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## An Unexpected Journey “from the naves to the chops”: *Macbeth*, Animal Trade, and Theatrical Experience

**Abstract:** The paper proposes to appreciate the play’s butcheries as an incision into the unstable character of the category of the human. The vividness of the “strange images of death” is thus analysed with reference to the cultural poetics of Elizabethan theatre including its multifarious proximity to the bear-baiting arenas and execution scaffolds. The cluster of period’s cross-currents is subsequently expanded to incorporate the London shambles and its presumed resonance for the reception of *Macbeth*. Themes explored in the article magnify the relatedness between human and animals, underscore the porosity of the soon to turn modern paradigms and reflect upon the way Shakespeare might have played on their malleability in order to enhance the theatrical experience of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Finally, the questionable authority of Galenic anatomy in the pre-Cartesian era serves as a supplementary and highly speculative thread meant to suggest further research venues.

**Keywords:** *Macbeth*, posthumanism, early modern animal trade, historical phenomenology.

### Introduction

Time and time again Shakespeare comes across as our notorious presentist. We bring him to life in a deadlift-like manner snatching his works from the pre-arranged stillness, then for a moment we hold the burden of his plays close to ourselves only to put the weight of the Bard down again, somewhat abruptly, perhaps hoping the floor will shake a little. Striving at the greatest results possible we are ready to dare even the greatest tendon-ripping leaps.

If Jan Kott was correct in his assertion that *Hamlet* absorbed any contemporariness like a sponge, then in the time of well-deserved agency of the microbes the absorption should not remain a metaphorical one. Instead, we ought to appreciate the intricate processes behind bacterial composition. But the

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attempt to reconcile some hundred years old Shakespeare with the struggle to force-feed ourselves the humble pie of flat ontologies and other-than-human ethics does not bode well for the future of time-travelling and its anti-anachronistic terms and conditions of use. Perhaps not at first glance. As many early modern scholars remind us, the questions are in plenty—from a gentle breaking wheel interrogation of the straw Vitruvian Man (Raber X)<sup>1</sup> through fostering awareness of the “numerous lateral nonhuman actants that underpinned, informed, and sustained models of ‘the human’ in this period” (Ferrick, Nardizzi 4). And, as Campana and Maisano (8) remind us, these

gestures, neither erroneous nor outmoded, might be just the beginning of a conversation that leads, at least to our minds, to a larger conversation about what Renaissance humanism is, was, and could be in the future.

Additionally, much of what Campana and Maisano stand for in the discussion on Renaissance posthumanism—most importantly, perhaps, the urge to instigate a close reading of humanism removed from sweeping gestures of contemporary (also posthumanist) scholars—is also advocated by Margreta de Grazia in her *Hamlet without Hamlet* (2007). If there ever was a Shakespeare-made sponge affected by wet rot (to invoke Kott once again), causing the structure of the work to deteriorate (a promise of healthy and ecological transformation in itself), it has been probed by de Grazia whose seminal work delves into the well-nigh impervious critical coating applied to *Hamlet* over the centuries. Hamlet the proto-humanist, the Hamlet-in-all-of-us, Hamlet the romantic, or the prince and his opulent inwardness—all produce the repository of themes that envelop and determine our understanding to the point we deem it intrinsic to the play. While not denying the legacy of the play’s modern refractions de Grazia attempts at reconciling Shakespeare’s play with its initial reception and underscores the “importance of the realm to Hamlet [which] knits him into the fabric of the play” (2). Focusing then on the dispossession of the prince and the context of its sociohistorical discontents as well as Hamlet’s forced detachment from the land he was to inherit, de Grazia unsettles the iconolatry conferred on the play’s eponymous hero. Perhaps the scholar would oppose being included to the category of posthumanist thinkers, but I think there are at least two crucial aspects of her work that would warrant a warm invitation to the club: an unorthodox reading against the grain of critical monoliths and careful attention given to the material intersections between human and their land.

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<sup>1</sup> Rosi Braidotti (*The Posthuman*) has been accused of falling victim to such an oversimplification of the Renaissance period (Campana and Maisano). Although the scholar rightly advocates the need for subversive thinking, she does not see that subversive potential within the period she portrays as irrevocably humanist.

Certainly, Shakespearean criticism did not take an equally burdensome toll on *Macbeth*, but this essay attempts to reproduce that same “un-modernising” investigative mode de Grazia applies to the early modern stage when she denies Hamlet’s “free-standing autonomy” from *Hamlet* and thinks on those themes immediately recognisable to the Elizabethan audiences.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, the ambitions of posthumanism do not end with unorthodox attitudes to the solidified identities of different plays. There is an anti-telos to it all, a wish to produce an alternative foundation for the precepts and concepts of our reasoning. As Raber (3) puts it

[p]osthumanism instead requires a sea-change, a radical revision of the nature and purpose of the category of the human and of the discourses that constitute it.

The advocated theory does not, however, do away with the repository of tools forged by the anti-humanist theories<sup>3</sup> but it employs these tools to different ends. Although the older approaches—e.g. Marxism or feminism—had already set out to achieve more inclusive discourses, they rarely questioned the central position and the ways of producing the category of the human itself. Through posthumanist lenses Shakespeare’s plays present themselves as a vast rhizome of resonances which seems to award the Elizabethan playwright a different status all together. Together with his oeuvre, Shakespeare becomes this perfect storm for humanist surefootedness. Conflating various arguments for the Renaissance relevance to posthumanism Raber insists that

[p]rior to the disciplinary separation of science, political theory, religion and other ways of interpreting the world—before, that is Boyle and Hobbes, the figures Latour focuses on—the connections among human and non-human things could be a source of marvel at the rich interdependencies of life, or wonder at God’s great pattern for cosmos. Renaissance humanism did not (always) seek to extract humanity from the mesh beings in the world. (21)

Posthumanist readings of Shakespeare are not only a casefile of creative and ethically engaged interventionist analyses. More often than not the union of early modern studies and posthumanism requires the scholars to adhere to the

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<sup>2</sup> Andreas Höfele would add that: “Habitually entrapped by [the Cartesian dualism], in looking at Shakespearean animals we must take a step back, seeking to attune ourselves to a mode of thought prior to the rigid Cartesian segregation of man and beast, resisting the temptation to recognise falsely what we see in terms of our own preconceptions” (25).

<sup>3</sup> Raber invokes here the genealogy proposed by Rosi Braidotti: “Posthumanism, in Rosi Braidotti’s account, inherited the deconstruction of Man from the anti-humanist theories of the 1960s and 1970s” (3).

tenets of the archival and materialistic turns simultaneously allowing them to include objects or other-than-human animals to be actively engaged in the process of making history. In many cases posthumanist interpretations dislodge our presumptions and make us suffer this productive discomfort we are so quick to disregard for its ephemer(e)ality.

### **What Is at Stake—and What at the Scaffold**

Macbeth's famous butcheries of the opening of the play draw the blood-stained path for this paper. As I would like to argue both the historical phenomenology of the play's language and the stage props used in the production connect the audiences and facilitate their response not only to the scene, but also to the streets of London. The focus will be put on the meat shops spread across London and, more importantly, on their animal constituents. Macbeth's sword then sinks deep into the flesh(es) of early modern England's capital.

To help us orientate in this journey, the analysis will go through three interrelated stages. Stages one and two provide a topography for various material points of convergence between human and animal in order to facilitate the argument that the analysed occurrences reverberate back onto the stage when Macbeth plunges through the body of his victims.

The discussion is to a large extent inspired by the work of two early modern scholars. Andreas Höfele's *Stage, Stake and Scaffold* (2012) adapts a new historicist approach and analyses the materiality of the Elizabethan theatre venues, but with an animal twist. Considering the scope of malleabilities between various forms of stage entertainment (be it plays, bear-baiting or public executions), Höfele argues for the inevitable role-reversal between the anthropomorphised animal and bestialised human (12).

The second scholarly guide for this paper is Erica Fudge who supplies us with detailed knowledge about animals in the early modern period.<sup>4</sup> Presenting a great fluency of the archives and literary artefacts Fudge's research can be seen as the case in favour of the congruence between the posthumanist bend and the examining of the old documents and records. Adopting such a standpoint incentivises those handling the historical data to arrange the constellations of the archives in correspondence with the postanthropocentric ethics and vouch for a methodological turn-within-a-turn. Supplied by other essays on these topics, my hope will be to link Höfele's arguments with Fudge's

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<sup>4</sup> The vast corpus of Fudge's research on early modern animals fuels the assumptions of this paper from the very get-go. The limited scope of the article, however, did not allow me to delve further into the issues discussed by scholar, but I am greatly indebted to her work.

research in order to extend the human-animal reciprocity to the outside of the stage(s).

The third section will aim at transitioning the discussion towards far less tangible arguments. It might have caused some confusion to the people of 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries to discover that the anatomical knowledge they derived from the medical books of Galen was based on animal viscera. The porosity of the bodily categories in the pre-Cartesian era was perhaps unjustly simplified and dominated by the discourse of the descendent epoch of Enlightenment. In a recuperative act, I suggest that the variety of incisions (cutting the flesh of animal or human) in *Macbeth* not only points to the Renaissance conceptualisations of acquiring scientific knowledge, but also reveal a subversive absorbency of Shakespeare’s plays.

Many posthumanist thinkers urge us to invent new terms<sup>5</sup> to be able to grasp at these intricate issues more accurately while simultaneously reflecting upon their equivocality. Abiding by this incentive, I would like to reformulate the stakes of this paper by introducing a framework-term for the further discussion. *The grand mechanism of animal misery* is a rectification of the famous formula proposed by Jan Kott. Contrary to the argument of the Polish critic, this mechanism describes not the kings and tyrants, but the relentless slaughter of animals (mostly cattle) fuelling the pre-Capitalist economy of early modern London. Their silent misery shifts the focus of Kott’s nightmarish machine to the tragedies always already there to be followed and constituting the undercurrent of human brutality. The horror-like dream is also the very reality of the citizens tired of seeing the kine slaughtered, sick of the reek of the carcasses, encumbered by the preponderant animal physicality. Bloody flesh wounds, images of open bodies, cauldron full of human and animal limbs and skulls, wildlife feeding on wildlife and even the living dead body of Banquo adorning the table set with carnivore delicacies—all these elements of *Macbeth* may be seen to have been organised around this repulsive potential.

Anticipating some critical remarks, it has to be stated that the article offers first and foremost a mere run-up to proper and original research. As far as *Macbeth* is here concerned, my main argument for focusing almost solely on this play is the idea that the lines initiating the play perhaps resonate with the hurly-

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<sup>5</sup> As Rosi Braidotti (104) claims: “This posthuman and post-anthropocentric sensibility, which draws on deep affective as well as intellectual resources, also expresses my rejection of the principle of adequation to the *doxa*, or commonly received normative image of thought. The posthuman predicament, in both the post-humanist and the post-anthropocentric sense of the term, drives home the idea that the activity of thinking needs to be experimental and even transgressive in combining critique with creativity.” A great example of fulfilling that posthumanist tenet is Andrzej Marzec’s *Antropocien* [Anthroposhade], Warszawa: PWN 2019. See also Patryk Szaj’s review: <https://czaskultura.pl/artykul/myslenie-rzeczy/> [Accessed 22 June 2021].

burly of the street life the audience had experienced prior to arriving at the theatre. All the offshoots of early modern thought and cultural materialisms presented *via* the works of other scholars serve to facilitate the methodological eclecticism—itself a reflection of the tenets of posthumanist analysis.

### **Porousness and Proximity of the Elizabethan Stage**

Macbeth humiliates his victims, there is no knight-like humbleness to his executions, only gore and blood. The future Thane of Cawdor tramples on the lifeless trunks and carves his way through the tendinous fabric of human flesh. These murders are pure kill and we observe them through the messenger who retells the story—the story that quite ironically never takes place on stage. But the blood welters through the scene. Reminding of the talking wounds of Shakespeare's Roman plays, the maimed Captain becomes a semiotic vessel for the victim and the sole survivor of the grim tale of Macbeth's deeds, its hero and the disdained.

Let us begin with the theatre facilities. As evidenced by Höfele (1-12), the 16<sup>th</sup> century theatres along with bear-baiting arenas, brothels and places of public execution were venues that organised the city's underbelly.<sup>6</sup> The German Shakespearean shows that the same stages that hosted Richard Burbage's roles had also given room to bears, mastiffs and bulls thanks to its malleable construction (7). Within such a cauldron of different forms of entertainment there brewed

the vital spillover (semantic, but also performative, emotive, visceral) from the bear-garden and the scaffolds of execution [which] substantially affects the way Shakespeare models his human characters and his conception of 'human character.' (3)

Höfele's intuition led him to claim that this unique proximity between the stages provokes an interconnectedness of affects. The scholar explicates this argument further by invoking Yuri Lotman's "semiosphere" within which there occurs a porous mutuality among the three forms of entertainment.<sup>7</sup> The porosity of that sphere allows, as I would like to argue, for other affects to enter the stage, too. It is the glut of animals in the streets of London which will be put in focus here. Of course, the early modern meat trade cannot be straightforwardly added as

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<sup>6</sup> Höfele draws here of course on the Foucault's study in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975).

<sup>7</sup> As Höfele later points out, the lessons from Foucault's *The Order of Things* (1970) should also be acknowledged here: "[...] as a habit of thinking, the forming of analogies remained ubiquitous in all areas of early modern culture" (Höfele 14).

a fourth compartment to Höfele’s equation. But I would like to propose that the animals and the different ways people interacted with them provide the undeniable reservoir of everyday experiences that might have enhanced the semiotic colloquy Höfele argues for. I believe that the proximity of the semiosphere to the biosphere offers here a proximity too compelling to just leave it be.

Bleeding from the guts, perhaps the messenger himself only narrowly escaped the faith of that Scottish traitor cut open by the tyrant *in spe*. The cover of Jonathan Sawday’s *The Body Emblazoned* (1996) presents a trunk of a cow carved and tied to a wooden pole. With its belly gaping and the front legs spread horizontally, the heifer in the image seethes with arrested violence, but its open wide carcass also tempts us to peer inside, seize the opportunity we are denied when staring into the mirror.

Could a picture similar to that of a dead cow accompany the Elizabethan playgoers when they heard of the valiant cousin’s deeds? Could it be associated with the objectifying, bestialising power of gore? Did the bodies of slaughtered cattle allow the early modern audiences to view *Macbeth* (and perhaps other plays, too) differently? Can we reach outside the stage and into the streets of the capital and witness there not baiting and mangling, but butchering and decay? Anticipating Höfele’s brilliant observations, I would like to add another source of the semiotic interrelatedness, namely the butchered carcasses of dead cattle to be found in London marketplaces and abattoirs.

Höfele argues that the conceptualisation of the theatre by the Elizabethan playgoer was altered by the interrelatedness (intermediality)<sup>8</sup> of the stage, stake and scaffold. But the thought process he presents his readers to support the argument is itself porous, inviting other “physical and cultural environments” to the sphere of reciprocal influences:

The blood rituals of baiting and criminal justice would inevitably be part of [the playwrights’] physical and cultural environment and thus be incorporated in the store of every day experiences that their imagination drew on. (14)

In that case, the perception of the audience could be seen as ever moulding and attuned to the variable amalgams of “endlessly fungible signifiers” (Höfele 46). Ian F. MacInnes puts forward a similar observation and suggests that the animal network of early modern England

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<sup>8</sup> “With the print revolution making an ever larger impact and the Theatre being reinvented as professional entertainment and pervasive cultural model there was a proportionate increase in the possible cross-currents between various components of this early modern media landscape” (Höfele 14).

came to shape the country and particularly its capital city, not only economically and materially but imaginatively as well. (77)

MacInnes who traced the routes of cattle trains by i.a. scrutinizing the Map of Early Modern London (MoEML)<sup>9</sup> makes a great case for the capital as the nucleus of the agricultural system of England where the large consummation of animal-derived goods governed the ever-changing attitudes towards non-human sentient beings. The scholar discerns four economy-related modes of correlation between humans and animals, starting with “generation, through transportation, processing, and consumption” (77). Similarly to the purpose of this paper, MacInnes also argues that this kind of cross-examination

allows us to see how its logic both underlies and causes the kind of persistently animal-centered textual discourse that has become so familiar to us in Shakespeare and others. (78)

In the next section I want to explore further the relevant processes of animal appropriation discerned by MacInnes and also bring the discussion closer to the archival research on animals as well as to some thought-provoking suggestions on Shakespeare’s embeddedness in the early modern animal trade proposed by Katherine Duncan-Jones.

### **The Images of Death We Live (Near)By**

This “fruitful cross-pollination” (Ferrick & Nardizzi 5) between the domains of early modern animal trade and various forms of entertainment was also noticed by Katherine Duncan-Jones, though perhaps in a more speculative manner. Following John Aubrey’s moderately plausible reminiscence about John Shakespeare the butcher and his son exercising the father’s trade—“[who] when he kill’d a Calfe, he would do it in a *high style*, & make a Speech” (qtd. in Duncan-Jones 183, italicised in the original)—the British Shakespearean discerns a potential connection between Berger’s anecdote and what Samuel Schoenbaum later called

an obscurely disguised recollection of the boy Shakespeare taking part—with basin, carpet, horns and butcher’s knife and apron—in the Christmas mumming play of the killing of the calf. (qtd. in Duncan-Jones 183)

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<sup>9</sup> <https://mapoflondon.uvic.ca> [Accessed 21 June 2021].



The props were there to create an illusion, perhaps symbolically invoking the return of the Prodigal Son, a theme eagerly elaborated by artists (playwrights and painters) in the Tudor era and alluded to in several Shakespeare’s plays (Duncan-Jones 184). Importantly for us, however, Duncan-Jones extracts from Schoenbaum’s claim several threads that pertain to the matter at hand: the material relationship of whittawers and butchers to the early modern theatre, the distinctions between the two trades as well as the “images of butchery and calf-killing in Shakespeare’s plays” (184).

Pointing to the healthy relationship between whittawers and butchers, Duncan-Jones (185) proposes that the Shakespeare kids were accustomed to the sight of slaughterhouses, but the acquaintance with animal slaughter and the processing of their bodies would also be promoted by folklore romances and other forms of local drama Shakespeare himself might have taken part in (188). Setting aside the theory behind young Will’s career path,<sup>10</sup> Duncan-Jones contemplates further the extent to which Shakespeare’s know-how of the leather trade might have influenced the content of his plays.<sup>11</sup> It is when the scholar considers a passage from 3:1 of *2 Henry VI*<sup>12</sup> that she comes to a riveting conclusion:

The simile [between the old Gloucester and a calf] is clearly calculated to tug at the heart strings of audiences who, whether they lived in town or country, were

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<sup>10</sup> It seems only natural for Duncan-Jones to further hypothesise that young William was drawn to the procedures of treating animal skins and perhaps also helped produce props for the different pageants. Moreover, accustomed to Warwickshire folklore, he would, according to Duncan-Jones’ hunch, acquaint himself with the local romance hero: Guy of Warwick, a medieval chevalier tasked with the slaughter of a mad cow (187). Perhaps Shakespeare might have even enacted the Guy and carried with him all the way to London the ill repute of a “killcow” from Warwickshire, one that Thomas Nashe scorns for “swaggering eloquence” in the preface of Greene’s *Menaphon* (1589).

<sup>11</sup> Duncan-Jones’s point of departure here is the biography by E. I. Fripp, *Shakespeare: Man and Artist*, London, 1938. The scholar goes on to list calf-related metaphors scattered in several Shakespeare’s plays, e.g. *King John* and *Hamlet*. The topic of the influence of craftsmanship on the early modern poetics is by MacInnes as well: “... during the sixteenth century, over 20% of the population of cities like Northampton and Chester worked in the leather trade. These processes were not neutral; they acted powerfully and persuasively upon people’s imagination. Each different stage in animal encounters, from generation through transportation, processing, and consumption, acted as a slightly differently form of persuasion” (78).

<sup>12</sup> “[...] as the butcher takes away the calf,/ And binds the wretch, and beat sit when it strains,/ Bearing it to the bloody slaughter-house;/ Even so, remorseless, have they borne him hence;/ And as the dam runs lowing up and down,/ Looking the way her harmless young one went,/ And can do nought but wail her darling’s loss;/ Even so myself bewails good Gloucester’s case [...]”

deeply familiar with the sight of calves being led off to slaughter—a sight from which modern farming methods protect almost all of us today. (191)

This leads the scholar to set the scene proper—outside the theatre:

There were several extensive arrays of butchers' stalls with 'shambles' just behind, for instance in Mountgodard Street, only a few yards north of St Paul's. Although, or because, the spectacle of animal slaughter was so hard to avoid, early moderns detested it. The great martyrologist John Foxe,<sup>13</sup> for instance, wrote in 1548 that he could not pass near to a slaughterhouse 'but that my mind recoils with a feeling of pain.' (192, extension mine)

MacInnes too extrapolates the same passage from *2 Henry VI* and delves into the likely response of the audience:

The easy mixture of pathos and sympathy in the passage also suggests that the audience would have been prepared not only to authenticate the event through repeated experience, but to acknowledge that the animal stories played out on their streets were parallels to their own experience. (84)<sup>14</sup>

I would like to steep my reading of *Macbeth's* initial parts—so utterly permeated by butcher-like gore—in the image of London prompted by the observations of Duncan-Jones and MacInnes. Combining their reflections allows to see a spectrum of animal-induced responses: from pity to loathing with arguably a great variety of emotions in-between. Both scholars, moreover, acknowledge the importance of traffic—a term which when brought into the posthumanist paradigm must resonate with all its meanings.

An observation which may remain in accord with this discussion is the one proposed by Derrida in his famous essay on animality. The philosopher presents a discrepancy between *being* and *following* which constitutes the axis of his argument. Human being is subsumed under the act of following the animal. To tread on its heels is an accidental effort of relocation, a transposal that brings human to “the confines of man” (372) and forces him to traverse the boundaries “between man and animal” (372). This ontological translation of sorts is not unprecedented in Shakespeare. As Höfele rightly points out (35), although the case of *Dream's* Bottom may be the starkest case of that transition, “it also

<sup>13</sup> Another early modern man of letters to pity the non-human animals was Thomas Dekker. See Höfele 59-60.

<sup>14</sup> Höfele would perhaps second these observations: “And while the stage cannot remain untainted by its messy company [of stake and scaffold], this very taintedness, this being-close-to the renting, tearing, and killing, also offers a unique platform for mobilizing resistance to it, for evoking sympathy for the suffering fellow creature” (38).

captures the irreducible doubleness characteristic of that traffic in general” (35). The “human-animal border traffic” (Höfele 35) in early modern London would then consist of the trade, transport, congestion as well as the act of Derridean following.

Importantly, it is not only the ordinariness of the outside animal encounters that underwrites the spectacles. The animals pushed through the ontological boundaries from inside the playhouses too. In a synecdochic gesture their objectified and very much material presence provided for the spectators a multi-sensory experience. Blood, for instance, becomes an obvious source of preponderant onstage animality as it in some circumstances was obtained from sheep or calves (Munro 79-80). Along with other animal-made-objects it must have constituted a potent reminder of human-animal proximity:

Stage blood addresses the eye and, if animal blood was used, the nose, while a consistently developed rhetoric of blood addresses the ear; together, they create a multi-sensory impression of violence and bloodshed. (Munro 84)

The intensity of question that initiated Jan Kott’s response to *Macbeth*—Duncan’s famous “What bloody man is that?” (1:2:1)—expresses itself then not simply in the figure of a dying soldier, but also in the stark smell of animal blood, increasing the rankness of “filthy air” polluted by manure reeking squibs probably used in the “thunder and lightning” sequence that initiates *Macbeth*.<sup>15</sup> By extension, the bleeding Captain’s “plight” becomes the memento of the non-human sentient creatures that bled at least twice now for the sake of human.

However, not every single staging of *Macbeth*’s second scene would have smelled of abattoir as blood was also derived from other substances like e.g. paint, vinegar, vermilion or ink (Munro 80-81). As Munro (80) additionally observes, stage blood (of whatever source) was hard to obtain and even harder to exploit economically. It might be a topic worth further consideration whether the story told by Captain in *Macbeth*’s opening is a deliberate choice Shakespeare made negotiating the budget of the play as the intensity of gore would have cost the company too much if it was to be staged with heed to each of *Macbeth*’s lacerations.

Nonetheless, the layering of subsequent odours reeking of a dead animal would still manifest itself due to the taint of tallow candles that was

unavoidable in a variety of indoor contexts and contributed ironic depth to the metaphor of the candle as human life, as in *Macbeth*’s “Out, out brief candle! Life’s but a walking shadow.” (MacInnes 86)

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<sup>15</sup> See Jonathan Gil-Harris 2007.

Macbeth's cut, then, the way he unseamed his foe "from the nave to th' chops" (1:2:22)<sup>16</sup> becomes densely saturated with the faith of the animal actants touring the London semiosphere.

The scene usurps once more the multi-sensory tangibility of the stage blood. If there ever was any sympathy to be derived from the *Henry VI* despairing scenes of cows having their calves snatched from them by a human with a cutter, perhaps Macbeth's hacks and slashes might have been the moments of a regressive "bestialisation" of the human body. In that scenario, the everyday encounters of cattle-slaughter and the animal-made-objects (stage blood and tallow candles) would all have shattered the otherwise stubborn anthropomorphism and collapsed the binary gap. As suggested above, the view and the reek of the "unseamed" trunks of cattle<sup>17</sup> could appear to the Elizabethan playgoers as *the* visualisation at hand—arguably much more contiguous, notorious and manifest than those with its origins in bear-baiting arenas or at the scaffold.<sup>18</sup> This is not to say, however, that the image from the London street erase the one invoked on in the bear-garden—to borrow again from Höfele discussing the intermediality of early modern performance:

Rather than effacing their difference, the effect could be described as double vision or *synopsis*, in the literal sense of 'seeing together', of superimposing one image upon the other. What spectators perceived as human or as animal no longer exists in clear-cut separation; it occupies a border zone of blurring distinction where the animal becomes uncannily familiar and the human disturbingly strange. (14)<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Höfele too notices the borderline aporia of categories in the play's second scene. When discussing the "dagger of the mind" speech, he additionally notices that Macbeth "is trying to become an unconscious doer of deeds, which is how we first encounter him in the battle of the 'bloody man' in scene ii, where the grammatical confusion about who unseams whom 'from the nave to th' chops' bestializes both the celebrated butcher and his quarry" (57). As my focus stays with the "quarry," Höfele goes on to investigate Macbeth's collapse into "total bestialisation" (58).

<sup>17</sup> Referring here again to the cover of Jonathan Sawday's *The Body Emblazoned*.

<sup>18</sup> That spectrum is addressed by Erica Fudge in her chapter "Saying Nothing Concerning the Same: On Dominion, Purity, and Meat in Early Modern England". See below.

<sup>19</sup> Höfele provides here an image of two synoptic physiognomies: of a bull and a man. See Höfele 16. Later in the discussion on *Macbeth* Höfele adds on this note: "Such border-crossing is at the core of the play's insistent questioning of the human. It surfaces in those instances where terms are shifted across the species boundary, for example, in Lady Macbeth's remark about the messenger [...] Or when the First Murderer's assertion, 'We are men, my liege', triggers Macbeth's casual slip into a taxonomy of dogs whose inflationary differentiation of canines elides the much more momentous difference between dog and man" (53).

Like a gavel, the truncated lines of the Witches (1:2:69-70) seem to corroborate the association of Macbeth’s axe-dancing with those chops one may witness at the abattoir:

- 1 Witch: Where has thou been, sister?  
 2 Witch: Killing swine.

The laceration of people’s bodies would caricature the unnerving proximity between animal and human viscera. And what Ross calls the stuporous “Strange images of death” (1:3:88) could be an ill-boding sign of the strangest and most profound death image in the play. Strange but simultaneously inducing further uncanny occurrences, the murder of Duncan is precipitated by the sequence of butcheries that in consequence trivialises the very body politic of Scotland itself. The human-animal entanglement magnifies the very moment of unsettling the play’s recurrently threatened equilibrium, the “breach in nature/ For ruin’s wasteful entrance” (2:3:114-115).

Duncan’s murder trembles of the previous murders and the assumed juxtaposition of his corpse to the animal carcass echoes the paper’s main argument. Certainly, in this context Susan Zimmerman’s description of *Macbeth* as the play “obsessed with the *uncategorizable*, the marginal, the in-between” (339) strikes already familiar chords, but it is the scholar’s central line of reasoning that awards a new resonance to Duncan’s unresolvable embeddedness in the human-animal conundrum. In her essay, Zimmerman argues i.a. that Duncan’s corpse is a potent actant that serve “as a composite image for the representation of gender indeterminacy in both *Macbeth* and *Lady Macbeth*” (339). Moreover, its absence recites the theological tensions between the advocates and opponents of the agency of the dead (Zimmerman 342). Far from denying the power of the corpse proposed by Zimmerman, I want to see Duncan’s dead body as equally potent corpse of contention for the liminality between humans and animals. To “question this most bloody piece of work” (2:3:129) would mean to show its absent-presence at work with the most ubiquitous remains available in London—that of kine, sheep and swine.

### “‘Tis said they eat each other”

In a chapter from a great collection of essays on *Renaissance Beasts*, Fudge states that contrary to our beliefs and habits, meat eating in early modern England was not warranted by the absence of the dead animal. In fact, killing them was part and parcel of everyday life of most of the citizens, much like in the rural areas (Fudge, *Dominion* 74).

Fudge examines the early modern meat eating from several standpoints. Deeply embedded in the theology of Reformation, eating meat was a *memento*

*mori*, a humiliation of the human forced to chew on the dead in order to remind oneself of the inevitable role reversal. However, it was not just a plain case of sackcloth and ashes as the consumption of meat was a sign of God-like, although earth-bound, dominion over the other-than-human animals (Fudge, *Dominion* 75).

There are at least three moments in *Macbeth* where the case of human carnivores may seem ambiguous. The, perhaps, all-too-eagerly discussed opening lines from 1:2 about Macbeth's "carv[ing] his passage" is both a well devised visual metaphor as well as an image that would strike another butchery note.<sup>20</sup> However, it is in the light of Shakespeare's earlier play that these words acquire an antithetical quality. In *Julius Caesar* Brutus urges his fellows to "Carve [Caesar] as a dish fit for the gods, / Not hew him as a carcass fit for hounds" (2:1:171-2). Besides noticing that the murderous act in both plays requires a great degree of industriousness, the Roman carving allows us to discern between the attitudes towards carcass and human cadaver. But though full of finesse it may be, Macbeth again collapses the two categories by carving not a splendid dish, but passages in the Scottish traitors and their treacherous allies. In fact we might presume that most of Macbeth's kills make one think precisely of hewing the carcass. As Lennox and another gentleman discuss the recent news, the former observes that "In pious rage, the two delinquents [Macbeth did] tear" (3:6:13). Tearing not only strikes resemblance with dismembering, but it would also perhaps allow the playgoers to travel through the semiosphere towards the bear-baiting arenas and their brutal spectacles.

The two men in 3:6 also talk about restoring piece to the land and the Lord's hopeful vision is put into quite peculiar words. He longs to the moment when nobles will again be able to "give to our tables meat, sleep to our nights" (3:6:34). The sense of order, when unsettled by Duncan's murder, unhinges the symbolical human command of animal flesh conventionally replayed at the meal table as well as the repentant *memento mori* of chewing the very meat one is inevitably going to become (Fudge, *Dominion* 77). Fudge argues further that eating meat complicates the human status as it constitutes another unstable semiotic reservoir. The tools available to the early moderns were necessary for establishing dominion over non-human animals, but simultaneously they betrayed its imperfect construction (77). The Lord's wish to restore order is a somewhat partial evidence for just that divulgence. It is the juxtaposition between sleep and meat as the respective *sine qua nons* of "nights" and "tables" that shows the significance of proper feast food for achieving social equanimity. Following once more Fudge's reasoning, the scholar asserts that "human status is not a given, constant thing but is something that entails certain conditions to be met and that, by extension, can be lost if those conditions are not met" (81).

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<sup>20</sup> For further explication on early modern "life cooking" see Fudge *Dominion* 75-78.

Staying with meat consumption, Shakespeare presents in *Macbeth* another take on feasting, this time, however, hell breaks loose as the animals themselves are shown to be astray within their natural configurations. In the dialogue between Ross and Old Man there comes up the topics of night that “trifles former knowings” (2:4:3), the owl that killed the falcon (2:4:10-13) and the dead king’s horses that “would / Make war with mankind” (2:4:17-18) and kill each other in a cannibalistic act (2:4:19).<sup>21</sup> The equine cannibals verge on the play’s supernatural, but the eeriness of the act lies primarily in that the horses simultaneously commemorate Duncan (they will not serve Macbeth or his noblemen) and fend off (literally and conceptually) their subservient role. “Contending ‘gainst obedience” (2:4:17) they establish an impenetrable opacity that lurks beneath the structure of the category of the human.

This obscurity anticipates the events of the banquet scene where noblemen gather around the table rich and plentiful with meat. Banquo’s blood carried onto the stage on the murderer’s face signifies his absence among the feasters and the mention of his sliced throat perhaps finds its signifiers among the platters. “[T]he sauce to meat” may well be “ceremony” (3:4:33-34), but the meeting is steeped in blood rather than any pre-eminent sign of courtliness. After entering the stage Banquo is a butchered slab of meat seating at the table, a palimpsestic flesh multiplying the meaning of the “you are what you eat” proverb. The carcass-spitting graves certainly constitutes a dramatic metaphor for Macbeth’s delusion (3:4:68-70), but it seems fitting to imagine here that Banquo’s reeking wounds smell of an abattoir where kine and swine hang open and spread the uncontainable rot. Significant is also the faith Macbeth puts in the “maws of kites” (3:4:70) to solve the issue of the excess number of guests at the feast as if the birds of prey may succeed in what the feasters are unable to accomplish by peacefully resorting to their meal.

### Instead of a Conclusion

Following the evidence of the findings discussed above, I suggest we might reformulate the resonance pattern famously asserted by Greenblatt in *Will in the World* that “what principally excited Shakespeare’s imagination about London were its more sinister or disturbing aspects” (167). If the pikes garnished with lifeless heads of state criminals whispered their wicked charms to Shakespeare’s ear and inspired a reflection upon the brutality of the early modern England, I think that the ubiquitous presence of kine and other animals in London made

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<sup>21</sup> Apparently, eating horse meat was considered as a disgusting act. As Fudge states: “There are limits to the dominion of the meal table: horses exist on side of a conceptual boundary where they, alongside certain other animals, are not for consumption” (78).

manifest through the routes of animal trade and the stench of animals and their carcasses can all be seen as aspects of London's "sinister or disturbing" especially when viewed against the instability of the category of the human.

Moreover, as I have tried to show, in bestialising the bodies of his foes Macbeth becomes the "dismemberer of all values and order" (Fudge, *Dominion* 85).<sup>22</sup> Pointing not only to the practice of butchers, but perhaps also to the methods the doctors were undertaking with growing interest, dissecting designated the early modern concept of acquiring knowledge. The way that the bodily paradigms fluctuated may further remind one of a tectonic shift causing a sense of instability and tossing the dogmas of previous decades into the newly formed crevices. These holes soon turned into chasms which grew only wider as the once unwavering ideal of Galenic body collapsed. The need to redeem the body from ontological and epistemological uncertainties grew as the Cartesian turn was approaching with its dualistic conclusions. The inside/outside and body/mind dichotomies can be thus seen to form firm boundaries able to help regain control over what the body is and what it is not. And yet, these categories are not stable either.

"Go get him surgeons" (1:2:43) says Duncan after the dying soldier cannot speak more. Thus, Shakespeare established a parenthetical medical framework for the play (Tomaszewski 186-189). In this light, the openings Macbeth makes in the bodies of the enemy soldiers is a daring vivisection and Shakespeare might have well seized the opportunity to infuse Macbeth's cuts not only with the pervasive images of animal slaughter, but also the scientific conflict that arose in the background, namely the clash between Galenic medicine and Vesalius' revolution. The latter famously revealed the faults of the ancient medic—the Greek speaking Roman dissected animals not humans so the images early moderns absorbed would not present the structure of their bodies. Unknowingly then, for a certain time they imagined themselves as being built like animals, animals dressed in human façade.

Not an absent-presence, but a haunting presence of the two kinds of incisions—the butcher's cut and the anatomist knife, the latter appearing at "the playhouses of organized violence" (Sawday ix), and possibly adding another component to Höfele's intermedial repertoire. The one performed unabatedly on animals, the other more and more daring, troubling the previously established taboos of trespassing the materiality of human corpus. The approximation of the two sharp flesh-intrusions underscores the anti-essentialist standpoint of posthumanist theories and presents instead a fragmented tissue of early modern London sociopsychology.

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<sup>22</sup> The phrase serves Fudge to describe Titus Andronicus and refers to the revenge he exercised against Tamora.



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