

Cooks, Cooking, and Food on the Early Modern Stage

Submitted by Sally Jane Templeman to the University of Exeter
as a thesis for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English
in February 2013

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Abstract

This project aims to take the investigation of food in early modern drama, in itself a relatively new field, in a new direction. It does this by shifting the critical focus from food-based metaphors to food-based properties and food-producing cook characters. This shift reveals exciting, unexpected, and hitherto unnoticed contexts. In *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Titus Andronicus*, which were written during William Shakespeare's inn-yard playhouse period, the playwright exploits these exceptionally aromatic venues in order to trigger site-specific responses to food-based scenes in these plays. Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* brings fair-appropriate gingerbread properties onstage. When we look beneath the surface of this food effect to its bread and wine ingredients, however, it reveals a subtext that satirizes the theory of transubstantiation. Jonson expands on this theme by using Ursula's cooking fire (a property staged in Jonson's representation of Smithfield's Bartholomew Fair) to engage with the prison narrative of Anne Askew, who was burned to death in front of Bartholomew Priory on the historic Smithfield for denying the doctrine of transubstantiation. This thesis also investigates water, which, for early moderns, was a complex and quasi-mystical liquid: it was a primary element, it washed sin from the world during the Great Flood, it was a marker of status, it was a medicine, and it was a cookery ingredient. Christopher Marlowe not only uses dirty water to humiliate his doomed monarch in *Edward II*, but he also uses it to apportion blame to the king for his own downfall. In *Timon of Athens*, Shakespeare draws on the theory of the elements to cast Timon as a man of water, who, Jesus-like, breaks up and divides (or splashes around) his body at his "last" supper. Fully-fledged cook characters were a relative rarity on the early modern stage. This project looks at two exceptions: Furnace in Philip Massinger's *A New*

Way to Pay Old Debts and the unnamed master cook in John Fletcher's *The Tragedy of Rollo, Duke of Normandy*. Both playwrights use their respective gastronomic geniuses to demonstrate the danger that lower-order expertise poses to the upper classes when society is in flux. Finally, this project demonstrates that a link existed between ornate domestic food effects and alchemy. It shows how Philip Massinger's *The Great Duke of Florence* and Thomas Middleton's *Women, Beware Women* use food properties associated with alchemy to satirize notions of perfection in their play-worlds.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the University of Exeter for supporting my application for AHRC funding and the AHRC for awarding it. Without this financial support, this thesis could not have been written. I am extremely grateful to my supervisor, Pascale Aebischer, for suggesting the topic of food in the first place and for her support, encouragement, and enthusiasm throughout the last three years. My thanks also go to Elliot Kendall for his advice and suggestions. For their help with proofreading and feedback, my thanks go to Lesley Crawford-Turner, Audrey Flynn, Alanna Skuse, and Pamela Whitehead. For his continuing belief in my ability to complete this project, I send a big hug and a huge thank you to my son, Oliver. Finally, my thanks go to my mother for stepping in with financial support when my funding ended. This thesis is dedicated, with love, to Oliver and my mother.

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