

The Sauce to Meat Is Ceremony:

Cannibalism and Hospitality Serve as The Morality Police in Hannibal and The Scottish Play

The world is made up of two types of people; foodies, and those that don't care much what they eat. That being said, both types will usually enjoy sharing that food, bland or adventurous as it may be. The act of eating together comes with several steps. In 2024, it would probably include ordering uber eats, getting out some dishes/forks/glasses, putting on a movie/tv show, and greeting your friend/s at the door.

Going back several hundred years to the 16th and 17th centuries, things were rather different. Dinner parties, or feasts/banquets, were rarely enjoyed by ordinary people. This was considered an important event, one that pulled out all the stops, because the guests would be actual royalty and other high-ranking officials.

And yet – to every norm there are exceptions. In the 2010's Baltimore, MD, resides a (fictional but no less terrifying) brilliant Doctor of psychiatry. Banquets are his favorite thing. The kinds of banquets Shakespeare would attempt to emulate in his plays. Peacock feathers, six courses, different culinary wizardry/technology tools, recipes cultivated for decades, tablecloths made of silk and satin, fine China, and the rarest meat of them all – human flesh.

Shakespeare is well known for his massive feasts in his plays, less so for cannibalism, though his play Titus Andronicus has an infamous human-eating feast (two young men ground up into a pie as revenge for rape and amputation). Despite not explicitly writing about cannibalism, the Bard uses the metaphor for both human and animal cannibalism in many of his plays (Green, 2020).

What connects Hannibal and Shakespeare beyond their predilection for horror and home cooking, is that in both, cannibalism is looked upon as an act against nature. Cannibalism breaks the facade of normative behavior, and makes us look like unnatural beasts. It's also the perfect "scare" from a visceral standpoint. Nothing is more jarring than someone eating - for instance - a human foot, rather than an unidentified piece of meat.

When we are introduced, at first, to Macbeth and his Lady, we start with the three witches – not a great sign. They also use the famous line *"Fair is foul, and foul is fair"*(1.1.13), which does not bode well for the proceedings of this tale. It's interesting that the food

connotations start there. As a word, “foul” is often used to describe the smell of food going bad. It also describes smells of things that are not fresh, but have been “standing” for a long time. In addition, the witches deal with the preparation of “food” (AKA, organs in a cauldron).

In act 1.3 they are talking about killing swine (pigs) to eat them, and one of the sisters rejoices in finding a human thumb. As a sidenote, Hannibal’s victims are often referred to by his FBI buddy Will Graham as pigs, exclusively.

Act 4.1 is where the sisters and Hecate really shine, as they stir the magic cauldron and chant “*Double, double, toil and trouble*”(4.1.10). While chanting, they add to the potion: poisoned entrails, a toad with venom, a snake, a newt’s eye, a frog’s toe, a bat’s fur, multiple tongues, a lizard’s leg, an owl’s wing, a dragon’s scale, a wolf’s tooth, a shark’s gullet and stomach, a blaspheming Jew’s liver, a goat’s gallbladder, a Turk’s nose, a Tartar’s lips, and a finger of a “*birth strangled babe.*” (4.1.4-30) Yikes. And also – cannibalism!

In the very first episode of *Hannibal* (2013-2015), we as viewers must wait over 20 minutes to meet the infamous cannibal (made famous by the novels, and the Oscar winning film *The Silence of the Lambs* from 1991). We follow his soon-to-become friend, FBI special agent Will Graham who is trying to find a serial killer. The first breakthrough in the case comes when the FBI team discovers that the organs from the body – only some of them – were taken. When trying to understand, Will Graham knows why the entire liver was removed:

“*He’s eating them,*” he says. (*Hannibal*, episode 1 season 1).

The very next scene finally reveals Dr. Lecter. This is the description from the original pilot script, written by the show’s creator on February 5, 2012 – Bryan Fuller.

*INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT To the strains of Goldberg Variations by Bach, CAMERA CRAWLS across a well-appointed dining room table with place settings for one serving a beautifully prepared and presented liver. As fork and knife respectfully cut meat... ...CAMERA REVEALS a handsome, professorial man in his 40s. Erudite and as well appointed as his dining room. He cuts a piece of liver, skewering it with his fork before applying a balance of garnishes with his knife. He takes a bite. Meet HANNIBAL LECTER. CUT TO BLACK.*

And so, after meeting Will and his work, several gruesome scenes follow of murder and bodies, and all manner of horrific things. And yet, when viewing this little scene,

showcasing the liver, a chill runs down our spine as we realize that this fine, cultured gentleman is Hannibal the cannibal.

In Macbeth, Shakespeare asks us to meditate on the unnatural, and to repeatedly connect it with eating and drinking. In the moments that all things natural are changing and a King is killed, thus going against natural law to gain power – nature goes bananas. In this key scene, after his murder, we get a showcase of nature in it's most unnatural. We also get one short cannibalism line.

After Duncan's death, Ross and the Old Man are discussing shockingly unnatural events, including inexplicable darkness, and impossibly wrong behavior by animals:

*OLD MAN 'Tis unnatural,  
Even like the deed that's done. On Tuesday last  
A falcon, tow'ring in her pride of place,  
Was by a mousing owl hawked at and killed.*

*ROSS*

*And **Duncan's horses** (a thing most strange and  
certain),  
Beauteous and swift, the minions of their race,  
Turned wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out,  
Contending 'gainst obedience, as they would  
Make war with mankind.*

*OLD MAN 'Tis **said they eat each  
other.***

*ROSS*

*They did so, to th' amazement of mine eyes  
That looked upon 't."*

(2.4.17)

“Translated” loosely, the old man knows about the murder of the King. But there's more! Last Tuesday, he saw a falcon going for a kill by a mousing owl (an owl hunting mice) – which suddenly went after the falcon and killed it in mid-air! How can this be, as owls can't fly as high as hawks, and they certainly don't hunt them, let alone kill them. But Ross is upping the ante. He says he saw the King's horses going crazy and busting out of their stables, which is inconceivable. But the old man trumps this too! Not only did they escape, he says, but he heard that they **ate** each other! Ross, sadly, confirms this. Not only did they eat each other, he saw it with his own eyes.

Macbeth is not only about morality and madness; it is also about the feast serving as a showcase for a “play within a play” that is created by twisting ethics of hospitality. This happens often in Macbeth. Early in the play, Duncan enunciates Macbeths’ loyalty and political value, explicitly in terms of food, describing how Macbeth makes him feel:

*“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.”*

(1.4.54-58)

Macbeth is said to be “full”, which means wholesome, loyal, true. But not only that, he “feeds” Duncan, meaning he creates an air of safety, security, and peace. He recognizes the banquet for what it used to be in those time – a grand event that honored the main guest, and displayed the love that the giver of the feast has for that guest. He also says that Macbeth went ahead of them to make preparations. He knows this because in a previous scene, the King is impressed that a servant calls Macbeth a “harbinger”. This is a word given to the top-tier servants who are usually in charge of putting together these banquets. The King is in awe that Macbeth, an important warrior and man in his own right – has taken on that role himself, thus displaying an even greater care for the King. We see here how loyalty is entwined with feeding and serving food, and status is associated with being fed and hosted (Heffernan, 2014).

When Duncan, the soon-to-be-murdered King, receives Macbeth, Macbeth replies to the King’s kind words looking forward to the feast, by saying that:

*“The service and the loyalty I owe  
In doing it pays itself.”*

(1.4.22–27)

That “service” is also specifically table service, and although we don’t see the feast itself, the echoing of serving food and murder emerges in lines between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. When Macbeth says that *“as his host, who should against his murderer shut the door, not bear the knife myself”* (1.7.14-16) we understand that he should “bear the knife” to cut up food, just not to cut up Duncan.

But Macbeth gets cold feet, and in the middle of the feast, leaves and goes to his room to make a very nervous – even terrified soliloquy. But he has no time to indulge in such silly things as not wanting to commit regicide. The first thing Lady Macbeth says when finding her husband is: *“He has almost supped. Why have you left the chamber?”* (1.7.30-31). She is criticizing Macbeth’s behavior as a dinner host, while also suggesting he is backing out of the murder plan. Kottman refers to this as *“perverse hosting”* by which *“Each time that Lady Macbeth and Macbeth plot a murder, they simultaneously plan the evening’s hospitality.”* (Kottman, 1996, 98)

The King spends the time of the feast not only to assert his role as ruler, but also to assert his role as the only one able give new “identities” to his guests - new titles, gifts, and the like. This is his way to be generous and be considered a King that is not just fair/just, but appreciative of his most loyal friends, such as his son Malcolm, who gets the new title of Prince of Cumberland (1.4.35-42), and everyone else who has been lucky enough to be invited.

Even though he is a guest in Macbeth’s home, he is still the master. This makes his murder by Macbeth’s hands that much more jarring and unbelievable. A true betrayal. Lady Macbeth reminds her husband that he must blend hospitality with murderousness.

*“He that’s coming  
Must be provided for. And you shall put  
This night’s great business into my dispatch...”*  
(1.5.63–66)

The phrases *“must be provided for”* and *“this night’s great business”* can mean either the happy dinner party or a murder; and in this case both.

She is coaching Macbeth on this play within a play of hospitality. How to act in order to seem like the perfect host and subject. Unfortunately, the irony is comical. It is Duncan who is about to be devoured and spit out like waste. These feasts were supposed to show honor and appreciation while feeding and nourishing (Brzozowska, 2012).

If hosts mistreat their guests, as illustrated in several morals in mythology, folklore, and religious canons, they in turn might be mistreated. The Macbeths’ murder of King Duncan is undoubtedly a brutal violation of the ethics of hospitality. But what makes their sin

catastrophic, as Kottman argues, “. . . *is not only that the sovereign has been assassinated, but that the guest/host has been killed.*” (Kottman, 1996, 97).

By using the feast – a symbol of comradeship, friendship, trust, even glory – and making it about murder, Macbeth has removed himself from the table of humanity, so to speak. A feast will never again be a feast for him (Booth, 1951).

In her discussion of *Titus Andronicus*, Louise Noble argues that with Shakespeare’s “*exposure of the artificial, hypocritical nature of civility,*” he “*reveals the instability of such constructed identities*” making the distinction between Romans and Barbarians. Similarly, in *Macbeth*, Shakespeare is making fun of this “civilized” ritual by using the language of killing and feasting, and placing the murder immediately after the feast.

Shakespeare, in *Macbeth*, is showing his then audience a true mirroring of the times: killing a King is, in many ways, is just as bad as being a bad host (Greenblatt et al, 2016).

Hannibal would agree with that statement, most likely. When he kills (and eats) someone, it is most notably because they are either rude, uncultured, or mean spirited. He kills one of his younger female victims because she calls her mom a “bitch.” He kills another – a doctor - for complaining about Dr. Lecter playing classical music. To him, if you do not appreciate the refined ways in which Hannibal lives, eats, and hosts, then you better have a one-way ticket out of town.

The show itself uses the food metaphor even in the title names for the episodes, such as ‘Amuse-Bouche’, ‘Entrée’, ‘Trou Normand’, ‘Buffet Froid’, ‘Relevés’ and ‘Savoureux,’ thirteen names in total of French courses. The show also uses food metaphorically with words that are repeated often, such as devour, consume, “don’t have the stomach for”, “cocktail of personality”, “chew the fat”, “one piece at a time”, “Kaiseki” (A Japanese art form that honors the taste and aesthetic of what we eat), and “short shelf life.”

For Hannibal, killing people for food is just like our experience of ordering online or going to the grocery store. We compare, sniff, smell, hold, and then select. But in most current media forms, the making of the products we buy, like sausages or burgers – is not shown. In the tv show, we get a plethora of scenes that admire Hannibal’s butcher-level skill set with hearts, lungs, creating sausage from grounded human spleen, and even mimicking fish and veggies for guests who are vegetarians (Fuchs, 2015).

When the head of the FBI – Jack Crawford – comes to dinner at Hannibal’s, which happens frequently in the show, he always asks what he is about to eat. In episode *OEuf*, of the first season:

*JACK: What am I about to put in my mouth?*

*HANNIBAL: Rabbit.*

*JACK: He should’ve hopped faster.*

*(Hannibal, episode 4, season 1).*

Both men start laughing, as a fast cut accompanied by a screeching sound suddenly relocates the action to a forest setting, where a man is running for his life and stumbles, followed by another fast cut to Hannibal’s kitchen, where Lecter is flambéing meat (Fuchs, 2015).

To the tune of Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony*, Lecter unpacks a human leg, thus finally confirming that the structure of intercutting dead bodies with Hannibal in his kitchen or dining room, indeed, implicates him in the murders in question. The serial-killing psychiatrist calmly saws off the foot and then removes the knee, as he engages in the process of chopping, marinating, and otherwise readying food to be cooked (Long, 2000).

Hannibal’s pattern of consumption displays enough wealth and aesthetic discernment to grant him access to a high social status and degree of prestige, ultimately enabling him to achieve reputability and the ability to act with impunity. His kitchen, along with his duties as host, act as his performance space and reflects his orderly, highly visceral taste. It is a chef’s kitchen that conceals its transgressive activities. Several scholars have pointed out that more than half of the classical music played in the show involves Hannibal preparing, serving or enjoying food (Piñeiro-Otero, 2016).

All these reputable tools, his doctor status, his reputation (which he himself is all he has when asked about – later in the show – about losing Will as a friend), the way he performs, make him – and us believe that his killings are different than any other serial killer. He’s a different cannibal, too. He is not engaging in a garish ritual, nude in a forest, covered in blood. He wears a see-through plastic suit on top of his actual 3-piece suits when he kills.

This showcases one main difference between the Macbeth/food relationship and the Hannibal/food relationship – taste. Tasting of the food, of course, but more to the point,

Hannibal oozes and is defined by his tastes. His home, his rare friendships, rare lovers, rare empathetic choices. Taste governs him (Schwegler-Castañer, 2018).

Hannibal, occasionally, will also commit cannibalism and cruelty out of vengeance, as he does with Gideon, who pretended to be the *Chesapeake Ripper* and took credit for Lecter's crimes. He could kill him, but instead makes many, many meals of his limbs and body parts – which Gideon must then eat. Consume himself (Ziomek, 2018).

*HANNIBAL: Your legs are no good to you anymore. (...) This is a far more practical use for those limbs. (...) You were determined to know the Chesapeake Ripper, Dr. Gideon. Now is your opportunity.*

*GIDEON: You intend me to be my own last supper?*

*HANNIBAL: Yes.*

*GIDEON: How does one politely refuse a dish in circumstances such as these?*

*HANNIBAL: One doesn't. The tragedy is not to die, Abel, but to be wasted.*

*(Hannibal, episode 6, season 2)*

While eating/cannibalism have always been a metaphor for consumption of all kinds, the show also tackles creation and creativity as part of the consuming experience. While Lecter's guests consume his creations, it's not just the human-grade food, it's also the choice of plate, tablecloth, flowers, wine, and music. Much like the guests coming to Macbeth's feasts, they have no idea what awaits them.

The second banquet in Macbeth brings just as much horror, but of a different kind. Macbeth is ready to perform, finally, his character of "host." But after raising his glass, Banquo's murderers enter:

*"Be large in mirth. Anon we'll drink a measure  
The table round. [He approaches the Murderer.] There's  
blood upon thy face."*

*(3.4.12-14)*

He is, once again, stopped from hosting, and blood enters the room. He then says:

*"But now I am cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in  
To saucy doubts and fears." (26-27)*

Once more food/sauce is connected to blood, death, sin, murder, and fear. Lady Macbeth does not help matters when she attempts her role of "supportive wife":



*“The feast is sold  
That is not often vouched, 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.”(37-41)*

She tells Macbeth, as she did in the first feast, that he is not entertaining his guests, and if he doesn't start, they'll feel like they're “paying” for their meal. She uses the words/terms *“the feast is sold”* (37) to convey that a king must be known for his fabulous meals, not just in general but specifically for their generosity and their extravagance. She mentions *“To feed were best at home”* (3.4.39) to make clear the distinction between a feast, in which food and drink are metaphors for power, loyalty, love, and camaraderie, a nourishing of the souls – and food that is eaten alone, which is a simple meal to feed the body that no one else is privy too, no showmanship is needed. Lastly, she reminds him that *“the sauce to meat is ceremony”* (3.4.40), so he does not forget his role, now that he will be King. He must make the banquets “saucy” (for what is meat without its sauce?), so to speak - delightful, fun, a true treat that his people will be excited to attend.

But just as he goes to toast once more – Banquo's ghost appears. He even goes to Macbeth's chair (the King's chair that Duncan had sat on), and sits in it. Macbeth then says *“the table's full”* (55). He shouts at the ghost only he can see, believing Banquo is here for a confession, which he will not give. Lady Macbeth, clearly mortified, tells the guests to *“feed and regard him not”* (69). He then holds up his cup to toast for what seems like the 100th time, and says *“give me some wine. Fill full.”* (107) And then the ghost enters the room again. Not only is Macbeth thirsty, but his empty cup is a metaphor for the hole in his heart that was placed there by both murders. The first of his King, whom he loved. The second of his closest friend Banquo, who he also loved. He does his best to shake it off, but ends up yelling at the ghost, everyone leaves, and he and his wife remain alone, as the banquet – meant to honor him and those that served him – as he did once King Duncan - is smashed to bits. No one gets the nourishment they were begging for (Puhvel, 1993).

This is a moment of no return, in the play. One that proves Macbeth sees reality differently from his wife. He does not see Banquo due to guilt – he is now a part of the dead, in

his own way. Like a ghost stuck between life and death, or death and heaven/hell, Macbeth can no longer perform the reality that Lady Macbeth forces herself to believe is real. To her, they just need to get through this banquet. But Macbeth knows better. There is no going back. Banquo sits on his throne, which makes as much sense as Macbeth sitting on it (Dyson, 1963). The ghost brings chaos with him, not only ruining the hospitality/banquet, but chaos in Macbeth's head. Ironically, the last words of his guests leaving are: *"...better health attend his Majesty!"* (148). Karma is a bitch.

Knowing what Macbeth and his Lady have done to their royal guest in act 1, we know just what they intend—or at least what he intends—when they grandly invite Banquo as *"chief guest"* to their *"solemn supper"* and declare that his absence would leave *"a gap in our great feast"* (3.1.11–13). As Kottman says, *"The violence perpetrated by Macbeth and Lady Macbeth is portrayed in Shakespeare's language as a kind of perverse hosting. Each time that Lady Macbeth and Macbeth plot a murder, they simultaneously plan the evening's hospitality. They twice withdraw together under the pretense of preparing the evening's entertainment."* (Kottman, 1996, 98)

The final element that tethers our two heroes together is the thirst for power and social status. Lady Macbeth uses her tyranny for power and status as Macbeth follows her lead and becomes obsessed/haunted. Lecter kills to feel a power just as enthralling, feeding people human flesh without their knowing. Lecter is also wildly successful at manipulation tactics: During the conversation with Dr. Chilton, Lecter says: *"if force is used, the subject will only surrender temporarily. Once the patient is exposed, the method of manipulation becomes much less effective (...). The subject mustn't be aware of any influence"* (Hannibal, episode 11, season 1) (Ziomek, 2018).

This conversation occurs during the time that Lecter is convincing Will Graham that instead of encephalitis – he is mentally ill. Using different techniques, Hannibal makes his argument whether Will is aware or not. Just like Lady Macbeth works her way into Macbeth's brain, with and without his knowledge, and causes his demise and descent to a version of hell on earth, so does Hannibal to Will, who – during his illness – is made to believe with the "evidence" that Hannibal orchestrates, that HE is a serial killer. And then he ends up at a mental institution, standing on trial. But when they discover there that he's severely physically

ill, and he recovers, so do his memories of Dr. Lecter's manipulations, both physical (shoving an ear of one of the victims down Will's throat to make it appear he had killed and eaten her) and psychological.

In one of the show's crucial episodes, episode 8 of season 2 called *Su-zakana* (A vinegared appetizer that is used to clean the palate), Will decides to turn the tables. He puts on the show of a lifetime, weeping to Lecter begging for help, asking for his friendship back, and to resume his therapy, but knowing he can't due to his upcoming conviction. Hannibal, missing Will, decides to combat the trial that is going badly, with "new" pieces of evidence (body parts, skin, bone) of the victims that were considered to be Will's - found somewhere not relating to Will at all. Just like that, he gets Will acquitted.

The end of that episode? Will, Hannibal, and Jack are sitting at Hannibal's lavish dinner table. And having a fish-only meal together, caught by Will himself.

One is still left with a wondering question after considering cannibalism, horror, and what monsters look like – or turn out to be: can a human be called a monster at all?

Macbeth and Hannibal both commit many murders. One is manipulated into it, while the other eats manipulation for breakfast with a side of (human) bacon. They both go through a substantial change during their time in the play/show, and both have redeemable qualities such as honor, respect, even love. As shown in the article by Carroll (2015), the connection between the person who desires and the object, is almost symbiotic. The closer they get to each other, the more they become each other. Macbeth turns "into" his wife. Hannibal "turns" into Will, and vice versa. Thus, both become monsters in this fun house of horror mirrors.

Perhaps there is no difference at all between humane and monstrous. After all, society is what makes the monster. A cannibal in a certain culture is just a person eating to please their God, survive, or make use of the dead. The monster mirrors us. Shows us what we can be, if we were in a different place and time (Carroll, 2015).

That is the true horror of horrors – we are, all of us, capable of anything.

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## Epilogue

*It's finally here.* I stare at the table and take a moment to appreciate my handiwork. Sizzling, mouth watering, seared with the tongs I had specially ordered from Italy that took three months to arrive. Cooked in the best Malbec, *Devil Proof*, sent all the way by dear friends from Mendoza, Argentina. I present the Tomahawk steak on a planetary silver platter in the middle of the table. It is naked. A transgressive feast.

The room hushes as I approach the uncovered meat and hold in my left hand a long, metallic blade with a curved edge that I sharpen every Sunday. A slight murmur of awe ensues, as I - in slow motion - lower myself to the nourishing delight. First, I locate the bone. It glitters within the juices of the steak. I cut a vertical line along it, separating it from the flesh. It cuts like pudding. Lastly, I slit it into strips, 1.5 inches thick.

I bring from beside the platter a glass container large enough to fit a small child, where I have been collecting the bones from the rest of the animal. The guests know the routine, and each hand me their flat, white, quartz plates that sing when my trimmed nails touch them.

This section of the ribs is perfect for a small gathering of four or five people.

I place two slices for each person and fan them out next to a single piece of bone on each side as a frame. What art this is, I coo to myself. Sprinkling raw Himalayan salt with a flourish, my right hand much higher than my head, my movements like thaumaturgy.

All the pieces have been administered, the salt has had enough time to partially melt, and the servers provided each guest with a glass of my *Devil Proof*.

"Relish Slow!" I call out my catch phrase, and the group gorge like giddy hyenas. They force themselves to stop after each bite, glancing up at me - their charmer - knowing that savouring the bites is part of the experience, and that this is my house, and my rules.

A sharp shriek is suddenly heard from the kitchen, followed by a crashing sound of broken glass scattered on my heated stone floors.

"IT'S A FINGER!" Barbara squeals.

She must have found her way to my cooking area while I was observing my guests gormandize. But they're all too drunk to notice her callow interruption.

I dab the corners of my lips as if kissing the eggshell-colored cotton, and straighten my three-piece carmine suit as I rise, following her voice to the kitchen. By the sink stands one of my oldest, dearest friends, wearing a black and white zebra print dress much too tight for her fat flabs, holding onto a bloody stray finger that fell under the counter space.

I must have missed it. She gaped at me with cheap, cherry lipstick that stained her protruding canines, her mouth in the shape of an asshole.

Oh well, I sigh, as I saunter towards her, grabbing the ivory handle of my skewer by the cutting board. At least now I won't have to smell her sonorous perfume anymore.