



## BIROn - Birkbeck Institutional Research Online

Seymour, Laura (2020) The feasting table as a gateway to hell on the early modern stage and page. *Renaissance Studies* 34 (3), pp. 392-411. ISSN 0269-1213.

Downloaded from: <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/29842/>

*Usage Guidelines:*

Please refer to usage guidelines at <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/policies.html>  
contact [lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk).

or alternatively

## The Feasting Table as the Gateway to Hell in Four Early Modern Texts

'I could never abide to say grace' - Dekker *Satirio-Mastix*

### **Introduction**

When eating, early modern people are uniquely vulnerable. Their open mouths provide literal gateways for devils to enter, and their souls teeter on the balance between piety and greed. The ritual of saying grace makes all the difference between a meal enjoyed in safety and a meal that can send the eaters to hell. Early modern graces could be said before or after meals (or both); their varying forms are united by a focus on thanking God for the food and asking for his blessing. For instance, John Foxe's collaborator Henry Bull's popular *Christian Prayers and Meditations* (which, Susan Wabuda explains, 'went through six editions by 1590') includes a grace used in several earlier texts, beginning 'All things depend upon Thy providence, O Lord, to receive at Thy hands due sustenance in time convenient', referring to 'the spiritual food of Thy Word', and noting that Christ is 'the true bread of life'.<sup>i</sup> Early modern meals meant much more than simply taking in sustenance. Marget Vissier represents the meal as a repeated (because necessary) ritual that thus provides regular opportunities to learn to behave according to society's values and to display this learning.<sup>ii</sup> Michel Jeanneret argues that early modern banquets nourish minds as well as bodies: the mouth that eats is also the mouth that speaks and becomes a 'manifestation of the spirit' of the eater.<sup>iii</sup>

The stage is a place where concerns about the dangers of saying grace can be made visible. The popularity of anti-Catholic comedy meant that staged failures to say grace are often linked to Eucharistic debates. Failures to say grace correctly threaten the stability of the social order and transform immoral eaters into food for devils. This article examines a group of texts (three plays and a picaresque novel) that open out these key questions about saying grace. In Christopher Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* (written and performed in the early 1590s), Faustus and Mephistopheles cause epic confusion after the Pope fails to say grace. In Thomas Dekker's *If This Be Not A Good Play, the Devil is in It* (1611), the anti-catholic satire continues when a devil disguised as a friar gives a deliberately mis-said grace that appeals to the monks' greed and threatens to topple a monastery. In Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome's *The Late Lancashire Witches* (1623), a wedding feast is stolen by witches after grace is left unsaid, raising questions of the Eucharist's materiality and endangering social hierarchy. In William Winstanley's under-examined novel *The Essex Champion* (loosely based on *Don Quijote* and thought to have first been published in 1690) two bailiffs' failure to say grace results in the picaresque righting of social injustice.

### ***The stage: rendering visible early modern anxieties about saying grace***

With the devil usually thought to enter the early modern body in a literal fashion through its orifices, saying grace is an important way to guard the vulnerable mouth.<sup>iv</sup> Often, early modern fears about the consequences of impious eating were expressed literally as in Gregory the Great's description, cited in many later texts, of the devil hiding in a lettuce and possessing the nun who ate this lettuce so greedily that she forgot to bless it with the sign of the cross.<sup>v</sup> Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* is a touchstone for plays about devils, and one of the impressive moments of Faustus' trickery is his disruption of the Pope's banquet. Rendered invisible, Mephistopheles and Faustus taunt the Pope as he eats, beating his friars, stirring trouble with insulting words that the friars attribute to each other, and stealing food and drink. The Pope orders a ceremony of excommunication, which itself is disrupted. In both the A (1604) and B (1616) texts of the play, no lines or stage directions indicate that the Pope pauses to say grace before his meal, enabling Marlowe to stage this early modern belief that eating without saying grace leaves one open to the malice of prowling devils. He also stages the devils' fury at the Pope's subsequent attempts to protect his meat, and/or himself, with crossing gestures.

In the B text, Faustus and Mephistopheles appear as devilish catholic clergy as they initially disguise themselves 'like the Cardinals' before re-appearing 'in their owne shapes': 'are we not fitted well?' asks Mephistopheles; 'two such Cardinals| Ne're seru'd a holy Pope, as we shall do', replies Faustus, playing on the ideas of being cardinals 'serving' their supposed master the Pope, serving food at the table, and the more colloquial idea of serving someone well or ill. <sup>vi</sup>The Pope does, however, cross himself once eating is underway in the A text, and in the B text Faustus uses the culinary term 'spiced', perhaps to suggest that the Pope crosses his meat or perhaps that, in crossing himself he marks himself out as meat for consumption 'How now? Must euery bit be spiced with a Crosse?' (E1r). <sup>vii</sup>In both texts, this gesture enrages Faustus and provokes him to physically attack the Pope, just as the devil possessing Elizabeth Throckmorton in the late sixteenth century grew furious at the family grace. <sup>viii</sup> The play's prose source, translator P.F.'s *The Historie of the damnable life and deserved death of Doctor John Faustus* (1592) states, 'as he sat at meat, the Pope would ever be blessing and crossing over his mouth, Faustus could suffer it no longer, but up with his fist and smote the Pope on the face'. <sup>ix</sup>

Presenting the taunting of the Pope as a comic spectacle, Marlowe does not challenge the status quo for his (officially at least) mainly Protestant audience. In both Marlowe's play and the prose text, this scene demonstrates, rather, how low Faustus has fallen in his quest for knowledge at all costs, as he descends to use his devilish powers merely for a series of futile magic tricks. Stealing the Pope's food is part of Faustus' repertoire of silly episodes, as his great mind lies fallow, alongside planting antlers on a discourteous courtier and pretending to lose his leg and regrow it. Indeed the Pope's banquet later lent itself to pure comedy; in a farcical version loosely based on Marlowe's play, William Mountfort's *The Life and Death of Dr Faustus Made into a Farce* (1697), it is re-staged as slapstick. Scarmouche and Harlequin sit down to the 'Heavenly Apparition' of a table laid with meat and wine ('Bottles of Wine, and a Venison Pasty, a Pot of wild Fowl, &c') with kisses from a woman 'luscious as Pig-sauce' also subsumed into the greedy lexical framework. But as soon as they offer a brief 'Heaven be prais'd for all' by way of grace, they are menaced by thunder, the woman's disappearance, and a flying table, while in (in)direct homage to a scene we go on to analyse in *The Late Lancashire Witches* antlers emerge from the pasty, live birds fly from their pot and their salad is replaced with 'Thistles and Nettles'. So, the eaters decide, grace will not protect them: 'I have found the Secret: We must not say Grace at the Devil's Feast'. <sup>x</sup>

Physically presenting us with devils ready to snatch eaters' souls and showing us the devils' angry reaction as eaters bless their food, the stage makes visible contemporary moral anxieties about eating. Like Marlowe, Dekker, Heywood, Brome, and Winstanley show greed vying with piety at the dinner table, and present dinner as a ritual where decisions must be made about whether to think about God or one's stomach when eating.

### ***Eucharistic themes in theatrical representations of eating***

Representations of religious orders eating ordinary meals on the early modern stage are imbued with more fraught questions about the Eucharist. Dekker's *If This Be Not a Good Play* frames monks as eating in a materialistic rather than a spiritual manner, a mindset many Protestant authors believed to underlie the Catholic mass. I argue that related ideas about the materiality and transformation of the Eucharist are also implicit in *The Late Lancashire Witches*, where attention is drawn to the diabolical changes to the feast.

In Dekker's play, the devil Shacklesoul, disguised as a novice called Friar Rush, has infiltrated a monastery. This is part of a wider plan, hatched among the demons at the start of the play, to bring down various institutions of church and state. When appointed to say grace, he does not do so piously, but gives what I shall call a greedy grace because it is an expression of greed designed to provoke greed in his listeners. Shacklesoul lists delicious foods that contrast sharply with the plain and meagre meal that the monks are actually preparing themselves to eat:

For our bread, wine, ale and beere,  
For the piping hot meates heere:

For brothes of sundrie tast and sort,  
 For beefe, veale, mutton, lamb, and porke.  
 Greene-sawce with calves head and bacon,  
 Pig and goose, and cramd-vp capon.  
 For past raiz'd stiffe with curious art,  
 Pye, custard, florentine and tart.  
 Bak'd rumpes, fried kidneys, and lam-stones,  
 Fat sweete-breads, luscious maribones,  
 Artichoke, and oyster-pyes,  
 Butterd Crab, prawnes, lobsters thighe,  
 Thankes be giuen for flesh and fishes,  
 With this choice of tempting dishes:  
 To which proface: with bly the lookes sit yee,  
 Bids this Couent, much good do't yee.<sup>xi</sup>

Short for 'bon prou vous fasse' (Middle French.: 'may it do you good'), 'proface' was a word said to welcome guests, and/or to wish them well before a meal. Coming as it does at the end of a sonorously tempting 'grace', Shacklesoul's 'proface' marks an invitation to give way to greed; indeed the menu-like structure of the grace suggests that the next logical step would be to tuck in. This greedy grace is, I argue, more effective precisely because it does not involve lavish detail. His list of foodstuffs is seasoned with just a few adjectives, such as meats in 'past raiz'd stiffe with curious art' and descriptions of the meal as 'piping hot' and the marrow-bones as 'luscious'. Shacklesoul perhaps deploys this general lack of detail, with a couple of tantalising pointers about beautiful pastry and appealing temperature, in order to prompt the friars to fill in the details with their own imaginations. As they follow his nudges and consider for themselves how the pastries, tarts, and meats will taste, their minds and desires are implicated more fully in the sin of greed.

Strikingly, in this scene, the devil is actually giving grace, not (as in texts like Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*) simply taking advantage of a grace unsaid, or said poorly. Invited to say grace, Shacklesoul is presented with an opportunity to endanger the souls of his listeners, and he seizes this opportunity with gusto. Shacklesoul's grace is double-prefixed: the speech prefix *Rush* appears before the grace itself, and again at the line beginning 'Bids this Couent...', even though no other characters have intervened in between these prefixes. Such double-prefixing typically indicated that the actor would be reading a letter or other document, and was used to remind printers to insert the letter into the play text. Perhaps, then, it indicates that Shacklesoul dramatically unrolls or opens a document: a menu or missive from hell on which he has written his greedy grace. Reading the grace out from such a pre-prepared document may additionally be a visual reminder that it does not come spontaneously and authentically from the heart.

In *A Pleasant Conceited Comedy, Wherein Is Shewed How A Man May Chuse A Good Wife From A Bad* (1602) Thomas Heywood, to whom our attention turns later in the article, has a character give a similarly greedy grace, focusing listeners' attentions on a list of delicious foods rather than on God. This list hides a destructive plan, again linking a focus on food with mortal sin: Young Arthur has held the feast to mock his wife prior to murdering her with a poisoned 'Cuppe'. Unlike Shacklesoul's grace, though, the Pedant Aminadab's grace passes without comment; his lay listeners respond with a simple 'Amen' and fall to.<sup>xii</sup> Dekker's friars, though, are torn between needing to keep up their ascetic image and the fact that their interest has been piqued. 'But do our brethren in parts more remote? Feed so delituous saist thou?', inquires the Prior in response to Shacklesoul's insistence that religious communities elsewhere regularly enjoy the type of delicious banquet he has just described (C4v). The spelling 'delituous' is used several times in this text (again at D2v). This spelling, though not uncommon at the time, evokes a fitting double meaning. The word *delit* in early modern English meant 'delight', but in French, *delit* meant offence. The monks' delight (*delicia*) is their delict (*delictum*) or crime. As the friars argue over Shacklesoul's grace, they invoke the idea of treason (something usually happening on a national level against a monarch)

against an intimate bodily space (their stomachs), illustrating the link between state and individual dietary rituals that I will explore below, and which appears in several early modern plays (not least Aesop's 'Fable of the Belly' in *Coriolanus* 1.1, written in the first decade of the seventeenth century). The word 'treason' also positions the stomach, rather than the head or God, as king of the body.

Prior: How dar'st thou mock us thou ill nurtur'd slave?  
Sub[prior]: Contemn'st thou our order and religious fare?  
Shack: He has spoken treason to all our stomachs. (C4v)

This transcription of the 1612 text contains a rather odd speech prefix in the last line. Who is 'he'? Is Shacklesoul referring to the Subprior or Prior, suggesting that by condemning the greedy grace his fellow monk has spoken against their rightful king, the stomach? Or is Shacklesoul talking about himself in the third person, contributing humorously to the general confusion and condemning his own greedy grace? Another possibility is that this is an (in)deliberate misattribution of another character's words to Shacklesoul. If misattributed, the line reflects the devil's ability to 'possess' other characters, speaking through and for them. Misattribution is plausible, for two reasons. Firstly, the context is that all of the friars are joining together to condemn Shacklesoul's grace, and it would be odd (though humorous) for him to condemn himself. Secondly, a few lines later, Shacklesoul says 'I conjure you... to hear me speak', making it plausible that he has not spoken before. Speech prefixes for Shacklesoul are somewhat confused throughout the play, referring to him sometimes as 'Shacklesoul' and sometimes as 'Rush'. The double prefixing for 'Rush' in the grace further suggests a doubling of this character's identity that draws attention to the fact that he is *not* Rush. Though the text is invisible to the audience, these varying speech prefixes may have indicated to the performer when to perform more like a monk and when to let Shacklesoul's more overtly devilish side show.

Shacklesoul follows up his greedy grace with a ridiculous argument peppered with non-sequiturs; weakened by greed, the monks are primed to accept his conclusion that eating lavishly is good for the soul. Deploying the form of a logical argument (*Sic Disputo...e Contra*) Shacklesoul states 'He that eats not good meate is damnd: *Sic Disputo*| If he that feedes well hath a good soule, then *e Contra*| No, he that feedes ill, hath a bad and a poor soule' (D1r). Perhaps already thinking about the full state of his stomach, the Prior pronounces it 'A full and edifying argument' (D1r). The negative effects of this break in the protective boundary around the friars' food are quickly made clear. The now ravenous friars appoint Shacklesoul 'maister-cooke', thus handing over complete control of their diet to him and giving him easy access to the interiors of their bodies.

The opposition between grace and greed was frequently examined within a Eucharistic framework by early modern writers. The Biblical story of The Last Supper where Christ broke bread and gave thanks and offered a sacrifice as he did so was, in the early modern era, frequently seen not only as the first Eucharist but also (alongside Christ's blessing the loaves and fishes he multiplied) as the *locus classicus* for Christians saying grace before meals at their household tables. Several anti-Catholic texts align transubstantiation with a greedy grace. The Anglican clergyman Peter Heylyn (1599-1662) writes in *A Brief and Moderate Answer* (1637) that a belief in transubstantiation is similar to worshipping the food on our table (rather than God) when we say grace before a meal. Responding directly to the Independent minister Henry Burton's condemnation of the 'popish' practice of bowing to the communion table, Heylyn writes that, just as Anglicans do not worship the food on their plates but the God that gives them the food, neither do they worship the communion table itself but the God it commemorates:

*Towards* it if you will, not *to it*, When you say Grace before the table, or said your prayers in the last conventicle you were at, at the bords end: I hope you prayed not *to the* table, nor said Grace to it. Neither doe they bow *to the* Altar, or Communion table, call it which you please, which bow towards it.<sup>xiii</sup>

Heylyn's early straightforward anti-catholicism may be said to have mollified as the years passed. And, Heylyn allows bowing to the altar as an appropriate 'token of devotion' to the 'holy mysteries' of the Eucharist. Nevertheless, the implication is clear: grace ought to be said with our minds turned towards God and not towards our food. Those who say grace with their minds focused instead on the table and its delicious loadings are similar to those who focus their minds on the physical substance of the Eucharist rather than the immaterial substance of God. Though denied and used to make a different argument, the link between grace and the Eucharist is acknowledged by David Calderwood, a minister in the Church of Scotland. Calderwood writes in 1620, during his exile in the Netherlands, that the Eucharist should be received sitting, as Christ and his disciples sat at the Last Supper. He explains that kneeling before the sacrament is idolatrous, contending:

It is objected next, that when the meate is set on our Tables, we uncover our heads, and do say grace. I answer, There is a relation here between God and the meat, but not a relation of worship, either from the meat to God, as if our worship did passe by the meat, and determine in God, or return from God, and determine in the meat. The meat is the subject wherupon we desire Gods blessing to be bestowed before we use it.<sup>xiv</sup>

Calderwood's analogy reinforces the idea that grace should be said with reference to God. The two ministers disagree on the key issue of kneeling before the sacrament; Calderwood wrote from exile imposed due to his controversial beliefs and Heylyn wrote as an established Laudian minister. However, both agree on the idea that saying a grace that is focused on the materiality of the meat before us is dangerously analogous to the Catholic mass. This suggests that perhaps Dekker is commenting obliquely on the monks' catholicism in *If This Be Not A Good Play*. Early modern anti-catholic discourse suggests that any grace given in a catholic monastery may as well be a greedy grace, because it was central to this conception of the Catholic vision of the world that grace was said to the table and not to the Lord.

Shacklesoul follows up with a further menu of delicious recipes he aims to make in his new role as master cook (assisted by the newly-demoted previous cook Scumbroth) that echoes and overlays his list-like greedy grace and (though the friars don't know about this) his list of sins:

To *Scumbroth*, what I know ile teach,  
To make candels, Jellies, leach,  
Sirrups of violets, and of roses,  
Cow slip sallads, and kick-choses,  
Preserue the apricock, and cherry,  
Damsin, peare plom, raspis berry;  
Potates ike if you shall lack,  
To corroborate the back:  
A hundred more shall *Rush* deuice,  
And yet to early mattins rise,  
Our ladies office, sing at prime,  
At euen-song, and at compline time.  
Chant Anthems, Aniuersaries, Dirges,  
And the dolefull *de profundis*. (D2r)

Shacklesoul's concluding statement that despite preparing over 'a hundred' delectable dishes he will still have time to rise early for matins and fulfil all his duties of singing and chanting throughout the day suggests that he will conjure up these dishes very quickly indeed, even instantaneously. This hints not at normal cookery but diabolical conjuration.

In *The Late Lancashire Witches*, the speed with which the witches transform a meat-based meal into unappetising food is one of the key signs that diabolical magic has been involved. Seely proudly reads the menu for the guests:

‘Tis a busie time, yet will I review the Bill of fare, for this dayes dinner— (Reades) for 40. people of the best quality, 4. messes of meat; viz. a leg of Mutton in plum-broth, a dish of Marrowbones, a white-broth, a Surlovne of beefe, a Pig, a Goose, a Turkie, and two Pyes: for the second course, to every messe 4. Chickens in a dish, a couple of Rabbets, Custard, Flawn, Florentines, and stewd pruines,—all very good Country fare.<sup>xv</sup>

The witches transform this banquet into a selection of mushroom salads (including puffballs or 'Puck fists' and 'Jew's Ears', the still-used Englished name for the *auriculum judaicae* mushroom), insects and other critters, and cow dung or 'sheards'. Seely's wife Joan runs in exclaiming:

O husband, O guests, O sonne, O Gentlemen, such a chance in a Kitchin was never heard of, all the meat is flowne out o' the chimney top I thinke, and nothing instead of it, but Snakes, Bats, Frogs, Beetles, Hornets, and Humble-bees; all the Sallets are turn'd to Jewes-eares, Mushromes, and Puck fists; and all the Custards into Cow sheards!... (E4v)

One of the key surprises of Heywood and Brome's wedding feast is the difference between the expected taste and texture of the food (as advertised by Seely in his menu) and the actual taste and texture: cow dung, wiggling insects, clammy frogs, and mushrooms. It is obvious to the eaters' senses that their food is bewitched. This marked change in the food can be read alongside ideas about the Eucharist. Early modern people who expressed disbelief in transubstantiation often did so by stating that the bread and wine looked, felt, and tasted the same before and after it had been transubstantiated. Bodleian MS Eng 2774, a collection of seventeenth century sermons and sermon notes, returns repeatedly to this idea; 'all the senses shall tell us, that we tast nothing but bread, we se nothing but bread, we touch nothing but bread, and eat nothing but bread. When every sense (I say) makes it evident that it is bread, why should we say, it is the body of Ch. when it is nothing els but bread'.<sup>xvi</sup> In *The Late Lancashire Witches*, where no grace is said, the feast undergoes a devilishly obvious transformation, the extravagant obverse of the undetectable transubstantiation posited by authors like the sermon-writer just cited. Though the devilish influence on the food in *If This Be Not a Good Play* is more insidious, it shares with the witches' feast an ability to appear instantantly. Presented with the transformed feast, Arthur in *The Late Lancashire Witches* boasts, 'I defie all Witches, and all their workes; their power on our meat, cannot reach our persons' (E4v). Reading these two plays together suggests that he is in more danger than he allows himself to appreciate: it is precisely his power over the monks' meat that gives Shacklesoul 'power over [their] persons'. Failure to say grace invites witches and devils to exercise that power.

### ***Grace and social order***

As we have seen, grace was a means of protection from evil, and a ritual that confirmed the status of the household as a unit and trained its members up in skills and duties like governance and obedience. Conduct books like William Perkins' *Christian Oeconomie* (published in Latin in 1590 and translated into English in 1609) and Robert Cleaver's *A Godly Form of Household Government* (1598) frequently attest that a well governed family is necessary for training good citizens. Cleaver's text revolves around the importance of obedience to God, because a pious homeowner 'hath a church in his house'.<sup>xvii</sup> The first chapter of *Christian Oeconomie* opens with the assestion that saying grace at mealtimes is essential for acknowledging God's importance within the family; Perkins states that a well-governed family is governed according to God's law, referencing the Bible 'Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build'.<sup>xviii</sup> William Gouge writes

in *Of Domesticall Duties* (1622) that membership of a household (including parents, children, and servants) teaches people to fulfil their correct role in society, whether as leaders or as subservient inferiors:

a family is a little Church, and a little Commonwealth, at least a lively representation thereof, whereby tryall may be made of such as are fit for any place of authority, or of subjection in Church or Common-wealth. Or rather it is a schoole wherein the first principles and grounds of government and subjection are learned: whereby men are fitted to greater matters in Church or Common-wealth.<sup>xix</sup>

Gouge emphasises, 'so we may say of inferiors that cannot be subject in a family; they will hardly bee brought to yeeld such subjection as they ought in Church or Common-wealth', noting that even leaders must learn to subject themselves within the home (for instance, to rituals like saying grace), because this fits them for their future role in life: 'men must learn to obey well, before they can rule well' (C4r).

The link between a failure to regulate the family while saying grace around the household table, and the later breakdown of the family thanks to arrogant children who refuse to support their parents is cemented in Dutch art. Pieter van Thiel connects early modern Dutch representations of families saying grace with representations of profligate children who lord it over their parents and leave them to starve. Van Thiel shows that 'though 'not...inseparable', these themes in art are part of a broader Reformation interest in the family as a congregation, the correct way of ordering a family, and the passing down of ideals from parents to children.<sup>xx</sup> As Wayne Franits attests, there existed an abundance of prints and paintings depicting families saying grace, and this reflected the pedagogical importance of the ritual: 'much attention was devoted to child-rearing during meal times; to contemporaries, family meals provided a structured setting in which children could be trained on a daily basis'; the folded hands and attentive gazes of the model families in these paintings embody their aptitude for this instruction.<sup>xxi</sup> The implication is that households that are not well regulated through appropriate rituals like saying grace will eventually self-destruct. These conduct writers and painters do not represent the early modern household as a space where families could let loose in private and enjoy their own lives free from the expectations of society. Quite the reverse, the household is the foundation of the state. The implication is that if rituals are not correctly performed in the household, the implications are dire not just for the individual family but for the nation as a whole. Conduct literature presents an idealised version of the home, but these ideas are central the plays examined here.

At the start of *The Late Lancashire Witches* Whetstone states that he needs to get to lunch at his Uncle Generous's house before grace is said, implying that he does so from motives of hunger rather than piety: 'my stomacke is now much upon...I love ever to bee set before the first grace' (B2v). The conversation, and the action, then turns to the presence of witches and devils disrupting the 'weel governed' Seely household, turning it from a well-ordered mini commonwealth to a bestial 'nest' filled with demonic humours: 'I have knowne this, and till very lately, as weel govern'd a Family as the County yeilds, and now what a nest of severall humors it is growne, and all divelish ones', remarks Doughty (C3r). Political language of 'governance' informs language of the bodily humours to show how both bodily order and social order are disrupted by the presence of witches. Like many other conduct authors, Gouge frequently echoes 1 Corinthians 11 where the husband is said to be the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church; he models the household as simultaneously a unified body and a miniature church. Gouge emphasises that children ought to be subservient to their parents and servants to their masters; wives ought to submit cheerfully to their husbands and children should feel a 'filial fear' as well as love and respect for their parents (Ff2r). One vice that children may fall prey to is '*Disdainfull stateliness*': a lack of due 'reverence' towards their parents (Ff7r). In *The Late Lancashire Witches*, the disordered relationships between the members of the Seeley household are imagined as a house literally turned upside-down. Seely was until recently (B4v): 'a man respected| For his discretion and knowne gravitie,| As master of a



govern'd Family' but his house is 'turn'd topsie turvy' as Seely and Joan bow to their children and spend a huge amount of time and effort cooking the lavish wedding feast for their servants, Laurence and Parnell. According to the accepted logic of the play and of conduct literature, the newly-married pair ought to be serving the Seelies food, not the other way around. The witches steal the food for themselves and transform or replace it with unappetising fare. The cake, which is being traditionally crumbled over the bride's head, is 'snatch[ed]' by a spirit who 'powres down bran' over the bride (E3v).

Alongside the Eucharistic imagery, this feast also engages with ideas of subverted gendered household labour. Sara Mueller links the surprise of some aspects of the feast in *The Late Lancashire Witches* with the intricacy aspired to by women cooking fancy meals in the early modern era. Though many professional household chefs would have been male, Mueller draws on recipe books aimed at women which instructed them how to make delightfully deceptive meals including pies that released live birds (another surprise, as Mueller notes, that the witches have in store for the Seelies' guests), or swans made from marzipan stuck with feathers. Arguing that everyday women 'stage banquets',<sup>xxii</sup> Mueller contrasts the time-consuming labour of women who created such banquets with the instantaneous (stage-)magic of the witches. Simultaneously, she draws attention to the contrast between the extravagance and intricacy of this 'feminine food' and plain, masculine country fare of the kind offered by Seely in his initial reading of the menu: 'The play explicitly and repeatedly presents negatively the witches' food and their creative agony in producing it. In contrast, it takes a very clear position about the value of traditional plain country cooking, a kind of feasting associated closely with men' (279). The witches' food is produced within a framework of moral repugnance that can make even edible foods like mushrooms seem unappealing to the senses. These witches, as Mueller explains (385) 'can enjoy a banquet without suffering any of the work necessary to produce it', while Seely and Joan spend so long preparing the wedding feast that they miss the wedding itself ('we that have playd the Steward and Cooke at home,| though we lost Church by't, and saw not Parfon *Knit knot* doe his office', E3r).

The household Shacklesoul upturns is a monastic one; taking control over the monks' meal enables him to bring in sins that 'shake' the fabric of society. In a gloating aside for the audience, not intended for the monks' ears, he recites a menu of sin, his enjambment reflecting the way in which the sins step through the boundaries between the monastery, the monks' stomachs, hell, and the wider world:

Charity: shees undon:  
Fat gluttony broke her back: next her step'd in  
Contention (who shakes Churches) now the sweete sin  
Sallow lechery, should march after: Avarice,  
Murder, and all sinnes els, hell can device,  
Ile broach: the head's in, draw the body after,  
Begin thy feast in full cuppes, and end in slaughter. (D3r)

Joan Fitzpatrick argues, 'gluttony is a social sin as well as a personal one because taking more than one's fair share of food and drink means that someone else will have to go without'.<sup>xxiii</sup> It is fitting that the stomach of the individual eater becomes the gateway for devils to enter and destabilise wider structures: close on the heels of gluttony, contention enters to disturb the church, whilst murder and other sins threaten the peace and harmony of society.

In *The Essex Champion*, the motif of the disrupted meal is used more directly to punish social injustice. Here, two bailiffs do not say grace before eating a celebratory meal having wrung a poor man's last penny from him. This provokes the squire Ricardo to don his invisibility ring and tease them, Faustus-like, by stealing their food and punching them to provoke a fight between them:

*Ricardo* understanding what Harpies they were, how that they liv'd by other's Ruines,  
resolved to put a trick on them; and therefore they being set down to their victuals

without saying Grace, as men unacquainted with any Goodness, he presently slips on his ring, and conveys the Capon under his Coat, giving to each of them a blow on the Mouth with his Fist, which though they perceived not from whence they came, yet felt they it smart to some purpose...<sup>xxiv</sup>

Winstanley sets the scene by rooting the impiety of the bailiffs' consumption in socioeconomic greed:

a Couple of Baylifs, or Shoulder slappers, were sitting down to dinner with a Shoulder of Mutton and a Capon, having the same day seized on a poor Man's Goods for an inconsiderable value, which they Sold and Imbezzel'd away at their pleasure, to the utter Ruine of the poor Man, and maintainance of their Luxury and Drunkenness. (E3v)

The repetition of 'shoulder' creates a congruence between the poor man's shoulder that they slapped to recover debts and the shoulder they are eating. This evokes them literally, not just metaphorically, eating away at the poor man.

Despite owning a magic ring, Ricardo is a mundane creature. Helped by no devils, he is dominated by two desires featuring heavily in the texts discussed in this article: lust and gluttony. The one devil we meet in this story is false: Ricardo's master Billy of Billericay is scared by a man dressed in a bear skin with a candle-lit 'pompion rind' carved into a face-shape on his shoulder (C2r). Ricardo also uses his ring selfishly to approach women unnoticed and kiss them, and to escape before paying for lavish dinners. But, his use of the ring to unsettle mealtime rituals is explicitly inscribed within the tradition of disrupted eating examined within this article. The staff at the inns he hits interpret his trickery along the lines set down by *Dr Faustus* and *The Late Lancashire Witches*: a witch or a devil must be behind it. The Hostess of one inn accuses a horse-courser: 'he had brought the Devil into her House; but notwithstanding the Devil and all his Imps, she swore she would make him pay...they resolved to throw him into the River to try him for a Witch' (E4v). Ricardo is several times referred to as a devil; after the incident with the bailiffs Winstanley refers knowingly to 'their supposed Devil, *Ricardo*', and when Ricardo uses his ring to try and kiss a milkmaid, she later identifies him with recognition both of his wickedness and his humanity: '*This, this is the Devil that haunted me*' (F1v). When he and Billy are captured and face the law: 'Sir (said *Thomasio*) this *Ricardo* is the left hand of the Devil, a right *Lancashire Witch*, who can change himself into what shape he pleases' (K2r).

Around the incident with the bailiffs, Ricardo is more focused on using his ring for righting socioeconomic wrongs than for personal gain; he moves on to scare an usurer to repentance by making his money bags move invisibly (F1r) and when he runs away without paying for his dinner at an inn, the Host, Hostess, and Ostler, who have been cheating their customers in various ways, 'concluded it could be no other than the Devil to punish them for their sins', confess their transgressions and hopefully mend their ways (E2r). Winstanley shows the continued status of the meal as an indicator of eaters' moral worth. He indicates the enduring importance of thinking on God when eating and serving food and not on one's stomach or purse.

### ***Becoming food for devils: punishments for lust and greed***

Reducing a meal to material satisfaction suggests that the eater sees themselves as a mere material being: a stomach to be satisfied. Fittingly, several early modern texts emphasise that, having acted like greedy beasts, impious eaters are reduced to the object-like status of meat to be roasted in hell. Being damned is equated with becoming a meal for devils; the devils depicted in medieval art and literature cooking human flesh to eat in hell no doubt influenced the twofold description in the 'B' text of *Dr Faustus* of humans 'broyl[ing]' (a culinary term) on coals, with the aid of 'burning forks' and being 'fed with sops [bread steeped in liquor before cooking] of flaming fire' (V2r).

Just prior to the Pope's banquet in the prose *Faustus*, Faustus links the friars and nuns' lust for each other with their putative status as meat to be consumed by each other and by the devil in hell:

...he said to his Spirit I thought I had alone been a hog, or pork of the devil's, but he must bear with me yet a little longer, for these hogs of Rome are already fattened, and fitted to make his roast-meat, the Devil might do wel now to spit them all and have them to the fire, let him summon the Nuns to turn the spits: for as none must confess the Nun but the Friar, so none should turn the roasting Friar but the Nun. (C4r)

This final section of the article examines how the early modern conflation of lust and greed, and the idea of the greedy eater fattening themselves for the devil's consumption, are present in the texts we examine and subverted in *The Late Lancashire Witches*.

Several religious texts explain that if Christians do not acknowledge thankfully before eating that it is God who has allowed them to consume animals, they become no better than the animals themselves: 'I have seldome observed God served at the tables, eyther of Masters or men, by saying Grace and Thanksgiving, when like Hogges and Dogges they have served themselves with the usurped Creatures', writes the Church of England clergyman Stephen Jerome in *Seven Helpes to Heaven Shewing* (1614),<sup>xxv</sup> while the poet Timothy Kendall states in an epigram 'Of saying grace' that one who 'sitting downe doth take his meales,| And thanks not God in grateful wise:| Goes as a brutishe Oxe to boord,| And rudely like an Asse doth rise' (*Flowers of Epigrammes*, 1577).<sup>xxvi</sup> Five years after Kendall, John Smith, Rector of St Mary's in Colchester dilates on this theme:

'For it is to be noted, that although Beasts, and Birds, and Fishes, fall to't without saying Grace; and those that live by prey sustain themselves not only with Vegetables but Animals, without asking other leave then their own natures gave them—yet Man as he had not right to feed on Animals till God granted him that power after the Flood Gen 9.3 *Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you, even as the green Herb have I given you all things*. So neither could he deprive Vegetables of life, for the sustenance of his own, till God granted him liberty.<sup>xxvii</sup>

Eating without saying grace turns *us* into brutes whose meat is to be consumed and roasted – not at the dinner table, but in hell.

Not saying grace, or saying it in a garbled and hasty fashion, was a nexus of early modern expressions of lust and greed. Pervasively, in the seventeenth century, 'saying grace' was a term used for the talk that initiates sex, or for the marriage rite, – failing to say grace thus could mean sex begun eagerly without time spent 'wooing', or extramarital sex. Numerous examples deploy the notion of 'saying grace' in this metaphorical sense, simultaneously figuring the usually female object of desire as a dish of 'meat' to be devoured. This trope also implies that such sex is, like a meal eaten without a pious grace, dangerously unblessed. For example, 'The Conceited Lover', Song X of the anonymous miscellany *The Academy of Pleasure* (1656) rakishly reverses the animal imagery of the religious texts cited above; here the person who *does* say grace is an animal, slow and stupid like an 'Asse':

He that's still saying Grace  
And nere falls to the meat.  
Is at best but an Asse  
And deserves not to eat:  
But were he as eager  
After warm meat as I  
He'd not lie so long Leager  
Till his conscience cry Fie.<sup>xxviii</sup>

To lie leager was to lie at siege, and this military metaphor combines aggressively with an image of another person as 'warm meat' to be eaten without a lengthy grace. The end of the quoted passage from Song X seems confused – it's not clear what the conscience is crying 'Fie' to (to the overlong wait? To the fact that a siege is going on at all?)– but the central metaphor of sex as a meal without grace is clearly repeated in other mid seventeenth century works. 'The Antiplatonick', attributed variously in the early 1650s to John Cleveland and Francis Beaumont, for example, counsels 'For shame thou everlasting wooer,| Still saying grace and never falling to her' and admonishes 'Come lets in affection riot| Th'are sickly pleasures keep a Diet'.<sup>xxx</sup>

Numerous dramatic texts deploy the same type of imagery, including Shirley's *The Constant Maid* (1640) 'you should go to a wench,| As Gentlemen to Oysters, without ceremony| Or saying grace; devotion will spoil all',<sup>xxx</sup> Dryden's *An Evening's Love* (1671), 'His commendations serve onely to make others have a mind to me; He does but say Grace to me like a Chaplain; and like him is the last that shall fall on',<sup>xxx</sup> Middleton's *Women Beware Women* (1623) 'Tis but like saying grace before a Feast then,| And that's most comely; thou art all a Feast,| And she that has thee, a most happy guest',<sup>xxxii</sup> and Congreve's *Love for Love* (1695) 'he should not stay for saying Grace...but fell to without the help of a Parson'.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Both lust and greed are 'sins of the flesh', and the fact that an early modern prostitute could be referred to as 'mutton' shows how greed for flesh to be eaten was conflated in some early modern minds with lust for human flesh.

As the seventeenth century drew to a close, the writer and singer Thomas D'Urfey satirically linked the Eucharistic and the sexual in *Collin's Walk Through London and Westminster* (1690), 'a farsical Entertainment against Popery for the Brethren' featuring the character of 'country Collin' who 'was all sects but that of Rome'.<sup>xxxiv</sup> D'Urfey evokes the trope of saying grace and 'falling to' a woman, echoing the Lord's Prayer in describing women as 'daily bread' and states that this is not to be parsed as a Catholic act of eating or worship, as he will not 'put Popish tricks upon her':

Woman, to them's a Dainty made,  
Which t'others is as daily Bread,  
Which makes us without more adoo,  
Say Grace and eagerly fall too;  
Besides, altho I make assault,  
Upon her Person, yet my fault  
Extends to no unnatural way,  
Like that to which Back-sliders stray:  
I'm for the Orthodox plain manner,  
Nor will put Popish Tricks upon her. (M7r)

D'Urfey deploys these interlocking images in a disturbingly predatory way. He speaks of 'mak[ing] assault| Upon her Person' and acknowledges that what he does is a 'fault' or sin, mitigated by the absence of religiously or sexually 'unorthodox' acts. An imaginary and material surface to be 'put...upon' by metaphors of eating, saying grace, and orthodox religion, the woman is presented as if at the mercy of the passage's governing tropes as well as being at the mercy of Collin himself.

The slippage between greed, lust, and an unorthodox Eucharist hovers in the background of *If This Be Not a Good Play*, as Shacklesoul connects lust with greed not just verbally (with his menu of sin) but visually. The subprior is the one character immune to Shacklesoul's grace. He states baldly (D1v) that Shacklesoul is 'some divel sent to bewitch our soules', a notion roundly opposed by the salivating friars. Unable to ensnare the subprior through greed, Shacklesoul tries a new tack, re-setting the table with a different kind of temptation: 'A table is set out with a candle burning, a death's head, a cloke and a crosse; Subprior sits reading:| Enter Shackle-soule, leading in an Italian zany, five or 6. Curtizans, every one holding a Jewell' (I3v). The congruence between

the feasting table and the table with the alluring courtesans is highlighted when the Zany blazons the courtesans, presenting them in a list as if they are ('dainty') dishes as varied and appetising as those found in Shacklesoul's greedy grace and his menu for Scumbroth. The list begins, 'Will you have a daintie girle? here tis:| Currall lippes, teeth of pearle: here tis:| Cherry checkes, softest flesh; that's shee...' and goes on to list the varied features of the courtesans (I3v). Sweetness and edible 'cherry' lips evoke gustatory pleasure, interacting with images of precious stones (coral and pearl) and visual and tactile imagery of softness, daintiness, and differing skin colours or complexions. Existing as it does as the latest in a series of appetising 'lists' in this play, it is hard not to read this blazon as (like Shacklesoul's grace and his description of what he will teach Scumbroth) a menu.

In *The Late Lancashire Witches*, insert themselves into the trope of female bodies as flesh to be hunted and (literally or metaphorically) consumed, and explode that trope by frustrating its greedy conclusion. They transform themselves into animals to confuse the hunt but vanish before they can be caught, disrupting what in this play is a masculine pastime; 'A Hare? a Witch or rather a Divell I think' complains Arthur as he describes the being he has been pursuing all morning (B1r). The theologian Norman Wirzba argued (2011) that eating (especially eating meat) entangles humans in Christian questions of sacrifice and dependency on God's bounty, 'a daily life and death drama'.<sup>xxxv</sup> Wirzba's description of the act of eating as 'drama' is fitting when considered alongside these early modern texts, but *The Late Lancashire Witches* explores a freedom from his conclusions in ways that share concerns with later feminist writers. Since Carol Adams published *The Sexual Politics of Meat* in 1990, several scholars have connected atheism, feminism, and the refusal to eat meat. For Kim Socha in *Animal Liberation and Atheism* (2014), liberation from Christianity and liberation from patriarchal dominance entail freedom from the 'drama of life and death' involved in the meat-based meal. Socha draws attention to the metaphor of Christ as shepherd that dominates Christianity and points out that a shepherd's ultimate aim is to strip his sheep of their wool and slaughter them for eating.<sup>xxxvi</sup> Disappearing from the hunt, creating intricate but disgusting feasts without labour, and stealing a bewitched feast, the Lancashire Witches enact this threefold freedom, even as they inhabit and subvert the link between consuming meat, consuming female flesh, and consuming women's time.

### **Conclusions**

Wirzba asks at the start of his study, (xviii) 'Will there be eating in heaven?'. The plays that we have examined suggest that there is definitely eating in hell, and moreover that eating can be the means to bring us *to* hell. As David Goodman shows, scriptural exegeses are divided over whether eating is a purely human activity or something that angels partake in. Noting that angels occasionally break dietary laws that humans keep, Goodman explains that eating has been also linked to humans' superiority over angels.<sup>xxxvii</sup> In early modern English literature, Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1674) perhaps takes the most explicit interest in heavenly appetites, refusing to equate eating solely with damnation. Whilst the fallen angels are tormented by the apples of Sodom, the good angels are able to eat and 'corporeal to incorporeal turn...and transubstantiate' their nourishment, whilst Adam enjoys 'pure digestion' before the Fall.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Fitzpatrick links this to what happens to Christ's body when eaten in communion, arguing that both *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* are underpinned by the 'notion of food as social and how it relates to Christ's hunger as a demonstration of his love for humankind' (57, 123).

What about our hunger? When plays were performed in inn-yards, audiences looked forward to a meal soon after the play. As theatregoers stood on the ex-monastic land of the Red Bull to watch *If This Be Not A Good Play*, or as we read the text, like Dekker's greedy friars we guzzle down the appetising words of the play. The link between text and food is not lost on early modern writers,<sup>xxxix</sup> from Rabelais comparing the reader in his Prologue to *Gargantua* to a dog with a juicy bone to Robert Heath's epigram 'To the Reader' (1650) explaining why he has no endorsements from other poets 'Why should a stranger at her feast say grace?'<sup>xl</sup> Reflecting on our approach to entertainment may provoke us to examine how close we come to evil during everyday activities.

- i Henry Bull, *Christian Prayers and Meditations* (London: R. Robinson, 1596), Z1r. Posthumously published; Bull died 1577. Susan Wabuda, 'Bull, Henry', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2008), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/3904> [accessed May 28 2019]. Henry Dixon's *Saying Grace Historically Considered* (Oxford: James Parker & Co, 1903) lists examples of grace, spanning centuries.
- ii 'Feasts the world over are given as celebrations of relationship among the diners, and also as expressions of order, knowledge, competence, sympathy, and consensus at least about important aspects of the value system that supports the group', Margaret Vissier, *The Rituals of Dinner* (London: Penguin, 2017 [1991]), 27.
- iii Michel Jeanneret, *A Feast of Words: Banquets and Table Talk in the Renaissance*, trans Jeremy Whiteley and Emma Hughes (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), 33.
- iv See Philip Almond, *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 20.
- v Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, trans. Odo Zimmermann (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2002 [1959]), 18.
- vi Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragical History of the life and death of Doctor Faustus* (London: for John Wright, 1616). D3r-D4r.
- vii Cf Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragical History of D. Faustus* (London: V.S., 1604), D2r.
- viii Anon, *A True and Particular Observation of a Notable Piece of Witchcraft* (1593), cited in Almond, *Demonic Possession*, 86.
- ix P.F., trans, *The Historie of the damnable life and deserved death of Doctor John Faustus* (London: Thomas Orwin, 1592), C4r .
- x William Mountfort, *The Life and Death of Dr Faustus Made into a Farce* (London: E Whitlock 1697), C3v-C4r.
- xi Thomas Dekker, *If It Be Not Good, The Diuel is in it* (London: for I.T., 1612), C4r. Copy in Bodleian archive; frontispiece lacking a printed date but bearing a handwritten '1613'; dated 1612 in online records. Throughout the article, I refer to the play by its alternative title, in which Dekker's joke seems clearer.
- xii Thomas Heywood, *A Pleasant Conceited Comedy* (London: for Matthew Lawe, 1602), G1v.
- xiii Peter Heylyn, *A Brief and Moderate Answer* (London: Ric. Hodgkinsonne, 1637), R3v-R4r.
- xiv David Calderwood, *A defence of our arguments against kneeling in the act of receiving the sacramentall elements of bread and wine* (Amsterdam: Giles Thorp, 1620), C4v .
- xv Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome, *The Late Lancashire Witches* (London: Thomas Harper, 1634), E4r.
- xvi Anon, MS Eng 2774, Bodleian Library Oxford, fol 126r.
- xvii Robert Cleaver, *A Codly [sic] Form of Household Government* (London: Thomas Creede, 1593), A3v.
- xviii William Perkins, *Christian Oeconomie* (London: Felix Kyngston, 1609), B2v.
- xix William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (London: George Miller, 1634), C1r .
- xx Pieter van Thiel, "Poor Parents, Rich Children" and "Family Saying Grace", *Simiolus* 17(2/3) (1987), pp. 90-149
- xxi Wayne Franits, "The Family Saying Grace: A Theme in Dutch Art", *Simiolus* 16(1) (1986), 36-49. Franits demonstrates that the idea of the family as a 'little church' was culturally widespread.
- xxii Sara Mueller, 'Banqueting and Women's Work in *The Late Lancashire Witches* and Receipt Books for Women', *SEL* 56(2) (2016) (373-93), 375.
- xxiii Joan Fitzpatrick, *A History of Food in Literature* (London: Routledge, 2017), 57.
- xxiv William Winstanley, *The Essex Champion* (London: for J Blare, 1697), E3v-E4r..
- xxv Stephen Jerome, *Seven Helpes to Heaven Showing* (London: [T Snodham, 1614), P3v .
- xxvi Timothy Kendall, *Flowers of Epigrammes* (London: [John Kingston], 1577), R7r .
- xxvii John Smith, *The doctrine of the Church of England* (London: for Rich. Chiswell, 1683), L2v.
- xxviii Anon, *The Academy of Pleasure* (London: for John Stafford, 1656), C10v.
- xxix John Cleveland, *Poems by JC with Additions* (London: s.n., 1651), ¶10r-v. 'The Antiplatonicke' also appears in Beaumont's 1653 *Poems*.
- xxx James Shirley, *The Constant Maid* (London: I Raworth, 1640), D4r.
- xxxi John Dryden, *An Evening's Love* (London: TN, 1671), G3r.
- xxxii Thomas Middleton, 'Women Beware Women', in *Two New Playes* (London: for Humphrey Moseley), H2r.
- xxxiii William Congreve, *Love for Love* (London: for Jacob Tonson, 1695), G3r.
- xxxiv Thomas D'Urfey, *Collin's Walk Through London and Westminster* (London: for Rich Murphy, 1690), C3v.
- xxxv Norman Wirzba, *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1-2.
- xxxvi Kim Socha, *Animal Liberation and Atheism* (Minnesota: Freethought House, 2014), 4.
- xxxvii David Goodman, 'Do Angels Eat?', *Journal of Jewish Studies* 37(2) (1986), (160-75), 162-3, 175.
- xxxviii John Milton, 'Paradise Lost', in R. Flanagan (ed.), *The Riverside Milton* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 5.434-9, 5.4
- xxxix A link explored recently in *Text, Food and the Early Modern Reader*, eds Andrew Zurcher and Jason Scott-Warren (London: Routledge, 2018).
- xl Robert Heath, 'Epigrams', *Claristella* (London: for Humphrey Mosley, 1650) [unsigned] '6'.