that physicality in its proper relationship to marriage, he would have endured no tragedy. Like Hamlet, Othello concludes that woman and beast are but creatures of appetite. His is the tragedy of unreasoning expectation.

The Transplanted Garden:
Destruction of the "Pith of Life" Once Again

In Hamlet Shakespeare depicts decay devouring an entire society. The blight both infects and is spread by Hamlet himself, with the decadence of hero and society in a direct causal relationship. In Othello, on the other hand, Shakespeare shows another garden whose potential is overcome by festering weeds. However, Othello is directly neither product nor producer of the decadence; rather his own propensity for decadence appears to mirror the decay of individuals who surround him.

Frank Kermode observes that although Venice is noted for such virtues as wealth, power, and justice, "it is not Eden but a fallen world."[15] Considering the evidence he points to, and in particular his description of Iago as representative of "metropolitan knowingness,"[16] I am reminded of the expression "urban blight." Although the words are generated by a twentieth-century phenomenon, "urban blight" is an apt description of the potential Garden of Eden in Venice and Cyprus devoured by a blight as devastating as what infects Hamlet's Denmark. Venice is a world of "curled darlings" (I.ii.68) like the gullible Roderigo, of caring but unknowing

[15] Kermode, p. 1200.

[16] Kermode, p. 1200.

fathers like Brabantio, of a "demi-devil" (V.ii.301) like Iago who snatches men's souls and mocks their downfalls. The vulgar language exemplified by Iago and Roderigo emphasizes the bestiality of men that is only lightly covered by the facade of gentility. Shakespeare moves the action from Venice to Cyprus, supposedly to remove the guard of civilization; however, the veneer of Venice is like that of Portia's Belmont--a selective hospitality that nurtures where it chooses and devours where it chooses. This type of hospitality--alike in Venice and Cyprus--deals in individuals, nourishing some while destroying others. Othello is, even more than Hamlet, a play about individuality and the control exerted by the individual both on self and on others. In Othello, the garden imagery never focuses on the society of Venice or Cyprus, but on the individual will.

As is the case in Hamlet, the garden imagery in Othello is stated at some length in one passage early in the play and developed through various allusions in subsequent scenes. Iago introduces the concept in conversation with the lovesick Roderigo, tutoring him in the notion that the individual has sole charge of his own will:

> Virtue? a fig! 'tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners; so that if we will plant nettles or sow lettuce, set hyssop and weed up tine, supply it with one gender of herbs or distract it with many, either to have it sterile with idleness or manur'd with industry--

> why, the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills. If the beam of our lives had not one scale of reason to poise another of sensuality, the blood and baseness of our natures would conduct us to most prepost'rous conclusions. But we have reason to cool our raging motions, our carnal stings, our unbitted lusts; whereof I take this that you call love to be a sect or scion.
> (I.iii.319-32)

The effect of Iago's words on Roderigo is far less significant than what those words reveal about Iago. Just as in a previous passage he parodies the words of God, turning "I AM THAT I AM" (Exodus 3:14) into "I am not what I am" (I.i.65), in this passage Iago uses Christ's parable of the sowers (Matthew 13), bending its logic to his own purpose. Saying the right thing for the wrong reason is typical of Iago throughout the play; he thrives on the perversion of values and ideas. It is important to see that, although he has an ulterior motive, Iago speaks the truth about individual will. What a man plants in his mind, that he will become. If the fruit of one's mind is an idée fixe, that overbearing focus will eventually destroy the individual.

Iago applies his philosophy well. When he speaks to the simpleminded Roderigo, encouraging him to be patient in his pursuit of Desdemona, Iago alludes to the garden metaphor in sententious tone: "Though other things grow fair against the sun, / Yet fruits that blossom first will first be ripe. / Content thyself a while" (II.iii.376-78).

Later, Iago adjusts his tone to a blunter one, addressing Emilia but intending Bianca to receive the message that he is implicating her in Cassio's supposed murder. He calls the fray "the fruits of whoring" (V.i.155). Interestingly, the image is the same as that used to encourage Roderigo to whore, but now the chameleon-like Iago reverses his position to suit the present circumstances.

Othello is another character who uses garden imagery, one of many speech patterns he takes on from Iago. It is particularly appropriate for Othello to adopt this pattern, for it is his "garden" or "will" that especially interests Iago. Iago plants the seeds of distrust in Othello's garden, distributing and manuring them well. But only Othello can nurture the seedlings and harvest the crop. Shakespeare emphasizes the devouring nature of the crop by calling it a "monster." This supernatural designation suggests that it far outreaches blight or cankerworm, which at least belong to the natural world even though they are destructive forces in it. Iago seems to warn Othello against the carefully planted jealousy:

> O, beware, my lord, of jealousy!
> It is the green-ey'd monster which doth mock
> The meat it feeds on.
> (III.iii.165-67)

Indeed, Iago should know the truth of what he says, for he is the chief mocker in the entire Shakespearean canon.

Othello, however, is goaded, as Iago intends, not warned. The extent of Othello's jealousy and the decadence it brings to his own will are evident in his denunciation of Desdemona, stated in garden imagery:

> O thou weed!
> Who art so lovely fair and smell'st so sweet
> That the sense aches at thee, would thou hadst never been born!
> (IV.ii.67-69)

Othello, like Hamlet, has a fixation on rottenness. Hamlet, however, often notes a reality while Othello seizes on an illusion instilled by Iago. Othello's denunciation is vituperative in its sharp contrast between the implied beauty and fragrance of a flower and the rankness of a weed. His trading of the "fruits" (II.iii.9) of the wedding night for the "weed" of the smothering night shows exactly how effectively Iago has worked on Othello's will. Othello uses the garden image once more, this time with a poignancy, as he prepares to kill Desdemona, convinced he is committing a sacrifice rather than a murder:

> When I have pluck'd thy rose,
> I cannot give it vital growth again,
> It needs must wither. I'll smell thee on the tree. [Kisses her]
> (V.ii.13-15)

The number of garden images in Othello is small in proportion to their effectiveness. They show Shakespeare

attempting again, as he attempts in so many other plays, to find a new Eden. Instead, what he finds is another fallen Eden, another paradise lost. Rome, Venice, Denmark, Cyprus--all are remarkably alike. Nationality may change; but, consistent with the basic theme of tragedy, man's nature remains discouragingly constant.

Poison: False Nurturance Through the Ear

As I have observed earlier in discussing the motif of poison in Hamlet, Shakespeare's figurative use of poison is not surprising since poison at the literal level sustains the play. In Othello, on the other hand, no literal poison exists--unless we count Othello's request of Iago: "Get me some poison, Iago, this night" (IV.i.204). The literal poison is hardly missed since the figurative poison that Iago administers drop by drop is central to the plot of Othello. Indeed, Othello's request of Iago is extremely ironic, for Othello has, inadvertently, already ingested figuratively a poison he requests literally. What he anticipates feeding to Desdemona is what Iago has already fed to him. Furthermore, the effects of poison are already as deadly as Othello anticipates: He is as dead in spirit as he would have her in body.

In Othello, then, the literal poison that suffuses Hamlet is replaced by a metaphorical poison, an indication of Shakespeare's increasing mastery over his imagery. The concept of poisonous words is introduced early in the play. Iago goads Roderigo to awaken Brabantio with the news of Desdemona's marriage, "poison" being central in his action:

> Call up her father.
> Rouse him, make after him, poison his delight,
> Proclaim him in the streets; incense her kinsmen,
> And though he in a fertile climate dwell,
> Plague him with flies. Though that his joy be joy,
> Yet throw such changes of vexation on't,
> As it may lose some color.
> (I.i.67-73)

So successfully does Iago "poison his delight" that Brabantio eventually dies of broken-hearted grief. In another instance, Brabantio takes up Iago's "poison," suggesting to the Senate that Othello has bewitched Desdemona "with some dram" (I.iii. 105). A Senator replies to the accusation:

> But, Othello, speak.
> Did you by indirect and forced courses
> Subdue and poison this young maid's affections?
> Or came it by request, and such fair question
> As soul to soul affordeth?
> (I.iii.110-14)

Brabantio, having heard both Othello and Desdemona speak eloquently in their own defense, replies: "But words are words; I never yet did hear / That the bruis'd heart was pierced through the ear" (I.iii.218-19). In Othello,

however, words are not words; words are poison, just as in Hamlet words are "daggers" (III.ii.396). Without a doubt, the heart can be "pierced through the ear." This coupling of "poison" and "ear" resonates again the literal poisoning of King Hamlet by poison poured in his ear. Iago's poison begins to take shape in his soliloquy ending Act I:

> Let me see now:
> To get his [Cassio's] place and to plume up my will
> In double knavery--How? how?--Let's see--
> After some time, to abuse Othello's ear
> That he [Cassio] is too familiar with his wife.
> (I.iii.392-96)

Iago pours a very real poison--words--into Othello's ear, a poison that devours Othello's spirit as surely as the literal poison devours King Hamlet's life or as the Ghost's words eventually devour Hamlet's reason. Both Othello and Hamlet are led to a revenge that is the more damning because they consider the cause holy; Hamlet sees himself as "minister" (V.iv.175) while Othello sees himself as sacrificer.

The linking of "poison," "words," and "ear" in Act I resonates throughout the remaining acts. Indeed, the notion operates like a theme and variations: The theme is introduced, then presented in various tonalities and in different rhythms interwoven throughout the composition. In Acts II, III, and IV, Shakespeare sets forth the variations. For example, in soliloquy at the end of Act II, Scene i, Iago links the

images of poison and feeding, applying the notion to himself:

> Now I do love her too,
> Not out of absolute lust (though peradventure
> I stand accomptant for as great a sin),
> But partly led to diet my revenge,
> For that I do suspect the lusty Moor
> Hath leap'd into my seat; the thought whereof
> Doth (like a poisonous mineral) gnaw my inwards.
> (II.i.291-97)

Iago recognizes how poison gnaws the individual, causing a deterioration of both body and spirit. Like Claudius, Iago acknowledges that he is guilty of a great sin; and also like Claudius, he does not repent the cause. Again speaking in soliloquy, Iago admits that he is in league with the forces of hell:

> Divinity of hell!
> When devils will the blackest sins put on,
> They do suggest at first with heavenly shows,
> As I do now; for whiles this honest fool
> Plies Desdemona to repair his fortune,
> And she for him pleads strongly to the Moor,
> I'll pour this pestilence into his ear--
> That she repeals him for her body's lust,
> And by how much she strives to do him good,
> She shall undo her credit with the Moor.
> So will I turn her virtue into pitch,
> And out of her own goodness make the net
> That shall enmesh them all.
> (II.iii.350-62)

"Pour this pestilence into his ear"--this could be a line out of Hamlet. Shakespeare takes his own literal invention in one play, extending it into an effective metaphor in another.

It is significant that Act III, Scene iii, Othello's great pivotal scene, employs the imagery of poisonous feeding. Once again speaking in soliloquy--contrasting the true nature of the private man with the public image of "honest Iago"--the villainous Iago notes:

> The Moor already changes with my poison;
> Dangerous conceits are in their natures poisons,
> Which at the first are scarce found to distaste,
> But with a little act upon the blood
> Burn like the mines of sulphur.
> (III.iii.325-29)

"Poison" and "distaste" link feeding imagery with that of poison, showing how Iago feeds his prey with poison even as he feeds upon their virtues.

In Act IV, Iago becomes "doctor Iago"; in Robert Heilman's words, "Iago figures quite literally as physician."[17] In this role, Iago both diagnoses and prescribes. Iago's words underline this idea: "Work on, / My medicine work!" (IV.i.44-45). But the medicine he metes out is perverse, a poisonous potion that kills whoever feeds on it. Here is the antithesis of nurturance.

As Heilman also notes, the physician easily merges with the viper, reptile imagery supplanting that of doctor.[18] This reptilian imagery is of particular significance in a

[17] Magic in the Web: Action and Language in "Othello" (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1956), p. 86.

[18] Heilman, pp. 94-98.

pairing of Hamlet and Othello where Denmark and Italy exemplify fallen Edens. When we view Othello in light of a Garden-of-Eden analogy, Iago is surely the poisonous serpent, and Othello represents Adam, poisoned--however unwittingly--by Desdemona as Eve. Just as the serpent provides the means for Eve, so does Iago provide, through his poison, the means for Desdemona. Seen in this light, Desdemona does indeed guard the order of Othello's life. His words "Perdition catch my soul / But I do love thee! and when I love thee not, / Chaos is come again" (III.iii.90-92) take on even more significance in this context. Lodovico's identification of Iago with the Genesis-serpent-incarnate confirms the analogy: "Where is that viper?" (V.ii.285) is the final assessment of Iago, complementing "demi-devil" (V.ii.301) and "Spartan dog" (V.ii.361).

Shakespeare depicts a venom-filled Othello throughout most of the second half of the play. The extent of Iago's poisoned nature is evident in the feeding imagery. Several passages are particularly relevant. The first, already quoted, shows that Othello knowingly exchanges "fruits" (II.iii.9) for "weed" (IV.ii.67). In other places Shakespeare suggests that, ironically, Othello has become the cannibal he speaks of earlier. In the central scene, Act III, Scene iii, he states, "I'll tear her all to pieces" (III.iii.431). Then, in Act IV he exclaims to Iago, "I will chop her into messes"

(IV.i.200). As Northrop Frye points out, "The imagery of cannibalism usually includes, not only images of torture and mutilation, but of what is technically known as sparagmos or the tearing apart of the sacrificial body. . . ."[19] A similar "tearing apart" certainly appears to be Othello's intent, for he expresses a parallel idea later, speaking of Cassio: "Had all his hairs been lives, my great revenge / Had stomach for them all" (V.ii.74-75). The cannibal imagery is unmistakable. It, more than any other single aspect of the play, shows the depths to which Othello has sunk. The noble man of the play's opening scenes has become a primitive, beastlike creature--lower than any beast since he has shunned the gift of reason reserved for man. Othello-as-cannibal is even more pronounced than is the case for Hamlet--who, at a similar point, would "drink hot blood" (III.ii.390). In a sense, the alien in Venice has demonstrated the savage nature most dreaded by the so-called genteel citizens of the country.

As in Hamlet, the internal predator is at the heart of the feeding imagery; this self-violator is synonymous with jealousy, the fruit of what Iago has planted. Shakespeare places this idea firmly in the pivotal Act III, Scene iii, with Iago, ironically enough, warning Othello: "O, beware,

[19] Frye, p. 148.

my lord, of jealousy! / It is the green-ey'd monster which doth mock / The meat it feeds on" (III.iii.165-67). Emilia echoes the same idea in conversation with Desdemona:

> Emil. But jealious souls will not be answer'd so;
> They are not ever jealious for the cause,
> But jealious for they're jealious.
> It is a monster
> Begot upon itself, born on itself.
> Des. Heaven keep the monster from Othello's mind!
> (III.iv.159-63)

Othello's jealousy is, of course, the direct product of Iago's poison; the viper does his work well. The play's closing scene suggests that Othello would purge himself of the poison, of the barbarian within himself that Iago has drawn out. Othello's suicide is in the vein of purgation, for he realizes that Iago's poison is damning to his spirit.

Feeding imagery in both Hamlet and Othello shows man to be his own devourer. Lust, disease, and poison are three motifs sharing one focus, that of self-destructive appetite. Shakespeare takes an important step from the perspective in Titus Andronicus and The Merchant of Venice to that in Hamlet and Othello. The importance in the newer view is that it places blame for spiritual destruction within the individual, not on some external force. Shakespeare shows that the world is relative, not absolute; man is neither god nor beast. The tragedies of Hamlet and Othello stem from the heroes' belief in an absolute world. In each case,

the tragedy is a direct product of the hero's inability to evaluate and measure in relative terms. Because the hero cannot evaluate, "passion" and "poison" become interchangeable elements of destruction. Together they produce a blighted Eden, a place where dealers in passion and poison are at home.

Chapter Four

"Supp'd Full With Horrors" or With Sustenance? An Imagistic Perspective on *King Lear* and *Macbeth*

To read *King Lear* and *Macbeth* without noticing the pervasive feeding imagery is to read the plays without perceiving their thematic core. Unlike *Hamlet* and *Othello*, the two tragedies immediately preceding *King Lear* and *Macbeth*, these two later plays do not treat man's sexual appetite as a force eating at his spiritual potential. However, in *King Lear* and *Macbeth*, we encounter a powerful substitution for sexual appetite: Political hunger replaces its sexual counterpart. In depicting the effects of political hunger, Shakespeare dramatizes the unsexing of wives; both Goneril and Lady Macbeth choose to sublimate the typical woman's role in order to satisfy political appetite. In both cases, political fruition is achieved--however briefly--only at the expense of personal sterility. We never see a similar desire for political power in *Hamlet* and *Othello*. Although Hamlet is a prince, he manifests no desire for rulership such as that manifested by the Macbeths, Goneril, Regan, and Edmund. In Othello such a desire is not evident; while he enjoys military leadership, he is not power-hungry. Yet in *King Lear* and *Macbeth*, the power-hungry crowd the stage. By pairing political ambition with a denial of sexuality, Shakespeare links the two ideas in a marvelously inventive way. As in

Hamlet and Othello, self-destructive appetite retains center stage, but the particular expression of it changes.

In all four tragedies--Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth--Shakespeare treats appetite as part of a broad theme, that of nurture or sustenance. Shakespeare suggests that man's life must be based on more than physical or material needs. "Man does not live by bread alone" is a theme communicated by Shakespeare even as it is communicated by the Bible. In both King Lear and Macbeth, Shakespeare presents the theme of sustenance through archetypal characters and their relationships, through the predator-prey relationship, and through a symbolic treatment of banqueting. These three concepts are conveyed by feeding imagery at many levels.

The Albanys and the Macbeths: "Milk of Human Kindness" and "Gall"

Goneril and Lady Macbeth are wives, not mothers; yet Shakespeare sets them in a maternal imagistic context through "milk" imagery. Both function symbolically as mothers to their husbands; however, their function is destructive by design. Through their urgings, they would separate their husbands from spiritual sustenance. While the archetypal Good Mother represents fruitfulness, nurturance, and security, these unfruitful women are aligned with spiritual starvation.

Shakespeare uses feeding imagery, especially that of milk, to characterize the relationship between Albany and Goneril and between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Indeed, both the imagery and the relationships of the two pairs are remarkably similar. What is different is the outcome of the mothering.

Scholars have shown that Shakespeare probably wrote King Lear prior to Macbeth. A good argument in favor of this assumption is that the outcome of the Macbeths is in several ways an extension and inversion of the outcome of the Albanys. Albany exemplifies the milk of human kindness at its best; he, like the milk associated with him, is a sustainer of life, a force for good in spite of Goneril. Macbeth, on the other hand, is the inverse of Albany; at the urging of Lady Macbeth, he becomes a destroyer. Albany, in terms of imagery and function, may serve as a kind of foil for the deadly Macbeth. Since the two leaders are described in similar imagery and since Goneril and Lady Macbeth share the destructive qualities of the Terrible Mother, it is not unlikely that both pairs are the product of the same creative impulse in Shakespeare. Viewed together, the outcomes of the two pairs are like two sides of one coin.

The evil nature of Goneril has been treated much more often than the benevolent nature of Albany. In fact, Albany has frequently been ignored against the huge background of King Lear. A. C. Bradley states that although he is "merely

sketched," he is perhaps deserving of "a few words."[1] Bradley then proceeds to give Albany exactly that--a few words--setting a trend that other critics have tended to follow. Among more recent critics, Leo Kirschbaum and Warren Stevenson have recognized that Albany offers a quiet but powerful statement for good in King Lear. Kirschbaum sees the emerging strength of Albany as a counterbalancing force to the macrocosmic evil within the Lear universe.[2] Similarly, taking the archetypal perspective, Stevenson sees Albany as a mythic character around whom certain "structural, historical, and symbolic considerations revolve."[3] Of particular importance to the present study is Stevenson's discussion of Albany's symbolic name, which is derived from the Latin albus or white, the color associated with good and, incidentally, the color of milk. It is through his name that Albany is linked with Albion, "used by Greek and Roman writers as the name of Britain."[4] Thus, viewed from this perspective, Stevenson sees Albany as "an archetypal figure . . . pointing to

[1] Bradley, p. 237.

[2] "Albany," Shakespeare Survey 13 (London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1960), pp. 20-29; rpt. Character and Characterization in Shakespeare (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1962), pp. 33-49.

[3] "Albany as Archetype in King Lear," Modern Language Quarterly, 26 (1965), 263.

[4] Stevenson, p. 261.

the spiritual reintegration not merely of the British people, but of mankind."[5] Albany may appear unobtrusive, yet Shakespeare introduces him in the first line and involves him in the play's final conversation--sure signs of his importance.

Albany's portrayal through the milk-related images is initiated by Goneril when she accuses him of "milky gentleness:"

> No, no, my lord,
> This milky gentleness and course of yours
> Though I condemn not, yet, under pardon,
> You are much more attax'd for want of wisdom
> Than prais'd for harmful mildness.
> (I.iv.340-44)

Goneril's words show Albany to be a basically kind person. Shakespeare further reveals the nature of Albany in the duke's reply that shows him to value farsightedness. While echoing the important "seeing" motif of the play, Shakespeare also foreshadows both the ultimate goodness and the perceptiveness of Albany. This duke will not be blinded by lesser considerations once the dramatically appropriate time comes for him to act decisively as a sustainer of life and goodness. Later, when a series of virtually unparalleled horrors have occurred throughout the Lear universe, causing Albany's true nature to dominate, Goneril characterizes him with the same milk image:

[5] Stevenson, p. 262.

> Milk-liver'd man,
> That bear'st a cheek for blows, a head for wrongs,
> Who hast not in thy brows an eye discerning
> Thine honor from thy suffering, that not know'st
> Fools do those villains pity who are punish'd
> Ere they have done their mischief, where's thy drum?
> (IV.ii.50-55)

Ironically, at the very moment that Albany sees the good most clearly, Goneril accuses him of "milk-liver'd" blindness. The milk image is the same as in the earlier usage but not the man to whom it is applied; or, if the man is the same as he was potentially, the difference is in how the audience perceives him.

Shakespeare's treatment of Albany prefigures his treatment of Macbeth. Goneril's use of "milky gentleness" and "milk-liver'd man" is similar to one of Lady Macbeth's descriptions of Macbeth:

> Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be
> What thou art promis'd. Yet do I fear thy nature,
> It is too full o' th' milk of human kindness
> To catch the nearest way.
> (I.v.15-18)

Significantly, this is Lady Macbeth's opening speech. The milk image is, therefore, entrenched in the relationship of the Macbeths from her first appearance. Lady Macbeth's estimate of Macbeth accords with the public estimate of him: He is a good man, an ambitious man, but not a cruel man. Lady Macbeth fears that his nature will impede his political

progress. "Milk of human kindness" conveys a positive image combining the notions of physical and spiritual sustenance. However, we perceive immediately that Lady Macbeth, like Goneril, places a negative value on such "milk." The conclusion of her speech makes her negative connotation clear as she addresses the absent Macbeth:

> Hie thee hither,
> That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,
> And chastise with the valor of my tongue
> All that impedes thee from the golden round,
> Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
> To have thee crown'd withal.
> (I.v.25-30)

The usual association of milk-as-sustenance is frighteningly juxtaposed to the image of pouring spirits into the ear, which--as Hamlet and Othello attest--resonates dire consequences. In King Lear the figurative poison of Goneril and Regan fills the ears of the vain old king, setting off chaotic ramifications perhaps without equal in literature. In Lady Macbeth's language, Shakespeare gathers up these preceding associations, thus imbuing her speech with a foreboding it might not contain in another context.

The significance of the milk image gains in degree when accompanied by the associations of Goneril and Lady Macbeth as Terrible Mother. Of course, Lady Macbeth is much more clearly defined in the role than is Goneril. However, as the present discussion will show, the two women share certain characteristics that give them equal claim to the role.

In Jungian terminology, the Terrible Mother is one aspect of the Universal Mother, from which the Earth Mother symbol is derived. Just as the Earth Mother embodies both sustenance and destruction, so does the Terrible Mother. To understand the dual concept of this archetype, we can profitably look at a Hindu legend about the goddess Kali, as quoted by Joseph Campbell in his Hero With a Thousand Faces:

> One quiet afternoon Ramakrishna beheld a beautiful woman ascend from the Ganges and approach the grove in which he was meditating. He perceived that she was about to give birth to a child. In a moment the babe was born, and she gently nursed it. Presently, however, she assumed a horrible aspect, took the infant in her now ugly jaws and crushed it, chewed it. Swallowing it, she returned again to the Ganges, where she disappeared.[6]

Without a doubt, Goneril and Lady Macbeth are twins in quality with Kali. Each would devour the "child" she seems to nurture with her urgings of power.

Goneril is figuratively associated with the mother concept in several ways. First, the Fool, in his purposeful prattling, says to Lear:

> thou mad'st
> thy daughters thy mothers, for when thou
> gav'st them the rod, and put'st down thine
> own breeches,

[6] The Hero With a Thousand Faces (1949; rpt. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972), p. 115.

> [Sings] "Then they for sudden joy did weep,
> And I for sorrow sung,
> That such a king should play bo-peep,
> And go the fools among."
> (I.iv.172-78)

The Fool suggests that Goneril and Regan now play the parent role to Lear's child. But the parent who should sustain the child denies that sustenance. The roles are reversed in another image while the larger meaning remains the same: Lear refers to the evil Goneril and Regan as "pelican daughters" (III.iv.75), calling to mind the Elizabethan belief that the young pelican feeds upon its mother's blood. The most extensive reference to Goneril as mother is in Lear's sterility curse:

> Hear, Nature, hear, dear goddess, hear!
> Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend
> To make this creature fruitful.
> Into her womb convey sterility,
> Dry up in her the organs of increase,
> And from her derogate body never spring
> A babe to honor her! If she must teem,
> Create her child of spleen, that it may live
> And be a thwart disnatur'd torment to her.
> Let it stamp wrinkles in her brow of youth,
> With cadent tears fret channels in her cheeks,
> Turn all her mother's pains and benefits
> To laughter and contempt, that she may feel
> How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
> To have a thankless child!
> (I.iv.275-89)

In a real sense, Lear's curse is fulfilled; for Goneril has no children, leaves no legacy of fruitfulness. She is singularly ineffective in forming Albany as a "child" of

her perverted mothering. Albany states this lack of fruitfulness:

> O Goneril,
> You are not worth the dust which the rude wind
> Blows in your face. I fear your disposition;
> That nature which contemns it origin
> Cannot be bordered certain in itself.
> She that herself will sliver and disbranch
> From her material sap, perforce must wither,
> And come to deadly use.
> (IV.ii.29-36)

Again, the garden imagery combines with the larger feeding imagery. By implication Shakespeare contrasts the sustenance Albany provides with the sterility of Goneril.

Shakespeare's characterization of Lady Macbeth is a brilliant treatment of the Universal Mother archetype subjected to what Northrop Frye calls "'demonic modulation,' or the deliberate reversal of the customary moral associations of archetypes."[7] Shakespeare purposefully brings about this modulation, placing at the forefront the Terrible Mother, through the use of the milk imagery associated with Lady Macbeth. To suggest that Shakespeare's "fiend-like queen" (V.ix.35) is based on archetypal characteristics is in no way to suggest that Shakespeare's depiction is any less

[7] Frye makes this statement in a discussion of the relationship between antithetical principles. He shows that comedy often treats one aspect of life while tragedy treats the other, yet polarity is an oversimplification of the primary concept. The specific reference is to p. 156.

original; in fact, the dramatist did not have to perceive at the conscious level Lady Macbeth's affinity to the Universal Mother figures of a common mythology. What is significant about his portrayal of Lady Macbeth is that she is a highly individualized creation of Shakespeare's imagination while, at the same time, she is raised to cosmic proportions by her link with a notion that reaches back to the Garden of Eden and includes a diversity of women such as the Christian Virgin Mary and the Hindu goddess Kali, as well as such goddesses of Western culture as Venus, Diana, Ishtar, Isis, and Demeter. Lady Macbeth, like all of these women, represents the positive and negative forces of the universe. Each is a microcosmic example of the larger concept of the whole earth as Universal Mother, bringing forth her children, nurturing them, but eventually reclaiming them to herself through death. All, to greater or lesser extents, bestow sustenance; on the other hand, all, again in varying degrees, are associated with destruction or death. Shakespeare effectively associates milk imagery with Lady Macbeth to illustrate the dualism of her nature, a dualism intrinsic to the concept of the Universal Mother. Like the archetype, Lady Macbeth is capable of nurturing; however, Shakespeare clearly shows that she is even more capable of devouring.

Lady Macbeth's opening speech, containing milk imagery, has already been discussed. Shakespeare seems to verify the

preceding associations through Lady Macbeth's next speech, a soliloquy in which she both invokes the powers of evil to take possession of her and focuses again on the milk image:

> Come, you spirits
> That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
> And fill me from the crown to the toe topful
> Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood,
> Stop up th' access and passage to remorse,
> Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
> Th' effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
> And take my milk for gall, you murth'ring ministers,
> Wherever in your sightless substances
> You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,
> And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
> That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
> Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark
> To cry, "Hold, hold!"
> (I.v.40-54)

As Lady Macbeth calls on the powers of hell itself to "unsex" her, to remove all signs that she is woman, she significantly focuses on milk imagery; once again the image is the opposite of sustenance and is suggestive of death and destruction. This passage shows Lady Macbeth to be the most perverse of women. The mother's milk that should be a symbol of her natural role she willingly replaces with a bitter gall that offers not sustenance but death. Lady Macbeth's emphasis on "mortal thoughts" underlines her complete abdication of spiritual concerns. Her pitilessness here is a sharp contrast to Macbeth's subsequent reference to "pity, like a naked new-born babe" (I.vii.21). At least in Act I, Macbeth still shows a moral consciousness while Lady Macbeth abjures

all signs of such. Macbeth's own recognition of what Lady Macbeth represents is evident in the soliloquy that follows the damaging discussion between husband and wife and the subsequent arrival of Duncan. As Macbeth debates within himself the great issue at hand, his speech employs two images reflecting Lady Macbeth's words: He refers to "th' ingredience of our poison'd chalice" (I.vii.11) and to "pity, like a naked new-born babe" (I.vii.21). However, his choice of words shows that his values, although being severely tested, are not yet inverted as his wife's are. Macbeth, unlike Lady Macbeth who denies her womanhood, prizes his role as man. He holds out for a time against his wife's urgings, as his words to her show: "I dare do all that may become a man; / Who dares do more is none" (I.vii.46-47).

Lady Macbeth's soliloquy on unsexing and her subsequent speech, which is intended to goad Macbeth into action, both bind together the imagery Shakespeare uses to characterize her and suggest a cosmic link with the Hindu tale of Kali quoted earlier:

> I have given suck, and know
> How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me;
> I would, while it was smiling in my face,
> Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
> And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you
> Have done to this.
>
> (I.vii.54-59)

We do not know how many children Lady Macbeth has had, but "I have given suck" is a clear statement that she has had offspring. Nor do we know whether they were children of a previous marriage or children of Macbeth who are now dead. What we do know is that Macbeth has no living children--thus his concern over "Banquo's issue" (III.i.64) and his own "fruitless crown" (III.i.60). As A. C. Bradley states: "It may be that Macbeth had many children or that he had none. We cannot say, and it does not concern the play."[8] What does concern the play is Lady Macbeth's unsexing, her denial of the natural nurturing aspect of the mother, in order to "nurture" ambition. As the "I have given suck" speech shows, from this point on, Lady Macbeth has no sustenance for anyone; if woman in the life-giving sense of Universal Mother ever dwelled within her frame, all vestiges of such are gone forever. The only other "milk" she offers is in the drugged possets she serves to Duncan's chamberlains, a milk whose poisonous potential permeates the remainder of the play.

Shakespeare's insistence on the milk imagery associated with Lady Macbeth is especially appropriate in this play about the ambiguities of evil. What seems "fair" is ultimately "foul." What should symbolize sustenance symbolizes destruction. The "milk of human kindness" that Lady Macbeth

[8] Bradley, p. 398.

sees in her husband should be the norm, but in the world of Macbeth all norms are equivocal. In this world of equivocation, Lady Macbeth functions effectively as symbol as well as individual character. As woman she is by nature Universal Mother, but within the overarching concept of her role as the bearer and sustainer of life is the inverse principle: The Universal Mother both creates and, as the Terrible Mother, destroys. This duality is intrinsic within the Universal Mother as personification of the earth itself that both bears its fruit in season and nurtures that fruit toward inevitable decay. Interestingly, it is precisely this image, that of a garden in decay, that attaches to Macbeth, who has fallen into the "sear, the yellow leaf" (V.iii.23). Lady Macbeth's creation, the child of her imagination whom she mothers into her version of manhood, is finally the decayed fruit of her labors.

Thus, Shakespeare uses Lady Macbeth and the accompanying feeding imagery as an interesting and extremely complex variation on the theme of all his great tragedies; through her, the dramatist poses again the inexorable question: What is man if he is born but to die? Seen from this perspective, Macbeth may be Shakespeare's darkest tragedy, a logical sequel to King Lear. Lady Macbeth, not Macbeth himself, is the animating force. Macbeth salvages his manhood and human

dignity, at least for a brief final moment. For Lady Macbeth, however, Shakespeare offers no similar reprieve. The regeneration--literally and figuratively--comes through Macduff, who is "none of woman born" (IV.i.80). Out of the carnage of the Albanys and the Macbeths, only Albany stands for good. Albany is an example of what Macbeth might have been, the inverse of what Macbeth becomes. In Goneril and Lady Macbeth, there is no feminine counterpart of goodness, no symbol of fruitfulness.

Predators Natural and Unnatural

Closely associated with the treatment of the Albanys and the Macbeths is the recurring predator-prey relationship in King Lear and Macbeth. In one sense, Goneril and Lady Macbeth are merely predators, preying not only on their husbands but also on other characters in the respective plays. Goneril preys on King Lear, Regan, and the Gloucesters. Lady Macbeth preys on Duncan and, indirectly, on Banquo. In turn, Regan herself is a predator, as are Edmund, Oswald, and Cornwall in King Lear and as are the Three Murderers in Macbeth. King Lear and Macbeth do not, in the fashion of Titus Andronicus produce merely an array of predators; rather the plays' imagery describes a peculiar brand of unnatural predators, those who go beyond lex talionis or lex naturalis and violate

the principle of order itself. If the predator within the natural order is terrible, the predator that bursts the limits of that order is more terrible still. These two plays abound in imagery depicting both classes of predators.

King Lear and Macbeth treat many great themes; of these one of the most encompassing is that of order. Shakespeare bases his definition of order on the Elizabethan concepts that were accepted in his day, assuming a shared ideology among his audience.[9] Feeding imagery in King Lear and in Macbeth provides a foundation for the theme of order itself. In particular, the predator-prey imagery is one significant means through which Shakespeare conveys the theme of order and its inverse, chaos.

Order in King Lear and in Macbeth is closely linked with the state of being fully human. The inverse of that order is, therefore, linked with bestiality. Shakespeare's use of animal imagery to delineate the various predators in these two tragedies is a logical means of illustrating man's tendency toward bestiality. As Caroline Spurgeon points out,

[9] Arthur O. Lovejoy treats the complex philosophy of order in his The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea (1936; rpt. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1958). Two sources applying the concept more directly to the Renaissance are E. M. W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture (1943; rpt. New York: Vintage Books, n.d.), pp. 9-17, and Madeleine Doran, Endeavors of Art: A Study of Form in Elizabethan Drama (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1954), pp. 53-84 passim.

"in King Lear our imagination is filled with the accumulated pictures of active ferocity . . . animals of a certain dignity and grandeur, though seen here only when their desires 'Are wolvish, bloody, starved and ravenous.'"[10] Spurgeon points to a similar menagerie in Macbeth, noting that the images depict animals that are predominately predatory.[11]

As in Titus Andronicus and The Merchant of Venice, Shakespeare often describes his villainous characters in terms of predatory creatures. King Lear himself introduces feeding imagery in the opening scene when he instructs the husbands of Regan and Goneril in digestion: "Cornwall and Albany, / With my two daughters' dow'rs digest the third" (I.i.127-28). The implied appetitive process here is amplified and clarified by numerous subsequent references that couch these two daughters in predatory terms. By Act I, Scene iv, Shakespeare consistently draws Goneril and Regan as birds and beasts of prey. This imagery highlights Goneril's actions that devour Lear's spirit. In denying Lear the accoutrements of his venerable position both as king and as father, Goneril earns the epithet "Detested kite" (I.iv.262) that Lear applies to her, suggesting her rapacious nature. Later, Lear conveys a similar idea to Regan, linking Goneril with

[10] Spurgeon, p. 331.

[11] Spurgeon, p. 334.

the vulture: "Thy sister's naught. O Regan, she hath tied / Sharp-tooth'd unkindness, like a vulture here. [Points to his heart]" (II.iv.134-35). In the same conversation with Regan, Lear yokes Goneril with the serpent: "She hath abated me of half my train; / Look'd black upon me, strook me with her tongue, / Most serpent-like, upon the very heart" (II.iv.159-61). The reference to "serpent" takes on part of its force from an association with the Edenic serpent representing evil incarnate. Evil, symbolized in various guises throughout the Shakespearean canon, is the arch predator. Not only is Goneril linked with predatory birds and the serpent, but also she is described in terms of predatory felines and canines. Lear calls Goneril's appearance "wolvish" (I.iv.308). With his typical acumen, the Fool allies Goneril with the fox, seeming to provide levity while actually revealing much truth:

> A fox, when one has caught her,
> And such a daughter,
> Should sure to the slaughter,
> If my cap would buy a halter,
> So the Fool follows after.
> (I.iv.317-21)

Few predatory images adhere to Regan by herself--perhaps since she initiates no action without Goneril's example. However, the two evil daughters amass quite a few predatory images as a pair. Echoing the Fool's "fox" image, King Lear

addresses the absent daughters in the imagined trial on the heath: "Now, you she-foxes--" (III.vi.22). The tearing aspect of the predator is evident in an image Gloucester uses to describe the daughters just before they blind him; he refers to their "boarish fangs" (III.vii.58). An enlightened Albany sees the sisters in similar fashion when he cries out that they are "Tigers, not daughters" (IV.ii.40). Kent calls Goneril and Regan "dog-hearted daughters" (IV.iii.45), an image that seems different from the preceding ones until we consider the scene where a mad Lear thinks the household pets are against him. In his confused state Lear imagines: "The little dogs and all / Tray, Blanch, and Sweetheart, see, they bark at me" (III.vi.62-63). Robert Heilman is correct in placing the "dog" image in Lear's speech in conjunction with other predatory animal images.[12] Furthermore, we recall the characterization of Shylock, where the dog was easily metamorphosed into the wolf. In addition, the dog is clearly a predator in Gloucester's description of himself at the mercy of Goneril and Regan; Gloucester uses the image of bearbaiting: "I am tied to th' stake, and I must stand the course" (III.vii.54). One final predatory image adheres to the sisters, a singularly appropriate image that details both their preying

[12] This Great Stage: Image and Structure in King Lear (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1948), pp. 94-95.

on others and the ultimate preying of each on the other. Edmund describes the two in an "adder" image: "To both these sisters have I sworn my love; / Each jealous of the other, as the stung / Are of the adder" (V.i.55-57). Fittingly, the predator becomes the prey in a contest no one wins. It is true, as Heilman notes, that some of these same animal images are applied to good characters; but, as he also notes, when this is the case, the image characterizes the speaker's own nature rather than that of the character spoken about.[13]

In addition to characterizing the evil sisters, the predatory animal imagery also characterizes Edgar's persona, Poor Tom. Used in this way, the imagery suggests man's natural affinity with the lower animals, indicating that animality is a primary quality in "unaccommodated man" (III. iv.106). Poor Tom applies the imagery to himself, naming himself "hog in sloth, fox in stealth, wolf in greediness, dog in madness, lion in prey" (III.iv.93-94). Heilman is helpful in explicating this point:

> If we can read madness as wrath and prey as covetousness, and consider that he [Poor Tom] mentions pride and lust literally . . . Edgar has six of the Seven Deadly Sins, not to mention other vices on the side. Not only is such a catalogue a useful auxiliary way of stressing the sense of evil that permeates the play, but

[13] Heilman, p. 96.

> it also--even in Edgar's incoherent speech--ties in with and supports the animal imagery of the rest of the play: man in his sins is animal-like.[14]

What works well in King Lear also works well in Macbeth. Just as Shakespeare uses predatory animal imagery to characterize the inhuman behavior of Goneril, Regan, and Poor Tom in King Lear, so also does he use such imagery to depict the decline of Macbeth's nature. As Audrey Yoder has pointed out, some early characterizations of Macbeth combine the predatory aspect with a certain nobility.[15] Thus, Macbeth is first depicted as "eagle" and "lion," emphasizing the positive aspect. When Duncan asks a sergeant whether Macbeth and Banquo were dismayed by the new assault of the Norwegian army, the sergeant replies: "Yes, / As sparrows eagles; or the hare the lion" (I.ii.34-35). This alliance of the two leaders--combining eagle and lion in Machiavellian fashion--points up both their potential for nobility and their potential for preying. As the play progresses, we see Banquo typify the former quality while Macbeth typifies the latter. The potential for grandeur is necessary in order to contrast it with Macbeth's descent into animality.

[14] Heilman, p. 99.

[15] Yoder, p. 37.

Soon the decline in Macbeth begins; he quickly moves from "eagle" and "lion" to "serpent." Lady Macbeth warns him prior to Duncan's arrival:

> To beguile the time,
> Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye,
> Your hand, your tongue; look like th' innocent flower,
> But be the serpent under't.
> (I.v.62-65)

Scotland becomes another perverted Eden where serpent coils expectantly. Much later, the words of the Third Apparition continue the predatory emphasis, telling Macbeth to be "lion-mettled": "Be lion-mettled, proud, and take no care / Who chafes, who frets, or where conspirers are" (IV.i.90-91). The pride of the lion is, in this instance, a foolhardy pride. Macbeth's unconcern with others leads directly to his downfall. This lack of concern with wisdom and the accompanying belief in "artificial sprites" (III.v.27) gives Macbeth a false sense of security that seals his doom. Displaying the so-called "lion-mettled" pride, Macbeth ravages the wife and children of Macduff, earning the harsh epithet of "hell-kite" (IV.iii.217). In this image, reminiscent of Goneril, Macbeth is insensate and purely bestial--a sharp contrast to Macduff who must "feel" grief "like a man" (IV.iii.221). Also, Macbeth's savagery is contrasted to a gentleness of nature in the Macduffs, characterized as "poor wren[s]" who must fight against the fiercer "owl" (IV.ii.9,11). In like

manner, the Macduff family is referred to as "murther'd deer" (IV.iii.206). Macbeth, like Goneril and Regan, eventually becomes the prey of his own villainy; he applies the bearbaiting image to himself, suggesting both the ferocity of the beast and its helplessness when overcome: "They have tied me to a stake; I cannot fly, / But bear-like I must fight the course" (V.vii.1-2). Thus, Macbeth asserts himself briefly as man at the end of his life. Ironically, he depicts himself even here in the same animal image, refusing to be "baited":

> I will not yield,
> To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet,
> And to be baited with the rabble's curse.
> Though Birnan wood be come to Dunsinane,
> And thou oppos'd, being of no woman born,
> Yet I will try the last.
> (V.viii.27-32)

Macbeth is not the only character in this play delineated by predatory imagery. In the scene where Malcolm acts as foil to Macduff, the charading Malcolm is much like the charading Edgar in the "Poor Tom" scenes, characterized basically as an animal. Macduff says that Malcolm is not overcome by the "vulture" of desire; thus, Malcolm will not "devour" his countrymen (IV.iii.74). Malcolm, testing Macduff, plays the evil leader. He says he will, indeed, be that vulture. He amplifies the reply, using two more feeding images. First, Malcolm says: "And my more-having would be as a sauce /

To make me hunger more" (IV.iii.51-52). Second, he asserts:

> Nay, had I pow'r, I should
> Pour the sweet milk of concord into hell,
> Uproar the universal peace, confound
> All unity on earth.
> (IV.iii.97-100)

"The sweet milk of concord" is the sustenance that Macbeth's imagination will not let him drink. Malcolm's image resonates a central theme of the play. Of course, Malcolm, like Poor Tom, is simply adopting a persona in order to further his good purpose. The personae, charading as evil, actually accomplish good. The predatory animal imagery in this case shows what Malcolm and Edgar are not: beasts of prey.

The treatment of man as animal, even predatory animal, is rather conventional. A parallel to Shakespeare's use of predatory animal imagery can be found in such contemporary works as Ben Jonson's Volpone and John Webster's The Duchess of Malfi, for example. However, the inclusion in the imagery of the unnatural predator is far more comprehensive in Shakespeare's plays. Indeed, in treating the unnatural predator in King Lear and Macbeth, Shakespeare goes far beyond even his own earlier works where the emphasis is on the predator within the natural order. Within the imagination, we must move only a short distance to accept those predators that are outside the natural order. We are hardly aware of having moved from one class of predaciousness to the other, so

skillfully does Shakespeare integrate the two. The group of images detailing the unnatural predators is smaller than that of the natural predators; however, it is more effective in conveying the sense of total chaos that ever threatens to destroy the worlds of the plays.

G. Wilson Knight states that the world of King Lear always operates "within natural law."[16] I disagree with him on this point, for I find a number of instances in King Lear where Shakespeare's tragic vision strains at the natural and moves unmistakably into the unnatural. Although King Lear has no cannibalistic horses or owls preying on falcons as Macbeth does, it has its share of unnatural preying reflected in the imagery.

In the first place, Lear himself is characterized as unnatural for his treatment of Cordelia. Gloucester suggests this theme in Act I: "the king falls from bias of nature; there's father against child" (I.ii.110-11). A few scenes later, Goneril and Regan are characterized as cuckoos in a hedge-sparrow's nest. The Fool, ever astute, admonishes Lear: "For you know, uncle, / 'The hedge-sparrow fed the cuckoo so long, / That it had it head bit off by it young'" (I.iv.214-16). The cuckoo's foreign nesting habits form the

[16] The Wheel of Fire: Interpretation of Shakespearian Tragedy (1930; rpt. London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1954), p. 205.

basis for an image that points up the unnatural behavior of Lear's ungrateful daughters. While this example may be marginally categorized as natural, it surely illustrates aberrant nature and prepares the way for the cannibalism of Macbeth's horses. In like manner, the reference to the "pelican daughters" (III.iv.75) of Lear functions in the same way. Characterized as young pelicans who were thought to feed upon their mother's blood, Goneril and Regan are another aberration in nature delineating perverse behavior.

The second, and most pointed, example of the unnatural in the predatory animal imagery of King Lear is the frequent reference to "monster." While the term appears occasionally in other plays of Shakespeare, most notably Othello where jealousy is characterized as a "green-ey'd monster," the term appears a number of times in King Lear to describe Goneril and Regan with this very different connotation: Whereas in Othello "monster" is personified, in King Lear humans-as-monsters are dehumanized. In King Lear we find an ungrateful child compared to the "sea-monster" (I.iv.261). Later, even a servant recognizes the monstrous in Regan, who has just participated in Gloucester's blinding: "If she live long, / And in the end meet the old course of death, / Women will all turn monsters" (III.vii.100-02). To Albany Shakespeare gives one of the play's central thematic statements. Speaking in feeding imagery, Albany summarizes the monstrosity

working at the heart of Lear's universe:

> If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
> Send quickly down to tame these vild offenses,
> It will come,
> Humanity must perforce prey on itself,
> Like monsters of the deep.
> (IV.ii.46-50)

In the heated dialogue that follows, Albany specifically applies the appellation of "monster" to Goneril:

> Thou changed and self-cover'd thing, for shame
> Bemonster not thy features.
> . . . . . .
> Howe'er thou art a fiend,
> A woman's shape doth shield thee.
> (IV.ii.62-63, 66-67)

Throughout these passages, "monster" suggests a subhuman, unnatural element akin only to evil. Here man--or woman--is less than human and, somehow, lower even than beast. King Lear abounds in a convulsion of the natural, a condition that seems intrinsic to the world of man, yet a condition that man must guard against at all costs. This condition, because it is unnatural or abnormal, is difficult to capture even in the imagination. The mind recognizes its presence but has no words to name it. To name is, in part, to master. Thus, Shakespeare uses "monster," denoting something that is beyond the human world of order, yet connoting something that man senses he must fear beyond all else. Order is more than a physical context in which to view the concept of monster;

it is, in addition, a philosophical context. The absence of order, chaos, is the universe of the monster. Shakespeare uses "monster" to designate the unfathomable. It is this recognition of supreme unnaturalness toward which the predatory animal imagery moves.

In their recognition of monstrosity, the worlds of King Lear and Macbeth seem as one. In Macbeth, however, the aberrations in nature are larger. The pelican daughters and savage cuckoos of King Lear are superceded by cannibalistic horses and by a reversal in the normal owl-falcon relationship in Macbeth. Although Macbeth yields fewer examples of unnaturalness than King Lear yields, these events in Macbeth are portentous, a retribution in the animal world acknowledging the unnatural events in the human world. In Macbeth, the events are actual rather than imagistic. Thus, what Shakespeare at first suggests in King Lear becomes overt in Macbeth. The revelation of a universe where the predator operates both within and without natural order is a large revelation, a clear indication of the scope of Shakespeare's tragic vision.

The Banquet As Symbol

Not all feeding imagery in King Lear and Macbeth is predatory in quality. The hospitality theme, symbolized by banqueting, is an illustration of human refinement. One might question a discussion of banqueting in King Lear since no literal banquet occurs. A close look will show, however, that the absence of actual feasting can be as significant symbolically as the presence of the same.

Shakespeare goes to some length to ensure that Lear be given the trappings of royalty, of which feasting is an expected part. King Lear is the only tragedy by Shakespeare to include the designation "king" in its title. Indeed, other tragedies about political or military leaders consistently omit any such designation. Granted, Macbeth is hailed as king; Othello is referred to as general; Claudius is occasionally called king. But we never hear reference to "King Macbeth," "General Othello," "King Claudius." The title is reserved exclusively for King Lear among Shakespeare's tragic heroes. In this way the playwright emphasizes the esteem due to the venerable Lear. Lear remains king in fact, though he attempts to abdicate that unique authority. Yet although Lear is king, guest, and father, we never see him feted at a banquet in the conventional manner denoting the respect due him. In King Lear the absence of a feast is a

violation of hospitality and signifies the absence of nurture. Coupled with the figurative feasting of Goneril and Regan on King Lear, both physically and spiritually, the absence of nurturance becomes the most revealing aspect of the hospitality theme. King Lear is a play about the stripping away of life's necessities, a stripping that involves food, shelter, and clothing but that also involves depriving Lear of spiritual sustenance. King Lear puts to the test Shakespeare's philosophy expressed in Sonnet 146: "Within be fed, without be rich no more" (l. 12). For King Lear, throughout much of the play, there is no sustenance "within" or "without."

King Lear himself sets the scene for the figurative banqueting in the play as he feeds his self-esteem through the love test administered to Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia. The concept of appetite is further developed throughout Scene i. As part of Lear's venomous denunciation of Cordelia, he misplaces the label of devourer, suggesting that it is she who, cannibal-like, feeds herself on him:

> The barbarous Scythian,
> Or he that makes his generation messes
> To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom
> Be as well neighbor'd, pitied, and reliev'd,
> As thou my sometime daughter.
> (I.i.116-20)

Lear's words foreshadow his own metaphorical devouring of

Cordelia as well as the other two daughters' similar treatment of him.

Recognizing the double meaning of feeding in the context of this play, the Fool frequently chooses images of food that ironically point to the lack of sustenance. The Fool quips to Lear:

> Fool. Nuncle, give me an egg, and I'll give thee two crowns.
> Lear. What two crowns shall they be?
> Fool. Why, after I have cut the egg i' th' middle and eat up the meat, the two crowns of the egg. When thou clovest thy crown i' th' middle and gav'st away both parts, thou bor'st thine ass on thy back o'er the dirt. Thou hadst little wit in thy bald crown when thou gav'st thy golden one away.
> (I.iv.155-63)

A bit later, Goneril and Regan become "parings" (I.iv.188), perhaps of cheese or some other food having a rind or peel. Feeding imagery is repeated yet a third time by the Fool as he gives Lear sound advice: "He that keep no crust nor crumb, / Weary of all, shall want some. / That's a sheal'd peascod" (I.iv.198-200). Whites of eggs, trimmings of food, an empty pea pod--the Fool's images show his recognition that any banquet attended by King Lear will feature the old king as main course. Lear's life is devoid of nurturance. All of these images help prepare for Lear's request of Regan for "raiment, bed, and food" (II.iv.156)--and for her denial of his request. When Lear eventually expresses concern for

"Poor naked wretches" whose "unfed sides" (III.iv.30) cause pain, he empathizes with these sufferers the more deeply because of his own experience. Only Gloucester reverses the trend of starving Lear. His words on the heath show his understanding of the norm--food as sustenance: "Yet have I ventured to come seek you out, / And bring you where both fire and food is ready" (III.iv.152-53).

In this world of withered branches and ravening predators in King Lear, Albany emerges as true sustenance. The full connotation of his name, predominately whiteness like milk, assumes its rightful importance at play's end. Albany's final speech implies the banquet to come for those who have endured:

> All friends shall taste
> The wages of their virtue, and all foes
> The cup of their deservings.
> (V.iii.303-05)

But for King Lear, the only banquet is the brief banquet of the spirit he shares with Cordelia.

In seeming contrast to the paucity of feasting in King Lear, Macbeth offers three major instances of banqueting or preparation for banqueting. Hospitality for Duncan, the banquet scene interrupted by Banquo's ghostly presence, and the Witches' "hell-broth"--all comprise the hospitality or banqueting theme in Macbeth. Yet the sustenance from these

banquets is as lacking as it is in King Lear. Starvation and death are the outcomes of Macbeth's world even as they are outcomes of Lear's.

The opening act of Macbeth introduces the hospitality theme. Set between Macbeth's acknowledgement of "black and deep desires" (I.iv.51) and Lady Macbeth's horrible invocation of the "murth'ring ministers" (I.v.48) is Duncan's generous praise of Macbeth:

> he is full so valiant,
> And in his commendations I am fed;
> It is a banquet to me. Let's after him,
> Whose care is gone before to bid us welcome:
> It is a peerless kinsman.
> (I.iv.54-58)

Duncan's words must be received by the audience as ironic. Duncan states that he is "fed" a "banquet" of praise for Macbeth, yet Macbeth is plotting a figurative feast of ambition wherein Duncan will be devoured. As G. Wilson Knight observes, feasting and death are closely intertwined in Macbeth.[17] This first instance of apparent hospitality in Macbeth actually has two purposes: to extend welcome to a visiting king, Duncan, and to honor a hero, Macbeth. Each honoree is, in a sense, planning to fete the other.

[17] The Imperial Theme, 3rd ed. (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1951), pp. 134-40.

Macbeth has hurried ahead of the party, Duncan assumes, to prepare for the king. Duncan, in turn, announces that he will be "purveyor" (I.vi.22) for Macbeth. The purveyor or steward is one who goes in advance of a royal party to secure food and lodging for his group. Duncan thus takes a servant role to Macbeth, indicative of his generosity and love for Macbeth. Again the emphasis on preparing food is ironic in this context, as is the implication that Macbeth is ranked above Duncan.

Throughout the scenes where Duncan is king and supposedly honored guest in the Macbeth household, the concept of feasting as symbol of commendation and nurturance is fraught with irony. Lady Macbeth's words "He that's coming / Must be provided for" (I.vi.66-67) are richly ironic. Even the posset that Lady Macbeth serves to Duncan's guards contains death, not hospitality. Lady Macbeth's avowed purpose is to drown human reason in order that "swinish sleep" (I.vii.67) reduce the guards to animals. The sleep of Duncan's guards is deadly, foreshadowing Macbeth's deadly insomnia. Macbeth recognizes the nurturing effect of the sleep he cannot partake of after he murders Duncan. He tells Lady Macbeth the agonizing outcome of the deed:

> Methought I heard a voice cry, "Sleep no more!
> Macbeth does murther sleep"--the innocent sleep,
> Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleave of care,

> The death of each day's life, sore labor's bath,
> Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
> Chief nourisher in life's feast.
> (II.ii.32-37)

"Course," "nourisher," "feast"--all become ironic harbingers of death, not life. Macbeth's ambition is, indeed, an unnatural appetite "that will ravin up / [His] own live's means" (II.iv.29-30). For Macbeth the reward is a "fruitless crown" (III.i.60) while Banquo's "seed" (III.i.69) will produce a line of kings.

The banquet scene, Act III, Scene iv, contains a second significant feast. This banquet first symbolizes peace and order then later represents the complete chaos into which that order declines. Placed strategically at the mid point of the play, the banquet scene is the turning point of Macbeth, signaling Macbeth's realization of his own spiritual chaos.

A banquet represents fellowship, conviviality, unity. The meal has long been a symbol not only of nurturance but also of human refinement and order. Shakespeare emphasizes that order in Macbeth's invitation to the guests. He expresses cordiality and an anticipation of disciplined composition as well: "You know your own degrees, sit down. At first / And last, the hearty welcome" (III.iv.1-2). This sense of social rank was as important to the Renaissance mind as was its

larger model, cosmic order. Indeed, social order was both a reflection of the metaphysical order and a sign of that order among men.[18] To know one's "degree" was to know one's very nature. Therefore, Macbeth's well-ordered table is a symbol of the well-ordered state of Scotland that he desires. But the well-ordered table never comes about. Macbeth, king and head of the body politic, is unable to take his "stool" (III.iv.67) or rightful seat among his guests.

Not only is the king and host unable to sit down, but also he is prevented from giving the conventional signs of fellowship: the welcome statement and the toast. Lady Macbeth must remind her husband of his duty:

> My royal lord,
> You do not give the cheer. The feast is sold
> That is not often vouch'd, while 'tis a-making,
> 'Tis given with welcome. To feed were best at home;
> From thence, the sauce to meat is ceremony,
> Meeting were bare without it.
> (III.iv.31-36)

Macbeth, delayed by his conversation with Banquo's murderer, finally gives the welcome, attempting to inject a hearty note: "Now good digestion wait on appetite, / And health on both!" (III.iv.38-39). The toast is delayed even more than the welcome by the intervention of the murderer.

[18] Both Tillyard and Doran treat this point indirectly in their discussions of order and decorum.

Macbeth is in the midst of announcing the toast, "anon we'll drink a measure / The table round--" (III.iv.11-12), when he is interrupted by the murderer's arrival outside the door. His next words, "There's blood upon thy face" (III.iv.13), suggest a significant juxtaposition between "drink" and "blood," a juxtaposition carrying overtones of the Eucharist. Both Christ's drink and the intended drink of Macbeth represent unity, but the different applications of "blood" are striking. The blood of Christ's Eucharist is a life-giving blood while that on the face of the murderer symbolizes the physical death of Banquo and the spiritual death of Macbeth. The banquet marks, in the words of J. P. Dyson, Macbeth's "spiritual crisis."[19]

Macbeth's second attempt to propose the toast is interrupted by the Ghost of Banquo:

> [Enter Ghost]
> I drink to th' general joy o' th' whole table,
> And to our dear friend Banquo, whom we miss;
> Would he were here! to all, and him, we thirst,
> And all to all.
> (III.iv.88-91)

This is Banquo's banquet; surely the similarity of the two nouns is intentional. In name, in seat implying rank, and in royal lineage promised from "Banquo's seeds," the outcome

[19] "The Structural Function of the Banquet Scene in Macbeth," Shakespeare Quarterly, 14 (1963), 377.

of this banquet belongs only to Banquo. It is, in a real sense, Banquo's coronation banquet, not Macbeth's. For Macbeth, the outcome is a series of tedious tomorrows.

Macbeth's sequent damnation is acknowledged in his recognition that "blood will have blood" (III.iv.121). Paradoxically, in this statement of carnage is an affirmation of order. The immediate disorder endorsed in Lady Macbeth's "Stand not upon the order of your going" (III. iv.118) is balanced by a higher metaphysical order. Even at the moment of disorder in man's world, with the guests leaving in disarray, there is a promise of eternal order of a different degree. Through his political appetite, Macbeth has excluded himself from a shared humanity represented by the unity of a table that will not extend its hospitality to him. The lack of nurturance at this abortive banquet is summed up by a Lord speaking to Lennox about the starved state of Scotland:

> Thither Macduff
> Is gone to pray the holy king, upon his aid
> To wake Northumberland and warlike Siward,
> That by the help of these (with Him above
> To ratify the work) we may again
> Give to our tables meat, sleep to our nights;
> Free from our feasts and banquets bloody knives;
> Do faithful homage and receive free honors;
> All which we pine for now.
> (III.vi.29-37)

But starvation is not to be lifted yet. Blood will have blood, but in due time. The banquet where bloody knives replace food symbolizes the lack of nurture for Scotland and for its king.

The third instance of banqueting in Macbeth features the Witches and their "hell-broth" (IV.i.19). Never has cauldron received a stranger assortment of broken life--human, animal, and plant:

1. Witch. Round about the cauldron go;
In the poison'd entrails throw;
Toad, that under cold stone
Days and nights has thirty-one
Swelt'red venom sleeping got,
Boil thou first i' th' charmed pot.

All. Double, double, toil and trouble;
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble.

2. Witch. Fillet of a fenny snake,
In the cauldron boil and bake;
Eye of newt and toe of frog,
Wool of bat and tongue of dog,
Adder's fork and blind-worm's sting,
Lizard's leg and howlet's wing,
For a charm of pow'rful trouble,
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble.

All. Double, double, toil and trouble;
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble.

3. Witch. Scale of dragon, tooth of wolf,
Witch's mummy, maw and gulf
Of the ravin'd salt-sea shark,
Root of hemlock digg'd i' th' dark,
Liver of blaspheming Jew,
Gall of goat, and slips of yew
Sliver'd in the moon's eclipse,
Nose of Turk and Tartar's lips,
Finger of birth-strangled babe
Ditch-deliver'd by a drab,
Make the gruel thick and slab.
Add thereto a tiger's chawdron,
For th' ingredience of our cau'dron.

All. Double, double, toil and trouble;
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble.
2. Witch. Cool it with a baboon's blood,
Then the charm is firm and good.
(IV.i.4-38)

The broken ingredients are appropriate for Macbeth, who would break even the frame of the universe with the chaos he invokes rather than deny his ambition. Sated by the Witches' "hell-broth," Macbeth hears what he wants to hear--that he is invincible. His reckless demeanor bears out the Witches' warning: "security / Is mortals' chiefest enemy" (III.v.32-33). Aided by the Witches, Macbeth convinces himself that thought and deed are one. His words echo the philosophy of Marlowe's Tamburlaine:

From this moment
The very firstlings of my heart shall be
The firstlings of my hand. And even now,
To crown my thoughts with acts, be it
thought and done.
(IV.i.146-49)

The Witches' banquet is almost as significant to Macbeth as Banquo's banquet is. At the earlier banquet, Macbeth learns in unequivocal terms that he will never have true peace and security. Ironically, after the Witches' banquet, he lulls himself into that false security that the Witches know to be "mortals' chiefest enemy." He believes the Witches offer him security because that is what he desires

so intensely. As A. C. Bradley points out, "The words of the Witches are fatal to the hero because there is in him something which leaps into light at the sound of them,"[20] not because the Witches have any power over Macbeth's future.

The Witches' banquet is short in time, yet long in influence. "Hell-broth" is an appropriate metaphor for the entire play of broken life, unabated appetite in the form of political ambition, and spiritual starvation. Just as Duncan's horses devour each other, so also does Macbeth devour his own life's blood in a figurative sense. This man who by Act V is the epitome of nihilism has, indeed, "supp'd full with horrors" (V.v.13). In Macbeth as in King Lear, the banquet offers no nourishment. Whether the banquet is literal or figurative, present or absent, makes no difference. Physical bread and wine are not what sustains man.

[20] Bradley, p. 277.

Chapter Five

From Famine to Feast: Nurture in Timon of Athens and The Tempest

On the surface, a profitable pairing of Timon of Athens with The Tempest seems unlikely, perhaps even preposterous. The story line of Timon of Athens revolves around Timon's many feasts, representing his generosity toward others. We see a sharp contrast between the genial host of the early banquets and the vengeful Timon who serves a warm-water banquet to the same guests he has previously feted. At play's end, Timon dies an embittered man, the least noble of all Shakespeare's tragic heroes. In this play Shakespeare gives us a protagonist who begins by embracing all mankind through his hospitality and ends by rejecting all mankind through his bitter withdrawal from society. Timon's characterization suggests that all men are corrupt by nature: Man stripped of the outward trappings of gentility and generosity is motivated by self-indulgence. Timon's Cynic friend, Apemantus, is initially a foil to the magnanimous Timon; however, we soon perceive that the two are more alike than different. In fact, Apemantus is more admirable than Timon, for the Cynic at least recognizes and is contented with what he is, whereas Timon misestimates his own nature. Timon is a study in the dangers of excess: His extreme

magnificence is as absurd as his misanthropy. The result of his excess is physical and spiritual death.

The story line of The Tempest, on the other hand, revolves around a magical island complete with a sorcerer (Prospero), a fairy tale romance (Miranda and Ferdinand), a supernatural sprite (Ariel), and a man-beast creature (Caliban). In this play the protagonist, Prospero, moves from disinterest in society caused by complete immersion in books and magic to concern for his fellows resulting in his reunion with his former enemies, especially his brother Antonio. Prospero's characterization suggests man's highest potential: Prospero sets aside self-interest--including the opportunity for revenge on his enemies--in favor of forgiveness and reconciliation. Not only Prospero but also the other characters come to self-discovery, a knowledge that brings concord to the world of the play. The marriage of Miranda and Ferdinand symbolizes the new-found concord and its concomitant fruitfulness.

Timon of Athens is so bitter a tragedy, it is often termed a satire. The Tempest is so airy and pageant-like a romance, its creator deemed its comic spirit suitable for a wedding entertainment. Timon himself, in his renunciation of all mankind, is example of nothing except futility and misanthropy while Prospero, in his renunciation of artifice, magic, and revenge is example of human reconciliation

at its highest. These dichotomies are clear. However, in examining extremes, we often find a viable position; such is the case with an examination of these two plays in juxtaposition. The Tempest reverses the "feast-won, fast-lost" issue of Timon of Athens. As the literal feast approaches its symbolic resolution, Shakespeare makes it clear that physical nurturance is not the "bread" by which man must ultimately live. The banquet Prospero withholds from Antonio and the rest of the court party is, paradoxically, a sacrament representing complete love and concern for the community of man: Prospero, unlike Timon, is able to release his enemies--and in the process he releases himself.

These two plays, both written in Shakespeare's later period, utilize feeding imagery at three levels: plot, character, and theme. The imagistic treatment in Timon of Athens is more traditional while the imagery in The Tempest crosses the line--albeit thin--into symbolism. Of course, Timon of Athens is a much longer play than The Tempest, therein lending itself to a more expansive imagistic treatment. The tighter, briefer structure of The Tempest requires a condensed, sharply focused type of imagery; emblematic or symbolic elements function appropriately in this context. Together these two plays make Shakespeare's most extensive statement on nurture.

"Feast-Won, Fast-Lost":
Shakespeare's Sustained Imagery in Timon of Athens

Critical debate concerning Timon of Athens has centered so often on questions of authorship, degree of completeness of Shakespeare's last tragedy, genre of the play, and relative pessimism or optimism conveyed in the ending that imagistic studies are few. The classic work by Caroline Spurgeon devotes a mere two pages to a discussion of the "dog" image in this play, seeming to set a pattern for others to follow. Jarold W. Ramsey breaks the Spurgeon pattern by replacing the emphasis on "dog" imagery with a longer treatment of Christian imagery, in spite of which Stanley Wells--declining to classify Ramsey's piece as imagistic--states that "There is no extensive study of the imagery of Timon."[1] In addition to the sparse though important works mentioned above, one newer work deserves attention; Rolf Soellner devotes a chapter in a longer study of Timon of Athens to a discussion of certain image patterns. Soellner's study is helpful but limited in scope. Thus, one interested in pursuing an extended study of a single image in this play finds a paucity of critical studies on which to base such

[1] Stanley Wells, ed., Shakespeare: Select Bibliographical Guide (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), p. 229.

an effort.[2] I believe, however, that image patterns, particularly feeding imagery, provide a sound basis on which to analyze Timon of Athens. Feeding imagery permeates the play, providing the basic plot structure, outlining the characterization of Timon and his friends, and conveying the theme of the play. All three functions of feeding imagery are important; however, the thematic function is of primary importance since Timon of Athens is not so much a play of complex action or character as it is a play of ideas.

While Una Ellis-Fermor does not discuss the imagery as a separate focus, she does praise the first act of Timon of Athens as authentically Shakespeare's, and she asserts that Act I is "substantially Shakespeare's own introduction, indicating what was his intention"[3] in the play. Ellis-Fermor further suggests that this first act gives credence to "whatever in the rest of the play is clearly related . . . in

[2] We can quickly become acquainted with the majority of imagistic studies of Timon through these works: Jarold W. Ramsey, "Timon's Imitation of Christ," Shakespeare Studies, 2 (1967 for 1966), 162-73; Rolf Soellner, "Patterns and Image" in Timon of Athens: Shakespeare's Pessimistic Tragedy (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1979), pp. 97-113; Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us (1935; rpt. Boston: Beacon Press, 1958).

[3] Shakespeare the Dramatist and Other Papers, ed. Kenneth Muir (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1961), p. 161.

mood, in action, or in style."[4] In examining the relationship between feeding imagery and plot structure of Timon of Athens, my own study is supported by Ellis-Fermor's position. The relationship of feeding to plot development is, indeed, carefully prepared by Shakespeare in Act I, the preparation of a conscious artist who always signals in Act I what will be of continuing importance throughout subsequent acts. Perhaps Shakespeare's carefully consistent imagery has not been accorded its rightful merit because the shift from literal to figurative level is so subtle and well-blended that it almost escapes notice.

The feeding concept in Timon of Athens originates at the literal level. The main action of Act I is based on Timon's repeated invitations to his friends to dine with him. This invitation is extended specifically to the Painter (I.i.164), to Apemantus (I.i.202), to the Messenger (I.i.244-45), and to the Ladies of Cupid's masque (I.ii.154-55). In addition, Timon's literal invitation includes the senators, Alcibiades, Ventidius, and other lords. Shakespeare allows no mistaking of his intention: Banqueting is synonymous with the good life, and Timon extends his largesse to all. The emphasis of Act I is an evoking of the five senses, as

[4] Ellis-Fermor, p. 161.

Cupid's masque makes clear, but the sense of taste rather than the more usual sense of sight has primacy.

Shakespeare underlines the importance of the feeding concept throughout Act I. In the opening dialogue between the Poet and the Painter, the Poet introduces the image with a reference to "nourish'd": "Our poesy is as a gum, which oozes / From whence 'tis nourish'd. The fire i' th' flint / Shows not till it be strook" (I.i.21-23). The reference is brief and might go unnoticed but for the fact that it resonates in other passages such as Alcibiades' flattering compliment to Timon: "Sir, you have sav'd my longing, and I feed / Most hungerly on your sight" (I.i.252-53). Even the unnamed lords use the same language:

> 1. Lord. Come, shall we in
> And taste Lord Timon's bounty? he outgoes
> The very heart of kindness.
> 2. Lord. He pours it out: Plutus, the god of gold,
> Is but his steward. No meed but he repays
> Sevenfold above itself; no gift to him
> But breeds the giver a return exceeding
> All use of quittance.
> (I.i.273-79)

In this exchange, "taste," "pours," and "steward" all suggest the feeding notion--and it is important to recognize the now-blurred line between literal and figurative levels.

Although the motif occurs frequently in Act I, the main source of the feeding concept at its imagistic level

is Apemantus, whose cynical comments reveal what Timon cannot see. When Timon extends the dinner invitation to Apemantus, the latter replies: "No; I eat not lords" (I.i.204). Timon enlarges the pun on "eat not lords," but Apemantus reiterates the original sense in a brief conversation with one of the lords:

> 2. Lord. Thou art going to Lord Timon's feast?
> Apem. Ay, to see meat fill knaves, and wine heat fools.
> (I.i.260-61)

Throughout Act I, Shakespeare makes it clear that Apemantus equates Timon's "meat" with hypocrisy; however, Timon equates it with hospitality and generosity of spirit. The banquet scene (Act I, Scene ii) crystallizes this dual perspective:

> Apem. Let me stay at thine apperil, Timon. I come to observe, I give thee warning on't.
> Tim. I take no heed of thee; th' art an Athenian, therefore welcome. I myself would have no power; prithee let my meat make thee silent.
> Apem. 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! It grieves me to see so many dip their meat in one man's blood, and all the madness is, he cheers them up too. I wonder men dare trust themselves with men. Methinks they should invite them without knives: Good for their meat, and safer for their lives. There's much example for't: 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; 't 'as been prov'd. If I
> were a huge man, I should fear to drink
> at meals,
> Lest they should spy my windpipe's danger-
> ous notes:
> Great men should drink with harness on
> their throats.
> (I.ii.33-52)

It is this dual perspective--Apemantus' recognition of hypocrisy and Timon's intention of hospitality--that propels the plot in Act I. Without this antithesis and the unity it creates, the various parts of Act I would be a disjunctive, vignette-like assortment; however, this central emphasis on feeding at its literal and figurative levels ties together the actions of the first act and, furthermore, prepares for the remainder of the play.

In particular, the feasting that symbolizes the largesse of Act I is nicely contrasted with the fasting that characterizes the poverty of Act II. Even the relative size of the acts becomes integral to the whole: Act I's expansiveness juxtaposed to Act II's brevity indicates Shakespeare's awareness that structure can convey message. In the first two acts of Timon of Athens, form and idea are propitiously balanced. These two acts are memorably epitomized through Flavius, whose truthfulness puts Act I in perspective:

> Great Timon! noble, worthy, royal Timon!
> Ah, when the means are gone that buy this praise,
> The breath is gone whereof this praise is made.
> Feast-won, fast-lost; one cloud of winter show'rs,
> These flies are couch'd.
> (II.ii.168-72)

Shakespeare achieves an organicism in Acts I, II, and III that defies many of the criticisms leveled at this play. An excellent example of structural unity is his pitting of the many invitations and many feeders of Act I against the cumulative, terse "No" of Acts II and III when Timon needs the reciprocity of his feast-friends.

Not only is plot structure defined by feeding imagery, but also Timon, Apemantus, and Alcibiades are specifically characterized through the same language. In fact, Timon's relationship to both these men is depicted within feeding imagery. As Jarold W. Ramsey has pointed out, Timon is characterized as a Christ figure; yet within that characterization the "confounding contraries" (IV.i.20) between divine law and human law are all too apparent. Ramsey states:

> The idealism of Christian ethics is seen as potentially cruel, destructive, perhaps impossible to live by. . . . What sense is there is obeying Christ in moderation? His Gospels contain no grounds for it. . . . Has [Timon's] ruin nullified our Christian assumptions, reductio ad absurdum?[5]

[5] Ramsey, pp. 162-63.

The rhetorical question has no clear answer. What is clear, however, is that Timon is characterized from Act I as a Christ figure, and that characterization demands answers. Early in the play, Timon states his credo:

> We are born to do benefits; and what better or properer can we call our own than the riches of our friends? O, what a precious comfort 'tis to have so many like brothers commanding one another's fortunes!
>
> (I.ii.101-05)

To Timon, "benefits," "riches," and "fortunes" are all synonymous--and all are represented by feasting. His fixed idea is reflected in the allusions to the Last Supper of Christ; however, Timon is Christ-like in the ironic sense of the feeding imagery only. Ramsey accurately shows that Timon's banquet is "but a monstrous parody of the Communion of the Last Supper, with every guest playing Judas Iscariot to Timon's Christ."[6] The references to many dipping their meat into the blood of one man (I.ii.39-42) and to the betrayal in the man who shares another's bread (I.ii.47-50) are echoed by the stranger in Act III:

> Why, this is the world's soul, and just of the same piece
> Is every flatterer's sport. Who can call him
> His friend that dips in the same dish?
>
> (III.ii.64-66)

[6] Ramsey, p. 167.

The anthropophagic images of Act III both prove Apemantus' earlier warnings and depict Timon as a caricature of Christ. In particular, Timon himself makes the caricature explicit with his railings:

> Cut my heart in sums.
> . . . . .
> Tell out my blood.
> . . . . .
> Five thousand drops pays that. What yours?
> and yours?
> . . . . .
> Tear me, take me, and the gods fall upon you!
> (III.iv.92,94,96,99)

Thus, the bountiful giving of one's "meat" that permeates Act I turns to emptiness in Act III, where the feast-giver is feasted on. This nullifying is foreshadowed by Apemantus:

> We make ourselves fools to disport ourselves,
> And spend our flatteries to drink those men
> Upon whose age we void it up again
> With poisonous spite and envy.
> (I.ii.136-39)

Apemantus uses a description of consuming and regurgitating to depict the figurative consuming and eliminating of Timon by his feast-friends. The Christ caricature is implicit; Timon's final giving of self parodies Christ's "Take, eat: this is my bodie. . . . Drinke ye all of it. For this is my blood of the Newe testament" (Matt. 26:26-28). What is missing in Timon's "Last Supper" is the completion of the sacrifice through a corresponding attitude on the cross.

Timon lacks the essence of the sacrifice: "Father, forgiue them: for they knowe not what thei do" (Luke 23:34). Shakespeare characterizes Timon as man, not god, a fact Flavius can recite even if he cannot understand all of its ramifications:

> Strange, unusual blood,
> When man's worst sin is, he does too much good!
> Who then dares to be half so kind again?
> For bounty, that makes gods, do still mar men.
> (IV.ii.38-41)

It is evident that, through feeding imagery, Timon is characterized as a parody of Christ, serving a sacrificial feast whose potential sustenance is nullified by his own nearsighted perception. In like manner, through feeding imagery, Apemantus, the Cynic, is characterized as an eye of truth and accurate perception. Many of the passages cited above reveal as much of Apemantus as they do of Timon, for the two characters are carefully linked. Apemantus serves two functions: Not only does he see with clear vision the hypocritical feasting and toasting of the Athenians, but also the depiction of Apemantus in the first acts foreshadows the depiction of Timon in the final acts. It is this second function that is of major importance here. Like Apemantus, Timon becomes an eater of roots, a drinker of water. In Act I, Apemantus offers "Honest water" (I.ii.59) as a kind

of antidote to the hypocritical toasting at Timon's feasts. Apemantus' grace is in the same vein, an assessment of man's essential aloneness and a recognition of the contrast between society's false communion and his own preference for the basic necessities. The conclusion of this grace is as unadorned as the way of life it advocates: "Amen. So fall to't: / Rich men sin, and I eat root"(I.ii.70-71). In response to the sensuously lavish masque, Apemantus comments with emphasis on the simplicity of a diet of roots: "Like madness is the glory of this life, / As this pomp shows to a little oil and root" (I.ii.134-35).

This insistence of Apemantus on the superiority of water and root over the feast is intensified in Act III and Act IV through Timon's "banquet" of water and through his demand to the earth to yield him roots for sustenance. The warm-water banquet in Act III, Scene vi, is a parody of Timon's usual feast and gains ironically dark humor from the antithesis between the banquets of the past and the present one. The audience can feel the anticipation of the lords who acclaim the "cover'd dishes" (III.vi.48) promising unusually good cuisine; yet Shakespeare's artistry also conveys Timon's anticipation as he urges his feast-friends to be seated quickly without the regard for rank that is conventional at a "city feast" (III.vi.67). Timon's

blessing, like his feast, is the inverse of what it purports to be. The "nothing" of the anti-blessing is as pregnant with meaning as its prototype in King Lear:

> For these my present friends,
> as they are to me nothing, so in nothing bless
> them, and to nothing are they welcome.
> . . . . .
> May you a better feast never behold,
> You knot of mouth-friends! Smoke and lukewarm
> water
> Is your perfection.
> (III.vi.82-90)

Apemantus' attitude toward a diet of water and roots is quite different from Timon's attitude toward the same. What Apemantus enjoys, Timon resents. The contrast in their perspectives is still as marked as it was in Act I although their conditions are much closer together in the last acts than they were in the first. Thus, Shakespeare characterizes Apemantus as a foil to Timon. The former, however, has never known the "confectionary" world of the latter. Apemantus is a natural cynic, espousing an anti-material world but not necessarily hating mankind except for his materialism. By contrast, Timon rejects the material world because he first rejects mankind; however, unlike Apemantus, Timon is never truly in harmony with the life of water and roots.

Shakespeare does not develop the relationship of Alcibiades, the military leader, to Timon in terms of feeding

imagery in as much detail as he develops that of Apemantus to Timon through the same imagery; however, the connection is present even in the Alcibiades relationship--and if Shakespeare had polished the play, he perhaps would have developed this aspect more fully. As it is, the importance of the recurring imagery is much greater than the small number of examples might indicate. In an early conversation between Alcibiades and Timon, Timon states that the captain prefers the battlefield to the banquet hall. Feeding imagery undergirds this conversation:

> Alcib. My heart is ever at your service, my lord.
> Tim: You had rather be at a breakfast of enemies than a dinner of friends.
> Alcib. So they were bleeding new, my lord, there's no meat like 'em; I could wish my best friend at such a feast.
> (I.ii.75-80)

Alcibiades' use of "bleeding," "meat," and "feast" echoes the imagery of the banquet scene in Act I, Scene ii, where Apemantus' imagery alludes to the Last Supper of Christ. The imagery of Alcibiades, like that of Apemantus, prefigures the cannibalistic imagery of Timon in Act III, Scene iv, just prior to Timon's conceiving the idea for the warm-water banquet. I doubt that a careful artist such as Shakespeare would have stumbled onto this repetition unintentionally. Shakespeare suggests that appetite is integral to Alcibiades--even, in the figurative sense, appetite for the blood of men.

The feeding imagery associated with Alcibiades is appropriately linked to war, for he has a propensity for the battlefield equal to that of Timon for the banquet hall. Another example of the recurring language associated with Alcibiades is in his flattering greeting to Timon mentioned previously: "I feed / Most hungerly on your sight" (I.i.252-53). The final example, part of the senators' plea to Alcibiades at the play's end, strengthens the pattern:

> If thy revenges hunger for that food
> Which nature loathes, take thou the
> destin'd tenth,
> And by the hazard of the spotted die
> Let die the spotted.
> (V.iv.32-35)

Alcibiades discerns the truth in the plea and acts within a justice of which Timon is not capable. The man of war does, indeed, approach the coming battle "like a shepherd" (V.iv. 42), thus presenting a more Christ-like demeanor than Timon, the Christ caricature, ever could present.

Without a doubt, Shakespeare characterizes Alcibiades--just as he characterizes both Timon and Apemantus--with feeding imagery. Like Apemantus, Alcibiades is a foil to Timon; yet, also like Apemantus, Alcibiades differs significantly from Timon. Not only does he satisfy his appetite on the battlefield, but also he is able to make judgments within the parameters of his interest. For Alcibiades,

life does not consist of absolutes but of compromises; for him, there is no feasting-fasting dichotomy.

Shakespeare's theme in Timon of Athens is the logical extension of plot structure and characterization, an espousal of moderation in this play of extremes. The playwright uses feeding imagery to illustrate the folly of blindly nurturing "feast-won" friends. His use of the metaphor to characterize the true Cynic and the man of moderation as foils to Timon, who never knew the "middle of humanity" but only "the extremity of both ends" (IV.iii.300-01), also illustrates moderation. Shakespeare's theme is a primary Renaissance theme, the importance of curbing the appetite or passions. Timon is a different tragic hero--unlike Hamlet, Othello, Lear, or even Macbeth--for he never recognizes the value of moderation or the penalty for failing to be moderate. In fact, Timon, like his feast-friends, has an appetite that dominates him, something Shakespeare depicts through a unique equation of gold with food.

The equivalency of gold and food is implicit throughout the play; the feast is the symbol of riches, and the cessation of the feast is the symbol of poverty. However, the equation is also important at the thematic level. In Act IV, when Timon demands "Earth, yield me roots!" (IV.iii.23), he ironically finds gold, which he views as a kind of poison.

His demand must be viewed in context:

> Destruction fang mankind! Earth, yield me roots!
> [Digging.]
> Who seeks for better of thee, sauce his palate
> With thy most operant poison! What is here?
> Gold? Yellow, glittering, precious gold?
> No, gods, I am no idle votarist;
> Roots, you clear heavens! Thus much of this will
> make
> Black white, foul fair, wrong right,
> Base noble, old young, coward valiant.
> (IV.iii.23-30)

Timon rejects the gold because it can give no ease to his literal appetite and because of its poisonous effect on man. Later in the same scene, not knowing that Timon has uncovered gold, Alcibiades offers gold to him. Timon replies: "Keep it, I cannot eat it" (IV.iii.101). Timon rails about the poisonous quality of gold, then offers it to Alcibiades; however, Timon's offer is not the result of generosity as he intends the gold to "make large confusion" (IV.iii.128) for the soldiers, an indication of his hatred for all mankind.

Shakespeare equates gold with food and both with poison. This idea is expanded in Timon's apostrophe to the earth that he personifies:

> That nature being sick of man's unkindness
> Should yet be hungry! Common mother, thou
> [Digging.]
> Whose womb unmeasurable and infinite breast
> Teems and feeds all. . . .
> (IV.iii.176-79)

Timon's concept of the earth as mother is expressed in archetypal terms with emphasis on intrinsic qualities associated with the mother such as "womb unmeasurable" and "infinite breast." He associates the earth-mother with sustenance since she "feeds all"; however, he also blames the earth for contributing her spirit without discrimination to man and to poisonous or otherwise abhorrent creatures. Timon's address to the earth as mother is vituperative; it vacillates between the demand for "one poor root" and a curse against the earth's fertility that brings forth "ingrateful man":

> Yield him who all the human sons do hate,
> From forth thy plenteous bosom, one poor root!
> Ensear thy fertile and conceptious womb,
> Let it no more bring out ingrateful man!
> Go great with tigers, dragons, wolves, and bears,
> Teem with new monsters, whom thy upward face
> Hath to the marbled mansion all above
> Never presented!--O, a root, dear thanks!--
> Dry up thy marrows, vines, and plough-torn leas,
> Whereof ingrateful man, with liquorish draughts
> And morsels unctious, greases his pure mind,
> That from it all consideration slips.
> (IV.iii.185-96)

Shakespeare forcefully links feeding imagery with that of the earth as archetypal sustainer and destroyer, much as he does in Titus Andronicus and Macbeth. Lady Macbeth's curse that her milk be turned to gall is echoed in Timon's abusive address to the "common mother" earth. The difference

between the cynical Apemantus and the misanthropic Timon is particularly evident in the way each regards earth's sustenance: The root that Apemantus regards as ample nourishment to fulfill one of man's basic needs is the root that Timon sees paradoxically both as the antithesis of the feast and as the produce of earth that leads to abuse by "ingrateful man." Timon has at this point become the epitome of "confusing contraries." He cannot see that the same food can both nourish and destroy, just as gold can be put to both positive and negative uses. O. J. Campbell observes that Timon's diatribe on gold conveys the familiar theme "the love of money is the root of all evil."[7] Campbell's observation is logical, for Shakespeare relates food and gold, root and feast, sustainer and destroyer. For Timon, who perceives only "the extremity of both ends" (IV.iii.301), the temporal world is motivated by one instinct, that of preying. The fox "would eat" the lamb (IV.iii.329); the ass is "but as a breakfast to the wolf" (IV.iii.333); and the wolf, afflicted by "greediness," would "hazard [his] dinner" (IV.iii.334-35). Thus, sustenance and destruction are inextricably merged in Timon's thinking.

Critics who interpret the ending of Timon of Athens as Timon's apotheosis misunderstand Shakespeare's theme. Timon,

[7] Shakespeare's Satire (1943; rpt. New York: Gordian Press, 1971), p. 190.

the immoderate man of extremes, refuses aid to Athens. Alcibiades, a man willing to see relative merits, takes Timon's gold and uses it to purge Athens; in the process, the man of war redeems himself. Timon's end is not noble; he never recognizes that his own appetite, although unlike that of his feast-friends in direction, is as great as theirs in degree. In Timon of Athens, Shakespeare shows that man can be nurtured or destroyed: With the individual rests the choice.

"Nurture" in The Tempest: Shakespeare's Full-Course Meal

Somewhere between Timon of Athens, written about 1607--1608, and The Tempest, written about 1611, Shakespeare's moral vision finds a crystalline perspective. The vision moves from the dark venom of Timon of Athens to the bright, healing message of The Tempest. It moves from misanthropic separation to covenantal community. The personal motivations for Shakespeare's completed perspective can never fully be known. We can see, however, how he conveys that perspective, how he moves from tragic mode to comic mode. It is important to recognize the tragedy inherent in The Tempest; otherwise, the gap between tragedy and romance is too great and we fail

to see the complementary nature of two plays whose surface differences are very great indeed. Although Shakespeare's methods differ in the two plays, the concept of feeding, and especially that of nurture, is shared and helps to link the two. In The Tempest, as in Timon of Athens, the feeding notion is conveyed through plot, character, and theme. And in both plays the concreteness of feeding imagery takes on symbolic significance: Traditional imagery moves from a primarily descriptive function to a more comprehensive emblematic function.

Descriptive feeding imagery of the usual types, simile and metaphor, is almost nonexistent in The Tempest. Gone is the imagistic emphasis on a gamut of predators--although preying is evident at many levels. Early in Act I, Prospero uses the familiar predatory image once, casting it in terms of plant rather than animal, however. He describes Antonio, his brother, as "ivy" that obscured Prospero's "princely trunk" and "suck'd" the vitality from him (I.ii.86-87). Even in this metaphor, the symbolic function is present. The image is a graphic one of parasite and host that can be interpreted on several levels. The allusion to "host" can foreshadow the hospitality that Prospero later extends. In addition, another application of "host" is marvelously appropriate in this play: The "host" is the wafer of the

Eucharist, a symbol of the spiritual "bread" that nurtures man. Thus, the parasite-host image foreshadows the role of Prospero, who nurtures the spiritual development of the other characters. Aside from this one metaphor in the feeding imagery, Shakespeare goes beyond simile and metaphor to symbolic event and character in The Tempest--achieving, in the process, a comprehensive thematic statement on nurture.

Two symbolic events in the plot illustrating feeding imagery are the disappearing banquet in Act III, Scene iii, and the betrothal masque in Act IV, Scene i. Both are visionary in form. Both are pivotal scenes contributing to the nurture theme of The Tempest.

The disappearing banquet occurs at a climactic point in the play. In this scene, the sprite Ariel--acting under the direction of Prospero--causes a banquet to magically appear and disappear before the court party consisting of Antonio, Alonso (king of Naples), Sebastian (his brother), Gonzalo (an old counselor from Milan), and others. The court party, tired from "forth-rights and meanders" (III.iii.3) around the island, acknowledges a need for rest. As Ariel initiates the visionary banquet, Alonso's "What harmony is this?" (III. iii.18) resonates other longings for true harmony such as in The Merchant of Venice. Ironically, this longing for

harmony by the court party is juxtaposed to a murder plot underway elsewhere on the island under the direction of the play's low-life characters Trinculo and Stephano, along with Caliban. These rogues are plotting the murder of Prospero. Unaware of this murder plot--and recovering from a similar plot of their own against Alonso--the members of the court party now experience a mood of anticipation as they listen to compelling music and watch strange Shapes carrying in a banquet. An expectation of physical nurture for tired travellers is accompanied by a feeling of general acceptance, in spite of some anxiety expressed by Alonso at the strange happenings. Even the usual connotation of "monster" is overcome as the "monstrous shape" (III.iii.31) houses a kind and considerate being whose manners contrast favorably with those of the "human generation" (III.iii.33) known to the court party. Indeed, the tenor of this occasion is reminiscent of a similar banquet in Timon of Athens: Expectant guests whet their appetites and their spirits for the delicacies surely contained in the presented dishes. But in The Tempest as in Timon of Athens, the guests are disappointed. Nurture is provided for those who choose to partake of it; but its form is words and an invitation to repentance, not a succulent feast for the stomach. Ariel's harpy-like intervention recalls the invective of Timon. For

Prospero's guests, as for Timon's, the only relief is "heart's sorrow / And a clear life ensuing" (III.iii.81-82).

The similarity between the banquet scenes in Timon of Athens and The Tempest ends at this point. The former, concerned with the outcome of host rather than guests, accomplishes no repentance and no reconciliation. The latter, concerned with the outcome of both host and guests, reaches its pinnacle in the general forgiveness and reconciliation that is central to The Tempest. Both plays have potential revenge plots within their conception; however, we see Shakespeare move from the darkness of tragedy to the light of comedy expressed in Prospero's words:

> Yet, with my nobler reason, 'gainst my fury
> Do I take part. The rarer action is
> In virtue than in vengeance.
> (V.i.26-28)

Unlike Timon, who gets revenge on his feast-friends, Prospero withholds the banquet at this time to allow the necessary "sea-change" (I.ii.401) to happen for all the participants. In withholding the banquet of his art, he extends the hospitality of his spirit--the true sustenance offered and received in The Tempest.

The disappearing banquet is an anti-masque, or foil, to the betrothal masque in Act IV, Scene i. Prospero (and Shakespeare?) places the future in the control of Miranda

and Ferdinand, signifying in the masque the concord and fertility of such a union. Fruitfulness is the overarching quality of Miranda, a sharp contrast to the barrenness of a Lady Macbeth or a Goneril. Yet Shakespeare is careful to couch this marriage in chastity, not lust. Ferdinand and Miranda never deny sexual instinct; their affinity for such appetite is underscored by Prospero's strong admonitions about the "virgin-knot" (IV.i.15). However, the quality of this marriage is much like that of Spenser's Britomart and Artegall: sexual fulfillment within marriage, a unique extension of chastity. Implicit in this kind of chastity is a tempering of physical appetite. To Miranda and Ferdinand belongs a marriage where passion is in the service of reason. Fertility, then, becomes the fruit of both body and spirit.

Thus, the betrothal masque of The Tempest celebrates the fruits of the earth, merging earth's bounty with the fruits of society. Appropriately, the personages who present the masque are Iris, representing the rainbow, and Ceres, representing agriculture. Venus and Cupid, deities of unbridled lust, are explicitly excluded. Ceres' blessing on the bridal couple is filled with images of earth's plenty, representative of heaven's blessing as well:

> Earth's increase, foison plenty,
> Barns and garners never empty;
> Vines with clust'ring bunches growing,
> Plants with goodly burthen bowing;
> Spring come to you at the farthest
> In the very end of Harvest!
> Scarcity and want shall shun you,
> Ceres' blessing so is on you.
> (IV.i.110-17)

Although the verse is rather stilted in spite of the images of bounty it conveys, the vision is, as Ferdinand declares, "most majestic" and "Harmonious charmingly" (IV.i.118). Nature and supernature extend to the couple the sumptuousness of earth's banquet. The feast implicit in the masque contrasts with the fast of the anti-masque in a way reminiscent of a similar dichotomy in Timon of Athens.

The second significant application of feeding imagery in The Tempest occurs in character delineation. Like the feeding elements at the center of the plot, the feeding aspect of character also moves toward symbolism through the name "Caliban," an anagrammatic spelling of "cannibal."[8] Caliban--the half-fish, half-man offspring of the witch Sycorax and the devil--was already on the island when Prospero came to live there. Although Prospero has tutored him and attempted to eliminate his bestial tendency, Caliban is still an example of grossness in semi-human form. In

[8] Hallett Smith, Introd., The Tempest, in The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. G. Blakemore Evans et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974), II, 1607.

giving Caliban his name, Shakespeare does not intend to depict one who devours human flesh. Such a depiction would be much more unilinear than the one Shakespeare presents. Rather than associate Caliban with an appetite for flesh, the playwright associates him with an appetite for things of the flesh--a major difference. In addition, this creature of earth is not totally excluded from the general pattern of reconciliation and nurture in The Tempest. Through this multi-layered rendering of Caliban, Shakespeare gives us one of the most complex characters of the entire canon. Marjorie Garber describes Caliban as both "bestial man" and "mortal man"[9]--an accurate description and a combination that Shakespeare's characterization rests upon.

When we first meet Caliban, he is linked with the appetite of bestial man in the most basic sense. He lives up to the label Prospero gives him: "Thou, earth, thou!" (I.ii.314). One of Caliban's first thoughts is of his stomach: "I must eat my dinner" (I.ii.330). Then, almost immediately, we learn that Caliban has attempted to rape Miranda, an act the Renaissance audience would have viewed as sexual appetite. In his next appearance, Caliban is again greatly concerned with the sense of taste. He sees

[9] Coming of Age in Shakespeare (New York: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1981), p. 243.

Stephano and Trinculo, the play's low-life characters, and craves their "celestial liquor" (II.ii.117). Caliban pledges, "I'll swear upon that bottle to be thy true subject, for the liquor is not earthly" (II.ii.125-26). All of these examples illustrate appetite in a purely physical sense.

Caliban has another aspect, however. Even in his drunken state, he is a sensitive person. He offers all that he has, the gifts of nature, to his new-found gods: clear springs, berries, fish, wood. He shows himself to be appreciatively in touch with the fruits and animal life of the island. One of the most beautiful passages in The Tempest displays Caliban's aesthetic sensitivity as he reassures his companions, Stephano and Trinculo:

> Be not afeard, the isle is full of noises,
> Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and
> hurt not.
> Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
> Will hum about mine ears; and sometime voices,
> That if I then had wak'd after long sleep,
> Will make me sleep again, and then in dreaming,
> The clouds methought would open, and show riches
> Ready to drop upon me, that when I wak'd
> I cried to dream again.
> (III.ii.135-43)

Here is appetite, but of a sensuous rather than a sensual nature. In his delight in beauty and the bounty of the island, Caliban is rather like Desdemona--a responsive

being affirming life with a pure, unreserved joy. Furthermore, as R. A. Foakes points out, Caliban is a master of the language he uses to express his emotions. Although Prospero is the teacher of the language that is a mark of civilization, Caliban is the extremely apt student. In Foakes' words:

> Prospero taught him language, but Caliban's use of it is his own, and the surprising thing about this is the extent to which Caliban's language matches that of Prospero; Caliban's curses against Prospero are as rich and inventive as Prospero's invective and threats against him in I.ii, and his poetry is every bit as good as that of his master. . . . On the stage we see in the one figure both a brute and a human being . . . who speaks fine and sophisticated verse, itself a product of both nurture, in his command of language, and nature, in the sensibility he reveals.[10]

In yet another respect, Caliban shows himself to be more than untutored appetite such as his name suggests: Caliban is <u>not</u> "nature" without "nurture," contrary to what Prospero states about him:

> A devil, a born devil, on whose nature
> Nurture can never stick; on whom my pains,
> Humanely taken, all, all lost, quite lost;
> And as with age his body uglier grows,
> So his mind cankers.
> (IV.i.188-92)

[10] <u>Shakespeare: The Dark Comedies to the Last Plays: From Satire to Celebration</u> (Charlottesville: The Univ. Press of Virginia, 1971), pp. 153-54.

Not only does Caliban's acute sense of language show the results of "nurture," but also his determination to "seek for grace" (V.i.296) testifies to a being capable of growth and change. After the "sea-change" has swept the characters, bringing each to a fuller discovery of self, Caliban, too, illustrates regeneration. At play's end Caliban refutes his sensual appetite even as he asserts his spiritual potential, sure sign of mortal man:

> and I'll be wise hereafter,
> And seek for grace. What a thrice-double ass
> Was I to take this drunkard for a god,
> And worship this dull fool!
> (V.i.295-98)

Critics frequently denigrate Caliban without acknowledging this finer side. However, Ralph Berry offers a helpful present-day perspective on this paradoxical character:

> At the end, no guarantees for Caliban's future progress can be issued. Spiritually, the man is on probation. But his progress through this play composes a major statement of human potential: to be set against the explicit record of intended rape, murder, and a constitutional unwillingness to be governed by anyone but himself.[11]

An awareness of views such as those expressed by Garber and Berry is necessary if Caliban is to be understood fairly.

[11] The Shakespearean Metaphor: Studies in Language and Form (Totowa, N. J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1978), p. 108.

True, no one can guarantee the continued spiritual growth of this strange man-beast. In fact, Prospero's words "This thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine" (V.i. 275-76) imply some degree of acceptance of intrinsic darkness at man's core. The Tempest, for all its frothy beauty, dramatizes man's most deeply rooted concern. This romance shares with Hamlet the ultimate issue: "What is man?" It shares with King Lear the pessimism within that issue: "Is man no more than this?" Yet The Tempest does not settle for a nihilistic or negative answer. Instead, it asserts that the darkness can be named, nurtured, and mastered--if only in part. In this assertion, The Tempest overcomes the dark vision of man in Timon of Athens as well as that of the other tragedies. Caliban, more than any other element in the play, symbolizes a positive vision. Thus, through Caliban, character merges into theme: Caliban attests to the self-discovery of mortality integral to spiritual fruition.

In The Tempest with its "nature-nurture" theme, Caliban remains the enigma even while he represents the hope. He represents mortal man--"This thing of darkness" to be acknowledged in each individual man--yet he also symbolizes the potential of "nurture" over "nature." However, even though Shakespeare goes this far in affirming man, he shares with

the Gospel writers one supreme difficulty. He, as much as they, cannot permanently eliminate the darkness in man although he, also like they, can acknowledge it and nurture it into positive change, however gradual or finite. Within man's understanding, the darkness can be controlled only at the individual level and in the particular instance; however, such individual potential comprises the community of man. Caliban, like Shylock, is not invited into full community; within the bounds of the respective plays, nurture without reservation is not extended. Shakespeare cannot endorse unrestricted sustenance, for man's moral vision is never free of impairment even in its clearest view.

Although both Prospero and Timon are depicted to some degree as Christ figures, only Prospero understands the injunction "Fede my shepe" (John 21:17). Prospero, following Christ's teachings, acknowledges the darkness within self and others; yet through an espousal of reason and moderation over passion and extremes, he is able to accept the condition of mortal man. Timon, ever unable to accept and forgive human imperfection, moves from intentional hospitality to intentional revenge. Prospero, on the other hand, moves from a semblance of revenge to intentional hospitality. Thus, The Tempest effectively reverses the "feast-won, fast-lost" dichotomy of Timon of Athens.

Ultimately, we see that physical famine is necessary for spiritual feast, a fact Prospero shows us in withholding the banquet until spiritual readiness is achieved.

The "nurture" theme of The Tempest is a part of a larger Renaissance theme, that of reason over passion or appetite. Through Caliban--representing not cannibal but mortal man--Shakespeare shows the appetite that is intrinsic to man; but he also shows the application of "nurture" to "nature." The key to Prospero's forgiveness of his fellows lies in his acknowledgement of "This thing of darkness," for Prospero must accept man with his limitations in order to nurture man's progress--including his own--beyond those limitations. Prospero, like Alcibiades at the end of Timon of Athens, must admit relative merits. In The Tempest, no less than in Shakespeare's tragedies, man is nurtured or devoured by his own choice.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

From Titus Andronicus to The Tempest, rapacious appetite, Shakespeare suggests, brings chaos to the world of man. Shakespeare expresses both a central concern of his age and a timeless concern of man when he explores the nature and source of this appetite and its significance for the human condition. Through feeding imagery, Shakespeare depicts man as victim and victimizer, both equally destructive states. Although the particular use of feeding imagery changes through the plays both in complexity and in artistic effectiveness, the basic image pattern remains remarkably consistent from early plays to final works. Thus, feeding imagery conveys Shakespeare's overarching theme of man's ambiguous nature in a relative world where the only absolute is the struggle--gained or failed--for spirituality. The message that resonates throughout the feeding imagery is both elemental and sublime: Physical appetite devours the individual and destroys his world, but spiritual nourishment sustains the person who shares the feast of forgiveness.

As we explore how Shakespeare's feeding imagery conveys this theme, certain motifs emerge as primary. One such motif is cannibalism. In Titus Andronicus, we see explicit cannibalism manifested in the eating of human flesh. A

similar intent is expressed in The Merchant of Venice. Both of these plays depict the human condition as being savage, bestial--fraught with errors in judgment and with an intentional appetite to raven one's fellows. Such ravenous inclination is mitigated slightly, if at all, when it occurs in the guise of religious sacrifice or human justice. Compared to the cannibalism in these early plays, the cannibalism implicit in later plays is much more subtle, the expression of a finer artistic sensibility and of a maturing moral vision. Caliban, an anagrammatic rendering of "cannibal," represents the culmination of anthropophagy in Shakespeare's works. In depicting Caliban, Shakespeare personifies appetite; yet he focuses here on figurative appetite rather than on its literal model. Caliban never exhibits cannibalism in its most literal sense; however, his suggestive name keeps the notion of anthropophagy ever before us and reminds us of a raw tendency to devour intrinsic to the human condition. At the same time, Caliban represents man's struggle to overcome his innate appetite. In stating his determination to seek for grace, Caliban voices the optimal human condition. He shows that even cannibal-man can master his appetite and partake of the spiritual feast.

Closely interwoven with the motif of cannibalism is that of the Eucharist. The religious sacrifice appears in

skeletal form in the early plays, especially in Titus Andronicus and The Merchant of Venice. In the former, Titus's flesh banquets are offered as sacrifices; in the latter, Antonio offers himself as sacrificial lamb. We see this idea of human sacrifice take shape in the plays until it is imbued with Eucharistic overtones. These suggestions are explicit in Timon of Athens, where Timon's words are an unmistakable parody of Christ's Last Supper. Shakespeare explores the ramifications of the Eucharist, showing the hollowness of an insincere sharing of self with others. Timon's sacrifice is empty and offers no sustenance because he gives it bitterly and unforgivingly. On the other hand, in The Tempest Prospero serves a true communion to the court party when he ensures that he and they are spiritually prepared before they partake of the feast. Timon and Prospero convey the multiple meanings of nurture--the first by negative example, the second by positive example. The allusions to the Eucharist are an extension of the cannibalism motif in Shakespeare's works. The movement from cannibalism to religious feast is subtle but powerful, an example of Shakespeare's developing theme and artistry.

Throughout the plays under consideration, Shakespeare explores the source of man's nature, using the earth-mother motif. In the early plays and even as late as Timon of Athens, the earth-mother is a convenient displacement of blame,

suggesting that some cosmic force controls man and causes him to devour. However, when Shakespeare returns to the earth-mother in Timon of Athens, we are convinced that dramatist and character do not share one view. While Timon rails against the greedy earth-mother, he does not speak with the voice of his creator. We hear Shakespeare most clearly in Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth, where he resolves that the most destructive force is not some element outside of man but an innate quality within man's control. Placing the responsibility for control of appetite within the individual, the great tragedies stand at the heart of Shakespeare's exploration of the human condition.

In the various Garden of Eden analogies throughout the plays and also in the rendering of Caliban, Shakespeare shows that man is poised between extremes that either nurture or devour. Man can seek for grace or he can starve himself spiritually. The feast conveys perfectly Shakespeare's emphasis on nurture: When the menu satisfies physical appetite, the process of digestion is impeded; but when the menu is human forgiveness patterned after spiritual acceptance, man is able to digest his condition and share a communal meal with his fellows. Thus, the imagistic feast conveys one of the major themes in Shakespeare's dramas: man's quest for physical and spiritual sustenance

in a world of relative values that can either sustain or destroy. Reading the plays through an analysis of feeding imagery suggests an important new imagistic perspective through which to view the selected plays and invites application to other plays of the canon.

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