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READING SOCIAL CONFLICT IN THE ALIMENTARY TRACT: MORE ON THE BODY IN RENAISSANCE DRAMA

BY FRANK WHIGHAM

During the early seventeenth century Renaissance drama increasingly presented the body politic in *privacy.* Elizabethan political and social sins once portrayed with armies and rebels and maps were often recast in terms of sexual deviation and bodily excess. *Henry IV* gave way to *The Revenger's Tragedy,* the battlefield to the court, privy councils to privy parts. What was the freight of this turn to the private body? What ideological labor did it constitute or enable? A full answer to this query will involve a massive cross-category analysis well beyond the limits of a brief essay. Here I present some groundwork for the larger venture: a preliminary interrogation of one subset of this privatized bodily discourse, in which I seek to exhume a buried vocabulary and suggest the apparent terrain of its favored subjects and issues.[1] This discourse deals, I believe, with class ingestion, retention, and evacuation—in short, with a social coding of the alimentary tract.

Much of the thematized deviation of Jacobean drama concerns sexual transgressions of rank at court. Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* founds this pattern, as it does so many others, and Shakespeare, Chapman, Tourneur, Marston, Webster, and Middleton all address it in major plays. Now, thanks to Lawrence Stone, we all know that with the accession of James and the bursting of the Elizabethan bottleneck on social reward, the notorious "inflation of honours" set in: more and more suitors swarmed the Jacobean court, with more and more success, undeterred by howls of conservative outrage.[2] Perhaps we can read some of the drama's fascination with cross-class courtly sexuality in light of this shift in access to the ruling elite, by exploring it in terms of invasion and contamination. I take my theoretical point of entry from Mary Douglas's famous study of purity and danger:

> Many ideas about sexual dangers are better interpreted as symbols of the relations between parts of society, as mirroring

designs of hierarchy or symmetry which apply in the larger social system. What goes for sex pollution also goes for bodily pollution. The two sexes can serve as a model for the collaboration and distinctiveness of social units. So also can the processes of ingestion portray political absorption. Sometimes bodily orifices seem to represent points of entry or exit to social units.[3]

Such formulations point suggestively toward certain details repeated and varied in *The Merchant of Venice*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *The Changeling*, and Webster and Heywood's *Appius and Virginia*.[4] Each of these plays problematizes transgressive sexuality between elite and adjacent groups, and links it with an alimentary discourse. I will be asking whether these plays support Douglas's hypothesis that figures of ingestion, retention, and evacuation might mirror relations between parts of the social body. This coherence seems especially likely given the alimentary focus of Renaissance medicine, and the fact that, in different ways, these plays present the local body politic as unhealthy, as suffering from what was often called intestine conflict.[5]

Let me quote some passages that give this puzzle concrete form. In one expression from everyday seventeenth-century speech the alimentary trope construes social conflict in a fairly clear way. An intercepted letter of May 20, 1626, from a Catholic named Gabriel Brown to a priest in Spain, reports this of Buckingham's audience:

> hardlie would yow believe . . . how ill the Commons house took his Carriage at a Committee, by his being a little more galliard, trimme and wantonly great, after the French Fubb, & gard, then standes with the naturall gravitie of the noble English, as if it were criminall to crindge, ducke, nodd, twirrle a bandstring or the like. . . . the selfe same bodie of men . . . doe now picke a thousand quarrells at him, striving all they can to trample him under foote, yea more, if it were in their power, to teare him peace meal, & eat him raw with salt whom soe little a while since they did so immesurablie extoll.[6]

This proverbial imprecation seems to be a symmetrical inversion, in the mode of Kenneth Burke, of the trope of the dog returning to eat his vomit (a trope that also often condescends to the fickleness of social inferiors).[7] Here the fury of "eating with salt" is situated in the unusual complexity of the criminality of cringing in a supposedly upstart superior seen from below. The Commons are said (by a hostile Catholic witness) to seek vengefully (and jealously?) to degrade one they regard as a former equal who has elevated himself above them by behavior they label degrading, behavior to

which they supposedly would not stoop. The reporter's apparent scorn of the Commons complicates his tones considerably, but the force of the alimentary expression itself is clear enough: the Commons invoke an unsympathetic magic to put Buckingham in his place, returning him with rending obloquy to his point of origin at the back door to power and position. (Surely this is the logic of the still-current British vocabulary of arse-creeping.)[8] A parallel resentful scorn names the triumphant climber a dunghill cock, crowing atop his fit foundation.[9]

Other usages, however, can be more opaque. Celia's adventure with mountebank Volpone at the open window, for instance, begets a curious if savage response, alternately genital and anal (and probably otherwise overdetermined), from her old husband Corvino. Enraged at the "death of his honor, with the city's fool" (2.5.1), he shrieks, "here's a lock [a chastity belt, glosses Alvin Kernan], which I will hang upon thee, / And, now I think on't, I will keep thee backwards; / Thy lodging shall be backwards; thy walks backwards; / Thy prospect, all be backwards; and no pleasure / That thou shalt know but backwards. Nay, since you force / My honest nature, know, it is your own, / Being too open, makes me use you thus" (2.5.57–63).[10] If she continues to misbehave, he swears, "let me not prosper, whore, / But I will make thee an anatomy, / Dissect thee mine own self, and read a lecture / Upon thee to the city, and in public" (2.5.69–72). Some things seem clear here. Corvino imagines regaining his wife's inmost inward will, recapturing or seizing control of her wanderings by distributing them himself to the city, exposing her himself, assuming the role of outraged guardian of a public order from which she has severed herself and which he must now protect from her. But why *backwards*? Should we say that Celia's self-exposure to contamination from below arouses an ironic fury in Corvino, who threatens to extend and literalize her transgressive gesture, making it its own punishment? Is the tone that of "So you want to do it backwards? Okay, I'll give you just what you asked for. Take this!"? Is permissible social and sexual intercourse thus "forward," as it were (though perhaps thus forbidden in its own right), so that backward intercourse is a figure for illicit and forbidden relation?

Chapman's *Gentleman Usher* offers an even more opaque case. In this play a father and son compete for the love of the same woman; the transgression in this case is familial and generational rather than one of social rank. As one might expect, the play

presents the son as the deserving suitor. The father's confidante, advising him to cease and desist, argues that a proper father "Would rather eat the brawn out of his arms / Than glut the mad worm of his wild desires / With his dear issue's entrails" (5.4.49–51).[11] "What is a father?" he demands ironically; someone who would "Turn his entrails [into] gulfs / To swallow children when they have begot them?" (5.4.54–55). And the young woman actually destroys her face with poison (defacing what is forward?) to frighten away the father, whose wooing would "eat his own child with the jaws of lust" (5.3.82). This is perhaps metaphor to Jonson's metonym. Transgressive sexuality from above rather than below is cast not in terms of anal intercourse but of self-consumption, not as excessive and improper openness but as inappropriate closing off, turning a linear linkage or transition into a solipsistic circle. Surely alimentary passages like these seem to address transgressions of social categories.

I first became aware of a linkage between transgression and the alimentary while working with parallels in *All's Well* and *The Merchant of Venice*, reading them as permutations of gender and class conflicts. In both plays a young person (Helena; Bassanio) seeks marital entry to a social elite, is tested in an explicitly romance format (the "performance of tasks"; the "choice of caskets"), and risking his or her fertility (Helena embraces the risk of a strumpet's tax; Bassanio must swear never to marry if he chooses wrongly). In both plays the love-object of the upwardly mobile youth expels a repulsive social poacher (Bertram's violent rejection of Helena is no less passionate for being, as many readers think, insufficiently developed; Portia heartwarmingly carves up Shylock, who aspires to dominate those whom he is fit only to serve); furthermore, the poacher carries sexual contamination (a match with Helena would corrupt Bertram's blood—"Disdain / Rather corrupt me ever" (2.3.115–16), he says; Shylock seeks to cut off a pound of fair flesh, anywhere he likes). In both plays the young woman uses specialized masculine knowledge (medicine; the law) to conquer an older man's anal enemy (Helena cures the king's fistula; Portia disgraces retentive Shylock for Antonio), in a contest that is heavily genitally coded (the king's "lustique" [2.3.41] dancing ability is restored; Shylock is effectively castrated, a confiscation that extends to bags, stones, ducats, and the rebellious flesh of his newly gentle daughter).

Such parallels raise many questions. So far as the alimentary

goes, *The Merchant of Venice* focuses on the anal, principally in its modern Freudian sense. Shylock is extraordinarily rich in this regard: "fast bind, fast find" (2.5.53), of course; Harry Berger thinks even his name a relevant pun; Shylock's austere table frustrates and expels Launcelot, that great feeder named after our most heroic back-door adulterer; and the locked invaded house itself is expressly bodily (it has ears, shut against the music of the masquers).[12] Jessica escapes from this tight household, exploiting the sexual ambiguity and freedom of the page disguise to elope from the second story through the back door with another masked trickster, Lorenzo, becoming gentle and gentile at once, and gilding herself with the hoarded dowry of her father's riches. Afterward Shylock is mocked by Christian choric figures when he laments his daughter's elopement as "rebellious flesh": "Rebels it at these years?" (3.1.32), they ask.[13] In the end, when he seeks to wield knife and law against his betters, he is once again effectively castrated by a young woman herself engaged in at least mildly transgressive mobility through marriage (if we think Portia's song hints to Bassanio in the casket trial).[14] The equation seems fairly straightforward: Shylock's self-righteous cultural identity, whether seen as difference or purity, is insistently figured as anal; it is breached by his Augustinian self-erecting daughter on her ascendant way, down and up at once, to membership in the dominant social and ethnic group. His sequestered heaps of infinite riches likewise find their way out of his little room into circulation against his will.[15] For his hubristic attempt to refuse assimilative intercourse in her intermarriage, he is figuratively castrated.

The anality is more literal in *All's Well*—though perhaps not absolutely so. Here a young woman of lower rank must cure the old king of a fistula in order to receive the nobleman of her dreams. For my reading the initial puzzle is the odd specificity of the king's ailment. G. K. Hunter's resonant Arden note explains that the term *fistula* might then have denoted any "burrowing abscess," though now it marks a specifically rectal one.[16] Indeed, in the story's sources in Boccaccio and Painter the fistula is near the heart (just as the flesh that Shylock plans to cut out or off sometimes is).[17] But Shakespeare's French king's fistula is regrettably "notorious" (1.1.33), according to Lafew, as a chest ailment would presumably not be, and when the principals withdraw to a private chamber to effect the cure the clown at once begins to speak of a barber's chair that fits all buttocks (2.2.16), suggesting surgery. These details,

along with the more general factors of the frequency of occurrence (given typical medical treatments) and of references to the *fistula in ano* in the period make that identification the most likely. In any case, the ailment so seen functions with considerable richness in the discourse I am examining here.[18]

The mechanism seems quite similar to that in *The Merchant of Venice*. A woman who cures the dominant male of an anal ailment may grasp a husband for herself from the inner circle of the available ruling elite. Helena must undergo the risk of sexual taint as Jessica did. Jessica escaped from Shylock's house disguised as a boy—in fact as the son her father never had, gone prodigally to waste his birthright. Helena risks not androgyny but the taint of sexual impurity: "Tax of impudence, / A strumpet's boldness, a divulged shame, / Traduced by odious ballads; my maiden's name / Seared otherwise" (2.1.169–72). Here, however, her self-erection brings not negative erotic results (as with outsider Shylock's castration), but positive: the impotent king, now roused (the play abounds in imagery of erection), can lead her a coranto, a standard slang reference to vigorous sexual action. The old courtier Lafew, inspired by the sight, says "I'll like a maid the better whilst I have a tooth in my head" (2.3.41). Spenser provides a mythological parallel that may help us to read Helena's erotically restoring cure. In book 3 of *The Faerie Queene* the castrating boar that wounded Adonis in the thigh is imprisoned in the cave beneath the Mount of Venus.[19] The scene here sounds like a permutation of Spenser's tale: Helena descends, behind closed doors, to combat the notorious ailment maiming the king, and leads him back to daylight to dance and convey fertility to others. (The second stage of the play reiterates some of this pattern: again Helena must risk shame to work her way through to her cross-class marriage by arcane efforts in the bedroom. Bertram, if not so overtly anally marked, certainly remains resistant.)

In the Shakespearean plays the anality seems designed to figure and unpack this resistance, which is based on sterilizing notions of purity and pollution that the youthful characters strive to overcome in the name of fertility and plenty. Obviously, this coding deals in more sorts of difference than those of social class alone: generations are quite important, as is gender: it is striking that in each case the opponent of the anal evil is a woman. But still the most conspicuous effect of Shakespeare's use of the vocabulary, at least here, is a questioning of compensatory distinctions typical of a

thoroughly penetrated ruling elite, to which, in due course, he would himself make advances. It is worth noting, however, that each of these plays projects an explicitly doubtful, even paranoid ending for its fable of boundaries transcended backward. *The Merchant of Venice* ends with Gratiano's weird expression of gratified possession. "So long as I live I'll fear no other thing / So sore, as keeping safe Nerissa's ring" (5.1.306–7), he says: the swaggering burglar becomes paranoid householder. And in the next to last line of his play the French king allows that "all yet seems well" (5.3.327), and hopes the pattern will hold to the play's end. This statement appears to be almost a denial of its own content, an especially insecure version of Yogi Berra's view that "it's never over till it's over." (Could it even—like Berger's "shy lock" pun—also have bodily reference itself, to the king's nether end, no longer sick?) In both plays ratified women's power is also, at the end, uncomfortably distrusted, the back-door achievement labeled unstable.

A different approach to alimentary mobility is taken by Middleton and Rowley in *The Changeling*. In that play the impoverished, repulsive, sadistic, yet gentle servant DeFlores offers his services to his master's daughter Beatrice-Joanna when a fiancé chosen by her father blocks access to a preferable suitor; his fee, of course, is her virginity. DeFlores has long wanted her, but she has always hated the sight of his supposedly hideous face; she's given, however, to doing things like dropping gloves as she strides away from him in disdain. He picks one up and she says furiously (after her father has said, "DeFlores, help a little"), "Mischief on your officious forwardness! / Who bade you stoop? They touch my hand no more. / There! For t'other's sake I part with this; / Take 'em and draw thine own skin off with 'em" (1.1.226, 227–30). After she leaves, he muses, "She had rather wear my pelt tanned in a pair / Of dancing pumps, than I should thrust my fingers / Into her sockets here" (1.1.232–34). He has certainly gotten under her skin, as we say, and indeed we ought to see the entire chain of glove/skin/pelt as marking an external boundary of the aristocratic body, already breached in prospect, just as blood will later signify its internalized and transferable essence. After such equivocal anger it comes as no surprise that she comes to be happy with the bargain, finding him a "wondrous necessary man" (5.1.91); he harvests her pleasures on her wedding night while her maid in exchange serves her bridegroom (himself a suspicious fellow equipped with a

chemistry set complete with virginity tester; boundaries are obsessively fondled and guarded, if to little avail, in this play). Finally, however, Beatrice-Joanna cannot sustain her rebellious viewpoint, and as she dies, raped and stabbed in a gloating murder-suicide by her lover (indeed, locked into the closet with the chemistry set), she repents her radical social pollution as a disobedient daughter, wife, and co-murderess. She specifies her failure as in the blood. Readers will recall her remorseful, obedient, self-debasing, self-expelling description of that polluted and polluting fluid: "Oh, come not near me, sir," she says to her father, "I shall defile you; / I am that of your blood was taken from you / For your better health . . . / . . . cast it to the ground [perhaps like Onan's seed?] regardlessly, / Let the common sewer take it from distinction" (5.3.149–53).

The medical image of bleeding is obvious, and clearly cognate with the alimentary purge; but Middleton and Rowley realign the analogy directly toward the alimentary by making it almost literal, blood down the drain. The resonance here is remarkable. Perhaps from blood or seed cast on the ground, overnight mushrooms, sprung up in the dark, arise. Or perhaps there is a pun on "sewer" and "cupbearer" here: DeFlores's amorous and ambitious predecessor Horatio, in the first *Spanish Tragedy*, was a cupbearer too. In any event, a moment later DeFlores shows that he has served himself, that he has filled his own cup, that he has followed her, Iago-like, to serve his turn upon her. Having tasted the pleasures of Beatrice-Joanna's "blood" to the full, he says gloatingly to her husband Alsemero, "It was so sweet to me / That I have drunk up all, left none behind / For any man to pledge me" (5.3.169–71). DeFlores is himself the sewer; he has swallowed down her blood, made it his own, and in the act of "dyeing scarlet," as Prince Hal learned from another subjected cupbearer to call it, has absorbed almost literally the honor and rank of his mistress and master.[20] His cup runneth over. In the obvious related echo, she is his factor, his Hotspur. In her fall is his rise; when she dips herself in blood (3.4.126), she exchanges roles with him, dresses him like Hal (and as with the literal operation of drink in "dyeing scarlet") in a garment all of her blood. (We should also think here of Jessica gilding herself with stolen birthright ducats.) In taking her blood from distinction, in flowing through her veins, he has made himself her equal, and her his. As with the proleptic image of the dancing pumps (which now seem irresistibly to suggest fluid movement),

they turn out to occupy each other's skins, to be inside each other. He thanks life for nothing but that pleasure, he says. Such infiltration, for the gritty bloodletter DeFlores, is real transcendence.

This context of ingestion suggests another web of reference from an earlier passage. Speaking of Beatrice's newly expressed taste for him, DeFlores observes, "Some women are odd feeders" (2.2.153). If he eventually gorges himself on a liquor drawn from Beatrice's bloodline, he seems to have first punctured that repository by oral means, seeing himself as a "slovenly dish" that Beatrice "feed[s] heartily on" (2.2.151). This vocabulary of odd feeding repeatedly presents itself to Renaissance dramatists as a language for inappropriate desire. The most apposite specimen is from *All's Well*: "O strange men," says Helena, "That can such sweet use make of what they hate / . . . so lust doth play / With what it loathes" (4.4.21–22, 24–25). Shylock provides an inverse version of this when he speaks of men who, instead of loving the weird, pointlessly hate the harmless, say a gaping pig or cat or bagpipes (4.1.47–58), quite exactly as does Alsemero in act 1 when Beatrice-Joanna speaks of hating DeFlores.[21] "There's scarce a thing but is both lov'd and loath'd," he concludes (1.1.125). Similarly, one remembers Bel-imperia's founding taste for men below her, and its Shakespearean redactions: of Hamlet speaking of Gertrude preying on garbage and battening on a moor, and of Brabantio's disbelief that his daughter would do the same.

One final pattern. The combination of the alimentary focus and the fascination with deep-seated improper hungers chimes harmonically with a repeated and widely distributed emphasis in these plays on obscure interiorities, often involving sex, violence, humiliation, abjection, and death—in short, perhaps, some portmanteau of fundamental desires ("within are secrets" [*The Changeling* 1.1.166]). Again we may cite *The Spanish Tragedy*'s points of origin, with Horatio ambushed and hung before the eyes of his beloved in a secret garden ("This place was made for pleasure not for death"), and Pedringano tantalized and killed with the empty box's absent pardon from Lorenzo—a classic example of Auden's practical joke.[22] *The Merchant of Venice* offers the caskets, full of bitter jokes and Portia's counterfeit, as well as Shylock's fantasy of Jessica and his jewels in her ear in her coffin at his foot—a retributive gesture for her secret escape from his bodily house, behind his back, stealing his bags and stones, a gesture in fact for castration. In *All's Well* the pattern continues: to gain and regain her retroac-

tively rightful place, Helena cures the king without surgery, in a bedroom offstage, and pirates her wifely rights in the dark from Bertram. Parolles voices a repelled countervailing masculine view of such actions by contrast with proper public manly conflict: "He wears his honor in a box unseen," says Parolles, "That hugs his kicky-wicky here at home, / Spending his manly marrow in her arms" (2.3.275–77). But it is *The Changeling* that offers the richest lode. I have talked of gloves and pumps and sewers, but DeFlores also murders and symbolically castrates Alonzo in the narrow innards of the citadel, where there is no room for swords; puts himself in Alsemero's place on his wedding night, while putting Diaphanta into his bed for Beatrice; kills Diaphanta in her bedroom (under pretext of blowing out her chimney with a "piece"); and probably both rapes and stabs Beatrice-Joanna inside the bizarre cabinet of Dr. Alsemero (used previously to house the chemistry set, revealer of the hidden, and its rule book, entitled *Secrets in Nature*). Not to mention all the caged madmen and courtiers in the subplot, who may stand as general figures for the unmanageable interior bedlam of desire.

For Middleton and Rowley, then, the internal passages of the alimentary and vascular systems figure primarily as the conduits for contamination rather than, as in Shakespeare, sites of resistance and blockage. The obvious initial response is to say that what for Shakespeare was a reparative upsurge of supposedly natural virtue past artificial and sterilizing barriers, for Middleton and Rowley is an inescapable contamination by uncontrollable ungratified desire, already alive in the blood of both high and lower alike (DeFlores is gentle too, if fallen financially). But again we have the disturbing, even inverting, *nota bene* ending. The origin of the pollution is explicitly located in Beatrice's changeable woman's will, conservatively marked as refractory as it departs from the father's desire. But the bitterly ironic ending bares the narcissistic core of the patriarchal use of women as conduits. For the object of desire for the polluted father Vermandero was to bind himself to an appropriate son-in-law. He spoke of his daughter's first fiancé, Alonzo de Piracquo, as "complete, / A courtier and a gallant, enrich'd / With many fair and noble ornaments; / I would not change him for a son-in-law / For any he in Spain, the proudest he." "He's much bound to you, sir," replies Alsemero. "He shall be bound to me," says Vermandero, "As fast as this tie can hold him; I'll want / My will else" (1.1.212–16, 217–19). (Here, incidentally, we see quite

explicitly the Lévi-Straussian notion of woman as the conduit through whom relation flows, as mode of relation rather than one who relates. Beatrice-Joanna at first appears at one with Portia, Jessica, and Helena, all agents who refuse the father's will. By the end, however, she embraces her semiotic status as pure means, her interior self-motivating agency sucked out of her by DeFlores, agent and follower who changes places with her.[23]) Vermandero's last broken words, after his daughter's stabbing and her self-judging embrace of her fate, lament the soiling of his own good name. Never mind, his new son-in-law says, "you have yet a son's duty living, / Please you accept it; let that your sorrow, / As it goes from your eye, go from your heart" (5.3.216–18). To my ear this sounds perilously like "You haven't lost a daughter, you've gained a son." This time the patriarchal marriage-machinery does pull off its magic woman-taming, but only by means of a fully parodic conservation. And even this conservation is marked by excretion, as the patriarch's womanish sorrow flows out through his eye to be wiped away even as the daughter's father's blood flowed out through rents she herself constituted, passing from distinction.

Webster and Heywood provide in *Appius and Virginia* the most obscure of my four examples, which I present here essentially as postscript and provocation. The plot, familiar from many retellings (including, of course, Chaucer's *Physician's Tale*), concerns a Roman father who prefers to murder his daughter rather than allow her to be sexually assaulted. The authors give the story considerable seventeenth-century social coloration. The would-be rapist, Appius, is presented as a fairly typical ambitious New Man, who begins the play by assenting to become a *decemvir* (in practice, a judge), though with the reluctance that Castiglione recommends for anyone seriously on the make. He is, however, also already a gentleman, even noble, it seems, though he is charged with being quite new at it—eight months. And he gloats like a machiavel: "How dost thou like my cunning?" he asks his sidekick. He follows an Edmund-like code of individualist interest, severing himself from his panting "cozens" when he takes office, though they await corrupt family favor from him like Buckingham's entourage. He is said to have been reared on the praise of the rabble, like the tribunes in *Coriolanus*, but in the end he kills himself like a proper Roman noble, in sharp contrast to his whining henchman Clodius.

Opposed to Appius are the father and daughter, Virginius and Virginia, purist conservative Roman plebeians with an 800-year-

old pedigree behind them. The father, a soldier, goes to the Senate dressed in his dirty field uniform, reminiscent of the plain style of Thomas of Woodstock, who was mistaken for a groom by a courtly peacock.[24] If the class rankings are reversed here, so that the higher invades the lower, the effect is still one of a natural elite soiled by a new-fangled upstart.

As with most single-event plays, the plot is simple. Appius conceives a lust for Virginia, and his agent Clodius helps him cook up a scheme to capture her. The city is surrounded by a starving soldiery whom Virginius represents, reminiscent of the plebeians in *Coriolanus*. Appius is to hold back the money needed to relieve them, Clodius advises: "Her father thus kept low, gifts and rewards / Will tempt the maid the sooner; nay, haply draw / The father in to plead in your behalf" (1.3.56–58). This is clearly enough the territory of much Jacobean drama, but the plan is replaced with another, by which Clodius is to claim that Virginia is really the daughter of a bondwoman of his, and hence a slave, whom he moves to reclaim at law before Appius on the bench. The idea is to do all this in Virginius's absence, but the father arrives in time to speak for his daughter; he fails, however, and she is adjudged to Clodius. He then stabs her, for the good of his own family's honor, "paternal pity" (4.2.153), and the good of all Roman men who may have women at risk. The tables turn later, Appius is vanquished, Virginius is restored, and Virginia, her "sacrifice" honored like Lucrece's, has supposedly raised declining Rome in her death.

So much is familiar, if repugnant. The enslavement motif has obvious conservative class reverberations, and the force of the denouement preserves the established notion of genealogical purity and authority. Various uses of the alimentary vocabulary, however, give pause. Some indeed are interpretable enough. Virginius's soldiers languish outside the city in a class-specific famine reminiscent of the dearth in *Coriolanus*, attributed here explicitly to a piggish ruling elite. Like Antony, the soldiers must eat strange meats: dead cats and ditchwater, but also "Gentles" (4.2.25), which turns out to be a slang term for the maggots in their cheese.[25] If the greedy nobles are cannibals and parasites, the soldiers settle for a symbolic revenge of sorts. And the mutiny that gradually heats up (exacerbated by the death of their captain's daughter) receives explicitly oral expression: a soldier notes the ravens and crows circling the camp and says, "Come you birds of death, / And fill your greedy croppes with human flesh; / Then to the city fly, disgorge it

there / . . . and from thence arise a plague to choke all Rome!" (2.2.83–87). Again, a victim's revenge, and in the throat.

But two knots stand out beyond these passages. When Virginius stabs his daughter before Appius, he cries, "And if thy lust with this act be not fed, / Bury her in thy bowels, now she's dead" (4.1.346–47). This act first of all reiterates the thyestean banquet trope, where the victim laments having buried his children in his own bowels.[26] And we may think of *The Gentleman Usher*, where the father is accused of eating his own child. Virginia's father, however, reverses the classical pattern, offering to feed his child, killed at his own hand, to another, her nominal murderer as it were. Presumably this involves a raging attempt to displace his own pain onto Appius, but the element of penetration calls for comment: instead of Appius penetrating Virginia, the reverse will take place. She will take her place inside him, in a striking formal echo of the topology games DeFlores plays with his lady's chevril glove. How are we to read this?

Later Webster and Heywood vary the trope again. Virginia's body is brought back into their presence, and its wounds begin (ambiguously) to bleed. Virginius, struck with grief and weeping over the body, says "I'll pour my soul into my daughter's belly, / And with a soldier's tears embalm her wounds" (5.2.110–11). (Is this more topology? He to enter her rather than she to have come out of him? Some inversion of "I wish she'd never been born"? Or of "I never got her"?) Her fiancé Icilius has just alluded to the soul "whose essence some suppose lives in the blood" (5.2.104): is Virginius proposing in some metaphorical way to perpetuate his bloodline by returning it to his daughter's womb? By mixing his blood with hers—though hers is dead and his may be tears—to begin the line anew? Or is it *preserving*, through embalming, rather than conserving through a proper son-in-law? And are we to hear a deconstructive chime in the embalming of wounds rather than the daughter's body, preserving the violation itself as a signum of Roman virtue for the future?[27] What are we to make of these references to bellies and bowels?

For a final extension of the problem, one that may suggest the existence of a more elaborate and complex alimentary discourse than anything I have so far brought forward, I turn not to Webster and Heywood's *Appius*, but to the prior version of Livy, whose treatment of the relevant issues was available to the Renaissance in English translations by Painter and Holland.[28] There we find that

instead of acting in the forum, before the court, Virginius turns aside with his daughter to kill her, withdrawing into "a place called Cloacina" to find a butcher's knife and do the deed. Livy says this place was a shrine of the goddess Cloacina, patroness of *sewers*. Now this is strange enough, but the final touch resides in the fact that "Cloacina" is an epithet, like Tonans for Jupiter. Its owner is none other than Venus, whose purifying aspect derives from an act that eventually resulted in a blending of blood into the Roman strain itself—in other words, a linking of disparate groups. "According to Lanctantius (i. 20), [the name] was derived from the fact that her image was found in the great sewer (*cloaca*), and was set up by the Sabine king, T. Tatius, in a temple near the forum. . . . There is a tradition that T. Tatius and Romulus, after the war which had arisen out of the rape of the Sabine women, ordered their subjects to purify themselves before the image of Venus Cluacina. . . . This explanation agrees perfectly with the belief of ancients that T. Tatius was the founder of marriage; and Venus Cloacina, accordingly, is the goddess presiding over and purifying the sexual intercourse in marriage."[29]

It seems that if Venus maintained one private retreat on Mount Acidale, she also pitched another in the place of excrement. This obscure interior place, full of blood and filth and obstacles and opportunities, does seem expressly liminal, a doorway leading to many mansions, usually of the father's house, though sometimes figured through the belly of Virginia. Confronting the shape and force of this gender obscurity seems a necessary step in this investigation, and I believe we should avoid too readily collapsing the gendered into the comfortably genital, for the figures have too many cross-category dimensions. The unfamiliar sight of Virginius bending weeping over his daughter's belly should recall the more familiar one of Lear with the fruit of his womb dead in his arms; this might in turn lead to Falstaff's lament, "My womb, my womb, my womb undoes me," and to the universal wolf, who will last eat up himself. We are used to processing such matters in terms of orality and narcissism, and these psychogenetic processes offer quite productive analytic aid; but when we hear of Chapman's father glutting the mad worm of his wild desires with his own issue's entrails, we may wonder further about postinfantile, profoundly socialized and discursive transgressions and aggressions, about the origins and redistributions of what Mary Douglas calls, it will now

seem so mildly, "the collaboration and distinctiveness of social units."

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NOTES

Special thanks for detailed readings of this essay to Louis Montrose, Wayne Rebhorn, and Richard Strier.

[1] Such an enterprise is originally inspired by Michel Foucault's related concern with the recovery of lost knowledges. See "Two Lectures," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1927–77*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon et al. (New York: Pantheon, 1980): "With what in fact were these buried, subjugated knowledges really concerned? They were concerned with a *historical knowledge of struggles*. In the specialized areas of erudition as in the disqualified, popular knowledge there lay the memory of hostile encounters which even up to this day have been confined to the margins of knowledge" (83).

[2] See Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558–1641* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), esp. "The Inflation of Honours," 65–128, and passim. See also Stone, "Social Mobility in England, 1500–1700," *Past & Present* 33 (1966): 17–55. For a brief summary of relevant issues focused on social mobility at court into the ruling elite, see my *Ambition and Privilege: The Social Tropes of Elizabethan Courtesy Theory* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1984), 6–18.

[3] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 4.

[4] I cite from the following individual editions: for Shakespeare, the Arden texts: *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. John Russell Brown (London: Methuen, 1959), and *All's Well that Ends Well*, ed. G. K. Hunter (London: Methuen, 1959); for Middleton and Rowley, *The Changeling*, ed. Patricia Thomson (London: Ernest Benn, 1964); and for Webster and Heywood, *Appius and Virginia* in *The Complete Works of John Webster*, vol. 3, ed. F. L. Lucas (New York: Oxford, 1937). Other references to Shakespeare are taken from *The Complete Signet Classic Shakespeare* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972).

[5] A matter of further if obscure import is that the alimentary in Shakespeare seems to be predominantly associated with the masculine, whereas in Middleton and Rowley and in Webster and Heywood it is much more obscurely gendered, though tending toward the female. I reserve treatment of this issue for another occasion.

[6] I owe this reference to Robert P. Shephard's fine dissertation, "Royal Favorites in the Political Discourse of Tudor and Stuart England" (Claremont Graduate School, 1985); the passage is quoted (ch. 7, 45) from his transcription of State Papers, Domestic (London, Public Record Office) 16/27/36.

[7] For the salt proverb, see Morris P. Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1950), S78. See also Sir John Harington, *A New Discourse of a Stale Subject, Called the Metamorphosis of Ajax*, ed. Elizabeth Story Donno (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1962): "the poore sheepe stil for an old grudge, would eate him without salt" (68). Donno observes that "Harrington's usage apparently suggests an even more fierce hatred" than the proverbial base. For Burke's discussion of symmetrical instrumental proverbs, see "Literature as Equipment for Living," in *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (New York: Vintage, 1957), 253–62.

For the social use of the dog-and-vomit trope, see, for instance, *Henry IV, Part Two*, in which the Archbishop berates the commons for vomiting and then desiring Richard II:

So, so, thou common dog, didst thou disgorge
Thy glutton bosom of the royal Richard;
And now thou wouldst eat thy dead vomit up,
And howl'st to find it.

(1.3.97–100)

The proverb originates with Proverbs 26:11 and occurs in Erasmus's *Adagia* ("Canis reversus ad vomitum," in *Collecteana Adagiorum Veterum* [830F], from *Opera Omnia*, vol. 2 [1703]). The social usage may be principally Shakespearean: only one of Tilley's thirteen examples (D455) functions in this way. Compare also D458: "The Dog to his vomit and the swine (sow) to his (her) mire," originally from 2 Peter 2:22.

[8] For a modern specimen, see Anthony Powell, *The Military Philosophers* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1968): " Farebrother will get right up in the arse of anyone he thinks likely to help him on" (48).

[9] Given the character of Buckingham's homosexual relation to James and its presumed role in his rise to power, one might imagine that in Jacobean times this expression referred somehow to anal intercourse, but so far as I have been able to determine, the use of *cock* for penis is of more recent origin. The *OED* notes a first appearance in 1730 (sb 20). An oft-cited apparent exception from Fletcher in *The Custom of the Country* (written before 1628) refers, alas, not to roosters but to the cocking mechanism of a pistol: a Dane, sexually worn out, is "foul i'the touchhole, and recoils again; / The main-spring's weaken'd that holds up his cock; / He lies at the sign of the Sun, to be new-breeched" (*The Works of Beaumont & Fletcher*, ed. Alexander Dyce [London, 1844], 4:3.3.11–13). However, the several associations of rising (especially early—that is, prematurely, inappropriately, as with upstarts, and in the morning, and as with Donne's many familiar erection references), pride (as in being "at the top of the heap"), insemination (as of a brood of hens), fertilization (as with dung), make the sexual reading seem fitting even if not provable.

[10] Ben Jonson, *Volpone*, ed. Alvin B. Kernan (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1962).

[11] George Chapman, *The Gentleman Usher*, ed. John Hazel Smith (Lincoln, Neb.: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1970).

[12] See Harry Berger, Jr., "Marriage and Mercifixion in *The Merchant of Venice*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 32 (1981): 156.

[13] Compare St. Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), book 14, sections 23–24, pp. 585–89.

[14] For more on some of these matters (especially in relation to class, but without much reference to the body), see my "Ideology and Class Conduct in *The Merchant of Venice*," *Renaissance Drama* n.s. 10 (1979): 93–115 For thoughtful remarks about Portia's possible hint, see Berger (note 12).

[15] For a relevant dissonant echo, compare Christopher Marlowe's "infinite riches in a little room" in *The Jew of Malta* (ed. N. W. Bawcutt [Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1978], 1.1.37) with John Donne's "Immensity cloistered in thy dear womb" in *La Corona* 2.14 and 3.1 (*The Complete English Poems*, ed. A. J. Smith [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973], 306–7).

[16] See Brown's note to 1.1.31.

[17] See Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. G. H. McWilliam (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), day 3, tale 9, p. 305; William Painter, *The Palace of Pleasure* (1890; New York: Dover, 1966), tome 1, novel 38, p. 171.

[18] For another reading of *All's Well*, one that also takes the fistula as a master-trope of improper connections, see Ann Lecercle, "Anatomy of a Fistula, Anomaly of a Drama," in *Actes du Colloque: All's Well that Ends Well, Collection Astrea* No. 1 (Université Paul-Valéry—Montpellier III: Centre d'Études et de Recherches Élisa-

bethains, 1985), 105–24. This suggestive essay reached me too late for full response here.

[19] The passage reads as follows:

> Ne feareth he henceforth that foe of his,
> Which with his cruell tuske him deadly cloyd:
> For that wilde Bore, the which him once annoyd,
> She [Venus] firmely hath emprisoned for ay,
> That her sweet loue his malice mote auoyd,
> In a strong rocky Caue, which is they say,
> Hewen vnderneath that Mount, that none him losen may.

Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (London: Longman, 1977) 3.6.48. In typically mysterious Spenserian fashion, the author continues, "There now he liues in euerlasting ioy," confusing pronouns in an opaque way (as probably also with "losen") that goes well beyond my understanding, though perhaps not beyond the concerns of *All's Well.*

[20] For a suggestive discussion of related issues regarding Francis, see Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1988), 40–47.

[21] The relevance of the *Merchant of Venice* passage is double, of course, since the response of Shylock's man to bagpipes is to be unable to contain his urine—which looseness makes him a fit figure of contempt for anal Shylock. Compare the similar passage in Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour* (4.2.19–22) and Gabriele Bernhard Jackson's useful note on the passage in her edition (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1969), 205. For an extended meditation on related matters of the ideologized self-control of women as encoded in the body in *Bartholomew Fair* and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, see Gail Kern Paster, "Leaky Vessels: The Incontinent Women of Jacobean City Comedy," forthcoming in *Renaissance Drama.*

[22] See Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*, ed. J. R. Mulryne (London: Ernest Benn, 1970), 2.5.12; W. H. Auden, "The Joker in the Pack," in *The Dyer's Hand* (New York: Viking, 1968), 246–72.

[23] See Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 157–210; Rubin offers a masterly exposition and critique of the relevant issues of Lévi-Strauss's *Elementary Structures of Kinship* (Boston: Beacon, 1969). For an exceptionally subtle exploration of some implications of this idea for English literature, see Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1985).

We ought perhaps to inquire further into the relation between a conduit model of female identity and the Renaissance notion of women as vessels, as in Paster's (note 21) "leaky vessels," but also in regard to "weaker vessels," a notion that suggests that men might be called vessels too, but are strong enough to conceal the lacuna. In any case, if women are conduits, they are also containers, whose contents must be kept pure, unadulterated. One thinks here too of Lear's hollow daughters, whose hollowness (moral emptiness, but childlessness too, surely) reverbs the greater sound of claims of love.

[24] See *Woodstock: A Moral History*, ed. A. P. Rossiter (London: Chatto & Windus, 1946), 3.2.132 ff. For an introduction to the social articulation of class dress in the Renaissance in royal sumptuary proclamations, see my *Ambition and Privilege*, 155–69.

[25] This recalls Carlo Ginzberg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Six-*

teenth-Century Miller, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982).

[26] For a suggestive treatment of uses of this trope in the Renaissance, with special reference to *Macbeth*, see Gordon Braden, "Senecan Tragedy and the Renaissance," *Illinois Classical Studies* 9 (1984): 277–92.

[27] I owe this suggestion to my colleague David Wallace.

[28] See Livy, *History of Rome*, 3:44–50; Painter (note 17), tome 1, novel 5; *The Romane Historie written by T. Livius of Padua*, trans. Philemon Holland (1600).

[29] See *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*, ed. William Smith (New York: AMS, 1967), 1240.