

Introduction

I live with bread like you, feel want,
 Taste grief, need friends: subjected thus,
 How can you say to me, I am a king?

William Shakespeare, *Richard II* (III.ii.175–7)

Sooner or later, everyone needs to eat. This is the realisation which enables Shakespeare's increasingly impotent King Richard II to acknowledge his own mortality. On one level, Richard's bread constitutes the basis of a more general recognition of his implication within a material situation beyond his control. He has returned from Ireland, faces a superior force of rebels, and is rapidly discovering the inefficacy of a supposedly divinely ordained power. Eating, in this sense, is an index of the limits of authority. For all the power of kings and courtiers, they cannot escape the material restraints of the flesh: of which none is more significant than the need to consume food. Eating emerges as a fundamental element common to all humanity. It is an indicator of bodily equality which gives the lie to 'respect, / Tradition, form and ceremonious duty' (III.ii.172–3). The need for food, like the approach of death, is inescapable. Food is also, as many critics have noted, the basis of conviviality, and it is therefore unsurprising that, for Richard, to live by bread and to need friends are allied concepts. Indeed, bread was a fundamental constituent of that central ritual of Christian conviviality, the Eucharist. Richard consequently appears to be elevated to a Christlike status at the very moment that he acknowledges his own humanity. Yet the bread which Richard invokes here is an ambiguous property. For it was also, as Diane Purkiss has noted, 'the food of the desperate': a foodstuff associated with the poor and a traditional gift bequeathed to the needy (Purkiss, 2010, p. 13). Richard's speech has the potential to invoke a paradox. Of all drives, hunger and appetite are perhaps the most universal. But they are also profoundly determined by social and economic forces. What we eat, how we eat and whether we can eat have always been dependent on our position within

society. The historical Richard's court was a space of consumption and excess, producing *The Forme of Cury* (c. 1390), the first cookbook written in the English language. His invocation of a fundamental kinship with his subjects is arguably disingenuous. He may well require food, but at this point in the play, he has never gone without it. Others in his realm are not so lucky. And while a modern audience may have little awareness of this fact, few amongst the spectators in early modern London would have shared this complacency. Then, as now, everybody needed to eat, yet many starved.

This fundamental opposition constitutes the driving force behind this book. It is also, I will argue, one of the most significant material and ideological oppositions of the early modern period, and one which acquired a particular resonance in the plays and playhouses of early modern London. The drama of the period manifests an obsession with those who eat and those who do not. Hunger and appetite recur as a means of characterisation, with servants, soldiers, courtiers and misers all repeatedly defined through their relation to food. The two drives are deployed as a comment on sexual desire, with culinary images pervading the speeches of both elite lovers and lower-class prostitutes. They are integral to the representation of empire, hospitality and revolt. Attention to the opposition and interrelation of these drives is required in the first instance because it provides a perspective on an abiding concern of the early modern period. But it also furnishes a means to move forward with the culinary emphasis which has recently emerged in critical studies of the literature of the Renaissance.¹ It enables an escape from the 'soup-pot of nostalgia' which, as the historian Ken Albala has noted, occasionally defines critical interest in food and food-ways, in favour of an approach which stresses the forces of polarisation and expansion which defined early modern society (Albala, 2003, p. xv). Hitherto, the sheer force of want has remained remarkably peripheral to critical analyses of food.² The representation of those who lack has been largely confined to those who engage in armed

¹ Early work on the history and literary representation of food in the early modern period includes Albala (2002), Appelbaum (2006) and Fitzpatrick (2007). More recent work includes Goldstein (2013) and Goldstein and Tigner (2016). There have also been significant special issues of the *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* (2009), *Early Modern Studies Journal* (2013) and *Shakespeare Studies* (2014) which explore the role of food in Shakespeare and related authors. Although all these works are fundamentally concerned with the relationship between food and issues of gender, class and nation, the critical trajectory has been from an emphasis upon individual food choice, towards an emphasis on food 'from the point of view of community' (Goldstein, 2013, p. 3).

² Significant exceptions to this tendency include Burnett (1995); Gutierrez (2003); Angel-Perez and Poulain (2008); Knowles (2009); and Mukherjee (2015).

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resistance. In criticism, as in much of society today, hunger is visible only when accompanied by violence. But the playwrights and audiences of early modern London did not have this element of distance. There were few amongst them that could say, definitively, that they would never experience unsatiated hunger. And this basic material fact lends a pronounced significance to the manner in which the need and desire for food were represented.

In order to scrutinise these oppositions and interrelations, this book adopts a bifocal approach, considering the representation of both hunger and appetite. The relationship between these concepts is a matter of some complexity, as the two are closely related, both on and off the stage. For this reason, it is productive to draw on Stephen Mennell's research charting the 'tangled connections' between them (Mennell, 1985, p. 20). Hunger is a physiological state, defined by Mennell as 'a body drive which recurs in all human beings in a regular cycle' (Mennell, 1985, p. 20). But on the early modern stage, it is visible primarily in the context of lack, as a hunger which cannot be satisfied. I will therefore supplement Mennell's understanding of the hunger drive with the *OED*'s definition of hunger as 'The uneasy or painful sensation caused by want of food' and 'the exhausted condition caused by want of food' (*OED*, 'hunger', def. 1a). Appetite, by contrast, is merely a 'craving for food', with broader associations of 'desire, inclination, disposition' as well as a 'Capacity for food, feeling as regards food; relish' (*OED*, 'appetite', def. 4a, 1a, 5). As Mennell has argued, it is driven by the 'appetat', by which is meant 'a *psychological*, not simply physiological, control mechanism regulating food intake' (Mennell, 1985, p. 21). Although it may indeed be stimulated by hunger, it is also a product of 'psychological processes in which social pressures can play a considerable part' (Mennell, 1985, p. 21). It is therefore necessary to consider the specific social and environmental phenomena which determine these processes in early modern England, exploring factors as diverse as the pattern of good and bad harvests, the period's relations of production, the level of technological advancement and the country's imperial capabilities. Whereas hunger implies necessity, appetite is simply the desire for food. But the relationship between them is always historically determined.

This book will argue that the act of representing these drives in the early modern English theatres was inherently political. More precisely, it will show that when hunger and appetite were placed on stage, the resulting performances were not merely determined by socio-economic forces, but also supplied a means of reflecting on them. In order to understand this

relationship, it is necessary to draw on the resources of Marxism. Existing critical analyses of food have elicited a wide range of evidence for the extent to which taste and appetite are implicated within the construction of identities. Issues of class, gender, race and nation determined what foods were accessed by particular individuals, and the representation of food-stuffs was consequently integral to the manner in which these groups were perceived. Yet while this is undoubtedly true, the resulting research tends to mask what in practice constitutes a relatively static conception of society. Great care has been taken to explore how the patterns and perceptions of consumption associated with distinct groups changed in the period. But the dominant critical distrust of grand narratives has prompted a tendency to focus on the particular at the expense of the totality. This constitutes a problem of especial significance for an understanding of hunger and appetite, because their representation is intimately related to social change. What and how specific groups ate cannot be detached from more general changes in the production and distribution of food. It is not enough, for instance, to consider shifts in the representational strategies at work in the depiction of the hungry poor. Rather, it is necessary to acknowledge that the society in which the poor existed was itself fundamentally dynamic and that their role within it was therefore implicated in a more general process of change. In order to understand the representation of hunger and appetite, it is necessary to adopt a dialectical approach which relates the parts to the whole, situating these changing identities within a society conceived as a complex and contested totality.

Indeed, recognition of this dynamism is essential for a study of hunger and appetite, because the two drives repeatedly operate within contemporary discourse as a means of understanding emergent forms of social organisation. They provide a way of conceptualising the changes affecting early modern society, while allowing the depiction of imaginary solutions to the problems which those changes produced. Moreover, because hunger and appetite almost invariably operate as drives associated with particular groups or individuals, they also tend to focus attention on the agency of specific classes. In this manner, consideration of these twin concepts provides a mechanism to avoid reification of the basic transition from feudalism to capitalism. Attention to the representation of hunger and appetite reveals the frequency with which contemporary texts associate the destructive impulses of an emergent capitalist system with specific class forces in early modern society. Concern with excess, with want and with self-inflicted hunger recurs in the theatre, but the precise inflection which is placed on these issues varies enormously. A pervasive fear of uncontrolled

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appetite dominates the stage. But it is an appetite which can be ascribed to the poor, to the aspirant middle classes and the aristocratic elite in more or less equal measures. As a result, these texts can be productively interpreted as a series of hegemonic acts, whereby ‘the development and expansion of [one] particular group are conceived of, and presented, as being the motor force of a universal expansion’ (Gramsci, 1971, p. 181). They reflect upon the fundamental class struggle of early modern society, but they also constitute acts of intervention in that struggle, comprising a key means by which contemporaries conceptualised it, ‘for the purpose of *fighting it out*’ (Mészáros, 1989, p. 11).

The parameters of this ideological conflict can only be understood by grounding analysis of hunger and appetite in the material and discursive factors which defined their representation in the Renaissance theatre. Chapter 1 therefore begins by considering the factors which defined the lived experience of hunger and appetite in early modern England, situating these issues in the context of a Marxist understanding of the transition from feudalism to capitalism. The theatrical representation of hunger constitutes a means of reflecting on fundamental changes in the mode of production which defined the period’s class struggles. The Marxist approach enables understanding of hunger as not simply an unfortunate side effect of the period’s sweeping social changes, but as the driving force behind them. Yet the capacity of hunger and appetite to conceptualise these changes was a product not simply of material change itself, but also of the complex discursive connotations which those drives had accrued. For this reason, it is necessary to engage with both medical and religious texts, in order to define the precise nature of early modern attitudes to hunger and appetite. Attention to these broader ideological frameworks reveals the utility of these drives in conceptualising socio-economic change. Finally, the chapter concludes by considering the practical and theoretical implications of staging hunger and appetite on the Renaissance stage. It focusses on the theatres as places devoted to the sale of both plays and food, and considers the complex and multifaceted relationships of the period’s various audiences with the lived experience of hunger and appetite. If representation of these drives is situated in the context of the material base, ideological structures and specific factors which determined the staging of contemporary plays, it becomes possible to demonstrate their vital importance as a mechanism for the theatre to engage with the central political issues of the period.

Chapter 2 explores the stereotype of the hungry servant. This character type appears in plays of a wide range of genres, throughout the early

modern theatre. It provides a means of considering the relationship of hunger and appetite to dramatic form and highlights the ambiguity of the dividing line between hunger and appetite on the Renaissance stage. It is of fundamental importance for understanding the complexity of audience response to the representation of these drives. The chapter begins by considering John Lyly's *Campaspe* (1584), a text which embodies many of the broader characteristics of the hungry servant type. Here, the representation of hungry servants serves to mystify the actual conditions of the average servant's existence, representing hunger resulting from deprivation as an inalienable characteristic of the servants and figuring that hunger as an insatiable appetite. Yet once detached from the material conditions of hunger, the servant's appetite increasingly acquires metaphorical connotations which ensure that it can function as a means of conceptualising broader drives of profit and acquisition within early modern society. The second section will therefore scrutinise a range of plays, in which the servant's appetite is deployed to explore features of England's nascent capitalist system. Lastly, the chapter will consider the relationship of the hungry servant type to gender. Although female servants are rarely driven by appetite to the same degree as their male counterparts, the figure of the hungry servant constitutes a significant trope through which the theatre explored the complex relationships between husbands, wives and their servants. The final section will consider these issues through analysis of Massinger's *The Picture*, in which the character Sophia deploys hunger as a means to chastise not only her servant, but also her husband.

In the depiction of the domestic servant, appetite is predominantly a constant, in a manner which figures it as a characteristic of specific classes. But contemporary texts could also portray hunger and appetite as temporal states, subject to change. This is particularly apparent in the representation of food gifts. Chapter 3 therefore considers the representation of the food gift in plays such as William Shakespeare and George Wilkins's *Pericles* (1607), Shakespeare and Middleton's *Timon of Athens* (1607) and Massinger's *The Unnatural Combat* (c. 1626). It argues that attention to hunger enables recognition of the role played by use value in gift exchange, and places this in the context of the declining significance of traditions of hospitality in the period. It considers the recurrence of figures such as the discharged soldier, and suggests that the soldier's hunger constitutes a key means by which contemporary texts commented on the policies of pacifism carried out by monarchs such as James I. It emphasises the nostalgic dimension to representations of hospitality, but also argues that this nostalgia frequently marks the system itself as fundamentally

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untenable. It demonstrates that towards the end of the period it is possible to discern narratives of restraint and moderation which embody emergent bourgeois ideologies. Of especial interest is the extent to which these plays manifest anxiety not simply at the scarcity and want which was produced by the nascent capitalist mode of production, but also at the problems of plenty and excess.

Chapter 4 considers how the early modern theatre deploys the elision of appetite and desire. This can be related to a more general tendency, evident in a wide range of periods and cultures, to use food as a surrogate for sexual activity. Yet this chapter will argue that the early modern theatre is distinct in two significant ways. Firstly, contemporary medical theory placed a strong emphasis on the literal, rather than merely metaphorical, nature of the connections between sexual and culinary consumption. Secondly, appetite acquires a particular utility as a means of conceptualising desire at a time when theological debate increasingly acknowledged the legitimacy of moderate, but not of excessive, sexual intercourse. Above all, the elision of the two drives serves to lend a gustatory logic to the theatre's depiction of excessive desire, in a manner which lends it a profound political significance. The chapter will begin by exploring the extent to which this serves to associate desire with the excessive appetites unleashed by material excess and tyranny. But it will also emphasise the vulnerability which the culinary logic instils in representations of desire. The second section will consider the extent to which the simple subject–object relationship of consumption generates a profound ambiguity regarding who, precisely, is being consumed in the context of a sexual relationship. It will focus on Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton's *The Bloody Banquet* (c. 1609). The third section, meanwhile, will emphasise the extent to which the imagery of appetite foregrounds the potentially debilitating consequences of sexual desire, at a time in which humoral theory asserted a model of the body as porous, and potentially vulnerable.

Chapter 5 develops a number of these concerns, through attention to the representation of female food refusal in the period. It argues that although the refusal of food is not confined solely to women, it resonates in the early modern theatre as a gendered mode of resistance. In order to explore these issues, it begins by considering the contemporary phenomenon of 'miraculous maid' pamphlets, which recounted supposedly factual accounts of prodigious acts of religiously motivated food refusal. It then turns to Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (1603) and George Chapman's *The Widow's Tears* (1604). It places these plays in the context of changes to religious practice, contemporary understandings of the female

body, and the space of the household. It argues that in the context of female food refusal, hunger has the capacity to function as a form of parodic obedience to the norms of contemporary gender ideology. By carrying dictates of privacy and closure to a point of often terminal excess, these texts query or satirise the double standard within early modern English society. While Heywood's text approaches this dynamic in tragic mode, and Chapman's in an overtly comic fashion, in both plays the literal process of embodiment inherent in the dramatisation of food refusal threatens to carry prevailing gender norms to the point of collapse.

In Chapter 6, I turn to the depiction of hunger, appetite and imperialism. Food comprised an integral component of colonial discourse in the period, and the representation of hunger and appetite therefore provided a significant means by which the theatres could legitimise or critique England's overseas expansion. The chapter focusses on Fletcher's *Bonduca* (c. 1613) and Fletcher and Massinger's *The Sea Voyage* (1622), two plays in which hunger and appetite occupy positions of particular significance as a means of conceiving the problems and advantages of colonial settlement. Through an emphasis of the interrelation of hunger, appetite and empire, it becomes possible to acknowledge the role played by imperial expansion in the elimination of hunger in England, while simultaneously figuring that expansion as a product, rather than a cause, of the country's wider social changes. The chapter focusses on the use of hunger and appetite as a means to critique or endorse emergent bourgeois ideologies of imperialist expansion, with emphasis on how colonial adventures are constructed as both a solution to the problem of hunger and the object of new and occasionally unnatural appetites. It considers the cultural significance of cannibalism as an act which at this time is associated not only with subaltern native populations, but also with the expansive appetites of European colonisers, in a manner which can be deployed to express anxiety at the potential consequences of imperial expansion.

Chapter 7 considers the interrelation of hunger, appetite and armed resistance to the state. It focusses on texts such as Shakespeare and Marlowe's *2 Henry VI* (1590), the anonymous *Life and Death of Jack Straw* (1594) and Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* (1608), in which hunger and appetite emerge as grounds for rebellion.³ It explores how the initial causes of revolt are represented in these plays, stressing the interrelation of the hunger of the poor with the appetites of the rich. But it also emphasises the

³ For recent debates on the authorship of *2 Henry VI*, see Craig (2009), Vickers (2011) and Segarra, Eisen, Egan and Ribeiro (2016).

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degree to which these onstage revolts are represented as processes, which move from depictions of an initial grievance, to representation of the appetites which can be unleashed by the act of rebellion. Lastly, it stresses the utopian possibilities of presenting these rebel appetites onstage, arguing that discernible in the most radical of these texts is a proto-communist emphasis on the potential creation of a society in which all are equal, in which the excesses of the rich are moderated so that all may have enough. The depiction of hunger, appetite and revolt emerges as the subject of a pronounced interpretative instability, rooted in the legitimization of the contemporary status quo, but permeated, nevertheless, by insurrectionary possibilities.

This range of topics and texts is, of necessity, partial. Attention to the representation of hunger and appetite in the early modern theatres reveals, almost immediately, a vast surplus of material. In adopting the thematic approach, I aim to highlight the primary trends within this corpus, and to explore the fundamental dynamics at work within the representation of these drives. The approach, of course, raises the issue of teleology. The conventional critique of the Marxist analysis is that it enacts an anachronistic model of history, uninterested in the motivations of the original participants. Yet to argue that the representation of hunger and appetite in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is intertwined with social forces which would cause a civil war and revolution a few decades later, is not to suggest that the revolution was inevitable. On the contrary, to disregard these underlying causes is to reduce the study of history and literature to little more than a descriptive account of what happens, with scant ability to outline alternative possibilities. To ignore the fact that England descended into conflict is to risk attributing an excess of permanence to structures and hierarchies which at many historical moments in the period were palpably unstable. The depiction of hunger and appetite provided a means for the writers of early modern England to conceive of widespread and threatening social changes which they had limited means of understanding, but which for the modern critic can be identified as constituting the emergence of capitalism. The complex ramifications of these changes would eventually drive England into civil war and revolution. But in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, they found focussed expression primarily in the literature of the period, and rarely more so than in the representation of hunger and appetite.