

## THE SAUCE TO MEAT IS CEREMONY: CANNIBALISM AND HOSPITALITY SERVE AS HORROR AND CULTURE TROPES IN HANNIBAL AND MACBETH

This paper will place focus on Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in relation to horror cinema and television, with a particular focus the horror TV show *Hannibal* (2013-2017), to establish how valuable horror really is, as it is explored in, arguably, the best written works in human history – Shakespeare's plays. Specifically, horror tropes of food, feasting, cannibalism, and hospitality that have become so ubiquitous in the genre. As horror becomes more and more popular and well regarded/critically praised as an artform in the last decade, bringing in Shakespeare into this horror conversation is profoundly valuable.

It's hard enough to get younger and younger generations to read or learn Shakespeare, let alone show them how Shakespeare is universally relevant on so many levels and in so many aspects of art and life, and so showcasing his work as a part of the horror genre could potentially reintroduce him in a way that would appeal to young and old alike, sparking that much more interest in what this researcher considers one of the most important artifacts of literature, art, and psychological explorations ever created.

When considering how relevant Shakespeare really is to these times, and how universal, placing him next to the horror genre is the highest of compliments, and places his work among others that have defined generational issues that are both cyclical and new, as they are encountered in different ways. Hutchings, who speaks of the adaptation of Shakespeare to films such as *Titus* (1999) and *Hamlet* (1996), makes a valuable point when he writes that viewing any piece of art in a certain category (such as horror), is important, because "...it can give a more nuanced and grounded account of that film than simply viewing it as a zeitgeist expression of the times. Such an approach can potentially also offer a more revealing and meaningful historical engagement with the film than an approach that places it in a long line of *Macbeth* adaptations, thus necessarily prioritizing the idea of the film as a version of an original theatrical source rather than as a distinctive text in its own right." He cements the value of calling a flower by its name when he continues to argue that "Similarly, *Titus* and *Hamlet*'s forays into the representational territory claimed by horror direct our attention away from Shakespeare as a point of origin and instead encourage us to focus on a more immediate context, one that is characterized by specific genre formations and cultural relations (163)."

Naming Shakespeare's plays like *Macbeth* as part of the horror universe gives him more credit, more power, because it provides him with an unwavering spectrum, or sandbox with which to be viewed and adapted into television, film, other pays, or any other form of art. The title of horror writer also connects him to 2025 in a way that "historical genius" never could. That is a crown he will always wear. Yet, the horror wreath is applicable, wide, ever changing, and reels in the crowds – and potentially – a new generation of learners to gobble up the pie that Shakespeare is serving (sans ground up humans, one hopes).

### FOOD GONE BAD

When considering food as a horror trope, there are the obvious connotations, such as rotten or spoiled food, which is hinted at right at the beginning of *Macbeth* by the three witches. These three "unnatural" beings open the play, which the crowds in Elizabethan times would immediately recognize as "evil." Shakespeare was sending a clear message that this was not going to be a rollicking comedy, but instead, a tragedy, by utilizing these character's prophecies and incantations as a sign to what is to come. Each time they appear reveals another level of their terrifying powers, along with their use of human organs/animals in a cauldron to make their schemes a reality.

They begin with one of the play's most infamous lines: "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (1.1.13). As a word, "foul" is often used to describe the smell of food going bad. In addition, the witches deal with the preparation of "food," which in a natural setting would be an act of nourishment, but in this context, it twists and contorts all that is natural, and even changes fate. To continue their love of special ingredients in their potions, in Act 1 Scene 3 they are talking about killing swine to eat them, and one of the sisters rejoices in finding a human thumb.

In their last scene the witch's appearance is perhaps the most disturbing, and unapologetically stomach churning. In Act 4 Scene 1 we get one of the most common and universally abhorred horror tropes of all, cannibalism. To the potion they are making with the goddess Hecate, they add: "...a blaspheming Jew's liver, a Turk's nose, a Tartar's lips, and a finger of a birth strangled babe." (4.1.4-30)

Our titular hero, however, takes his time to enter the stage - nearly three scenes. The witches hail him, but vanish before he manages to get answers from them regarding their predictions. Even though his best buddy Banquo doubts they were even there "Or have we eaten on the insane root that takes the reason prisoner?" (1.3.88), connecting food to madness as if foreshadowing the play's events - Macbeth doesn't blink and begins thinking of their prophecy at once. As if he, and the unnatural, are already connected, he does not doubt what others would fear. When both realize that the witch's prophecy seems true, Banquo still calls them "devils" and "instruments of darkness," warning his friend Macbeth. It's no use; Macbeth is hooked. It's the beginning of the end - and the play has barely begun.

It's easy for us to accept that witches eat babies and control destiny, because a being that can control nature would be capable of anything. We accept the cannibalism and other bizarre and mythical acts because witches are part of that unnatural force. They serve as a mirror to Macbeth because he and his wife do awful things as well, breaking the natural law by killing the King (and other innocents), yet they are very much human.

While Shakespeare does not explicitly state that it is their potions and plotting that make things happen in the play - such as Macbeth's hallucinations, they control the fates of all involved to make their prophecies come to life. They do so by ending the lives of so many using magic and morbid spells. The Elizabethan audience always correlated the unnatural to evil, and so bringing in these characters as the ushers to the play is a brilliant framing device, for this play, dealing with the most unnatural act of their time - regicide.

The Elizabethan audience may have had the privilege of watching these plays soon after they were written by the Bard, but there's a reason that Macbeth and the witches are still discussed, dissected and analysed to this day. We love witches (*Bewitched on TV and film, Practical Magic, Hocus Pocus, Blair Witch, Charmed, The Witch*), and we love food (*Julie & Julia, Chef, Burnt, Sausage Party, Boiling Point*). Consider popular culture and its deep obsession with what is called "food porn," which includes everything from supposed low-brow culinary competitions (*Is It Cake?*) to the most high-brow of shows with gourmet, astonishing works of art made using food (*Iron Chef*). And of course, there is the Cooking Channel and the Food Network with the entire spectrum on display.

Just like "food porn," there is a similar genre in horror, though not yet given a specific name, as it translates in different ways. For example, food can be showcased in relation to class, wealth and consumerism in horror films such as *The Menu* (2022). Or, it can be used with cannibalism to showcase feminist ideals in a horror film such as *Raw* (2016). Even in the wildly successful TV show *Squid Game* (2021-), which is not about food, in both seasons the players erupt into chaos and murder right after they are given (and denied) food, using broken bottles (season 1) and forks (season 2) to kill in the most violent of ways.

It seems food and horror cannot manage to untangle themselves from one another.

## HUMANE MONSTERS

A similar delay in meeting our (anti)hero occurs in *Hannibal*'s first episode. We as viewers must wait over 20 minutes to meet the infamous cannibal, and while we wait, we view countless horrors that the FBI is investigating. We follow Dr. Lecter's soon-to-become friend, FBI special agent Will Graham, who is trying to find a serial killer. The first breakthrough in the case comes when the team discovers that the organs from the bodies are taken. The team is perplexed – why only some body parts? Why are they – of all things – the trophy the killer desires? Will knows the moment he walks into the room, and sees one of the bodies missing a kidney.

“He’s eating them,” he says.

(Hannibal, Episode 1, Season 1)

The very next scene finally unveils Dr. Lecter. This is the description from the original pilot script, written by the show's creator Bryan Fuller.

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

Despite having just endured all manner of terrors, it is this scene, showcasing a liver being consumed by a handsome and cultured man, that makes a chill run down our spine as we realize that this fine gentleman eating the liver is Hannibal the cannibal.

Most of us have heard about Dr. Lecter, from a variety of sources, as it is one of the most abundant sources of horror. The character first appeared in Thomas Hariss' novel from 1981, *Red Dragon* (on which the TV show is generally based). From that small part, the author wisely decided to dedicate entire novels to him, starting with 1988's *The Silence of the Lambs*, which was adapted into an Oscar winning film in 1991 of the same title, starring Anthony Hopkins (who won the academy award for best actor in 1991). The third novel, *Hannibal* from 1999 was adapted to film, with Hopkins reprising his role in 2001. The fourth and final volume came out in 2006, *Hannibal Rising*.

The story is a rather simple one – an off-the-charts brilliant former surgeon turned clinical psychiatrist, Dr. Hannibal Lecter, is a cannibal, starting at a very young age. Born to Lithuanian nobility he has superbly reined tastes, and a pallet to match. Due to his genius, and his standing in society, he becomes a prolific serial killer that goes uncaptured for decades. What makes this killer unique, is that before him, serial killers were mostly portrayed in masks, as supernatural beings (like the witches in *Macbeth*, inhuman) – but Dr. Lecter is not only human, he is a human we empathize and connect with in the show. We come to understand how capable he is of humanity. And yet, he can do something most of us cannot, and prepare like to Michelin star chef – eat human flesh, and feed it to others.

Cannibalism is not a new subject for academics, but it is relatively new as one connected to culture, pop-culture, and art. As Schwegler-Castañer (2018) writes, “It is the difficulty with which one can distance themselves from the food one eats (Van Arendonk 2008, 121) and cannibalism's disturbance of the boundaries of our society's conceptualization of what is morally edible – a core category from which survival depends and the basis in the definition of whether a society is civilized or not (614)” - great irony lies in Hannibal's contradictions he inhabits. On the one hand, he is brilliant, has the most impeccable “nose” for sophistication and class, is a widely respected psychiatrist and even a talented sketch artist. He is the epitome of refinement. And yet, he kills viciously and eats human beings.

The show uses the food metaphor/theme not only in cannibalism performed by the doctor, but when editing and putting together the aesthetics of the show itself, as seen in the

title names for the episodes, as Fuchs (2015) notes: “‘Amuse-Bouche’, ‘Entrée’, ‘Trou Normand’ - thirteen names in total of French courses (97).” The show also uses food metaphorically with words that are repeated often, such as devour, consume, “don’t have the stomach for”, “chew the fat”, “one piece at a time”, and “short shelf life.”

For Hannibal, the process of murder-consumption is just like our experience of going to the grocery store. We compare, sniff, smell, hold, and then select. But in most current media forms, the making of the products we buy, like sausages or burgers – is not shown, unless choosing a very specific cooking show that offers the making/production of meat. In Hannibal, we get a plethora of scenes that admire Hannibal’s butcher-level skill set with hearts, lungs, creating sausage from grounded human spleen, and even mimicking fish for vegetarian guests. He’s a wizard with a cleaver.

This is, of course, a way to connect us to him, even though “...cannibalism is intricately related to barbarism, which stands at the beginning, or opposite, of civilization. As anthropologist William Arens has explained, cannibalism functions as ‘a mythic marker in the progress of [...] cultural development (1979: 159 in Fuchs, 99).” Unlike the character in different iterations of the novels and films, this process makes us admire him, aspire to have his level of expertise, appreciate his love for the finer things. In addition, while having magnificent abilities to manipulate and control, this Hannibal is not above us. His friends on the show are regular people, however intelligent, and those that he chooses - such as Will, Elana, Jack and Bella, are considered his equals (to a point, of course). It is important that while observing heinous acts, we also experience “normal” behaviour, like preparing, cooking, eating dinner, and laughing with friends. After all, Hannibal has a witty and quite brilliant sense of humour. Thus, we often forget he’s cooking up human flesh.

Though Shakespeare is not known for cannibalism other than alluding to it, his play *Titus Andronicus* has an infamous human-eating scene (two young men ground up into a pie as revenge for rape and amputation). In her discussion of *Titus Andronicus*, Louise Noble argues that with Shakespeare’s “exposure of the artificial, hypocritical nature of civility,” he “reveals the instability of such constructed identities” making the distinction between Romans and Barbarians. Similarly, in *Macbeth*, Shakespeare is making fun of this “civilized” ritual by using the language of killing and feasting, and placing the murder immediately after the feast. Shakespeare, in *Macbeth*, is showing his then audience a true mirroring of the times: killing a King is, in many ways, is just as bad as being a bad host (Greenblatt et al, 2016).

Cannibalism may sound unnatural in the Western world but humans/hominids have been doing it for 100,000 years. Yet, we in 2025 still see it as a grotesque perversion akin to paedophilia, a school shooting, human trafficking, or other heinous acts. In Shakespearean times, it would akin to slightly different crimes, mainly high treason, or any type of act that was performed against a monarch.

## THE NATURALLY UNNATURAL

The horror, as has and will repeat throughout this paper, is the unnatural. In Elizabethan times, regicide was the most unnatural. Not having children like Macbeth and his wife. Lady Macbeth saying she would murder her own baby and wants to be unsexed. And Macbeth taking both banquets and turning them into the staging of murder, and even killing the host – is perhaps the most unnatural of all (Tassi, 2018).

In the play, Shakespeare asks us to meditate on the unnatural, and to repeatedly connect it with eating and drinking. In the moments that all things natural are changing and a King is killed, thus going against natural law to gain power – nature goes bananas. In this key scene, after King Duncan’s murder, we get a glimpse of nature in it’s most unnatural.

OLD MAN ’Tis unnatural,

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

ROSS

And *Duncan's horses* (a thing most strange and certain),

Beauteous and swift, the minions of their race,  
Turned wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out,  
Contending 'gainst obedience, as they would  
Make war with mankind.

OLD MAN 'Tis said they eat each other.

ROSS

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

(2.4.17)

All of nature, in accordance with its laws that have been broken by Macbeth and his wife, turn the entire world upside down, make the weather stormy and dangerous, and the animals just as frightening.

Several hundreds of years ahead, a cannibal gets away with murder – often – no one has a clue as to his true self. When the head of the FBI – Jack Crawford – comes to dinner at Hannibal's, which happens frequently in the show, he asks what he is about to eat:

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

HANNIBAL: Rabbit.

JACK: He should've hopped faster. (Hannibal, episode 4, season 1)

While in *Macbeth*, the witches are the only ones shown to prepare food, Hannibal is the only one shown cooking, and a true master of culinary masterpieces at that. Unlike the witches who are scary and disgusting (as intended by Shakespeare), Hannibal is handsome, wears three-piece suits, uses silks and silver cutlery, and plays Bach during supper.

The unnatural connection between cannibalism, murder, and entertaining is made clear when, after Jack and Hannibal start laughing at the bunny joke, a fast cut accompanied by a screeching sound suddenly relocates the action to a forest setting, where a man is running for his life and stumbles, followed by another fast cut to Hannibal's kitchen, where Lecter is flambéing meat (Fuchs, 2015).

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

Hannibal's pattern of aesthetic discernment grants him access to a high social status and degree of prestige, ultimately enabling him to achieve reputability and the ability to act with impunity. This also works on us, the audience, as we watch him do abhorred things with abilities and skills that seem endless, near superhuman at times, just like his restraint. He knows this well, how others view him, and he enjoys the game he plays – along with his duties as host. This acts as his performance space and reflects his orderly, highly visceral taste. He's a different cannibal, too. He is not engaging in a garish ritual, nude in a forest, covered in blood. He wears a see-through plastic suit on top of his actual 3-piece suits when he kills. We are left wondering: is the unnatural act the cannibalism, Hannibal being refined and lovely, that no one can crack his façade, or that we want him to remain free?

## TASTY DISCERNMENT

The many scenes in the show that explore all refinements and beauty that happen in Dr. Lecter's kitchen and dinner table, also give us the main difference between the Macbeth/food relationship and the Hannibal/food relationship – taste and discernment. Tasting of the food, of course, but more to the point, Hannibal oozes and is defined by his tastes. His home, his rare friendships, rare lovers, rare empathetic choices. Taste governs him (Schwegler-Castañer, 2018). To most, taste is subjective, but not to Hannibal, that is not only certain his selections are the “correct” ones, he imposes them unto others, to the point that taste becomes just another perversion of his quest for superiority in all things cultural, but also all things that govern life and death. Even murder is a matter of taste to him. Not only who he kills, but in what fashion they will die. He makes choices that are not based on implied madness and thirst for power like Macbeth. He makes choices according to his own discernment between right and wrong. Killing a young girl makes sense, because she was rude to her mother. Killing a man is also proper judgment, when he dislikes classical music.

This is another classic horror trope – not the killer themselves, but the decisions they make as to their victims. Take, for example, the *Saw* movie franchise (2004-2023 with more on the way). The killer nicknamed Jigsaw decides upon his victims based on their “sins.” He does not, like Hannibal, care about where they come from, their social status, etc. Nor does he kill for power or prestige. He gives his victims the chance to escape, if they make the right choices, such as cutting off their own foot.

The most explicit example of picking a victim based on the Hannibal's moral code is found in the middle of the second season, when he captures a fellow serial killer, Dr. Abel Gideon, who believes he is the Chesapeake Ripper – also known as Hannibal's serial-killer nickname that the police had given him. When he discovers Abel has taken credit for his work, he manages to capture Abel who awakens at Hannibal's lavish table. In front of him is a giant piece of meat cooked to perfection and displayed in the most heavenly manner. He is perplexed. On the one hand, he is tied to the chair and held captive. On the other, he sees Hannibal next to him wearing a gorgeous suit, the dinner table exquisite. He then discovers that he has committed the worst of all crimes, the most undignified and tasteless of all, and that the large piece of meat on the table, is his entire leg (sans foot). Though he did not kill a King, he performed the modern version among serial-killers. He “usurped” Hannibal.

Could Hannibal have simply killed Abel? Of course, but what would be the fun in that. Instead, Lecter enforces his own form of justice. Ziomek remarks, “This time, Lecter does not help the FBI in delivering justice. He has his own vendetta against Gideon (53).” Over a period of several weeks/months (it is not stated), Dr. Lecter makes many, many meals of Abel's limbs and body parts – which the captive must then eat.

Literally, consuming himself (Ziomek, 2018).

HANNIBAL: Your legs are no good to you anymore. (...) This is a far more practical use for those limbs.

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

HANNIBAL: Yes.

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

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

(Hannibal, episode 6, season 2)

## HOSPITABLE EVIL

Within the food family, another horror trope that is used constantly is hospitality. The motive to use it is clear. Take an event that is happy and celebratory, and twist it so much the viewer

of the film never goes to a wedding ever again. For example, in the film *Ready or Not* (2019), a stunning bride and groom get married in a huge estate (the family is very rich). It turns out, that the bride must pass a test to be a part of the family, and that is picking a card from a creepy deck (the family's business is games/card/toys). But, of dear, she picks the "hide and seek" card, which means the family must kill her by dawn, or they all die. And so, the happy occasion with feasting and joy becomes a glorious blood bath.

In Shakespearean times, the horror includes plots of overtaking Kings, ghosts coming to visit and play on the host's guilt and shame, or murder (of women and children) happening offstage to loved ones who were at the wrong place at the wrong time, as witches outside the castle are making baby soup. The problem in Macbeth's case, as apposed to Hannibal, is that he cares not for appearances. Lady Macbeth, however, is the one who – like Hannibal – is orchestrating the banquets and attempts to get her husband to "look" like a potential King, give proper speeches, and present the 17th century version of taste/dignity/power.

Unlike Dr. Lecter who is seen from the start eerie, to put it mildly, Macbeth starts the play in the best of lights, and the best of intentions. Others see him that way, too. King Duncan enunciates Macbeth's loyalty and political value, explicitly in terms of food, describing how Macbeth makes him feel:

"He is full so valiant,  
And in his commendations I am fed;  
It is a banquet to me. Let's after him,  
Whose care is gone before to bid us welcome:  
It is a peerless kinsman."  
(1.4.54-58)

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

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

"The service and the loyalty I owe  
In doing it pays itself."  
(1.4.22-27)

That "service" is also specifically table service, and although we don't see the feast itself, the echoing of serving food and murder emerges in lines between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. When Macbeth says that "as his host, who should against his murderer shut the door, not bear the knife myself" (1.7.14-16) we understand that he should "bear the knife" to cut up food, just not to cut up Duncan. Kottman refers to this as "perverse hosting" by which "Each time that Lady Macbeth and Macbeth plot a murder, they simultaneously plan the evening's hospitality (Kottman, 1996, 98)."

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

Even though he is a guest in Macbeth's home, he is still the master. This makes his murder by Macbeth's hands that much more jarring and unbelievable. When second thoughts enter his head, the terror of regicide, it is the beginning of the end, because the feast is a ruse. Lady Macbeth, nervous her husband is too much of a wimp to do what she would have done – easily – if she were in her husband's position, reminds Macbeth that he must blend hospitality with murderousness. Everything should appear to be for the benefit of the King.

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

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

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

If hosts mistreat their guests, as illustrated in several morals in mythology, folklore, and religious canons, they in turn might be mistreated. The Macbeths' murder of King Duncan is undoubtedly a brutal violation of the ethics of hospitality. But what makes their sin catastrophic, as Kottman (1996) argues, “...is not only that the sovereign has been assassinated, but that the guest/host has been killed (97).”

By using the feast – a symbol of comradery, friendship, trust, even glory – and making it about murder, Macbeth has removed himself from the table of humanity, so to speak. Sounds are what Macbeth hears before his decision to murder: a howling wolf, a summoning bell, and as Lady Macbeth anxiously awaits to see if her husband has done the deed, a shrieking owl makes her fear the awakening of Duncan's men. As Kottman puts it: “Macbeth's head becomes an echo chamber catching every sound that breaks the stillness of the night (134).” Instead of a sweeping or grand soundtrack of trumpets, all he can hear – is everything. A hyper sensitivity to sound is enough to drive most people crazy. There's a reason he recognizes that “Macbeth will sleep no more.” (2.2.47)

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

## GHOSTS OF MURDERED PAST

We all make mistakes. But the horror trope plays on the fact that we can still look back and relive those, or worse, these mistakes assault us when we least expect them, and are usually accompanied by a panic attack. Take for example a horror movie that has it in the title – *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997). Four friends are stalked by a slasher because they had attempted to cover up a car accident in which they believed they killed a man. Multiple people die, and the killer is barely seen until the end. Or take the 1996 classic that brought back the slasher genre to horror with a meta/self-aware sense of humor – *Scream*. In it, a group of friends are followed by a slasher, killed off one by one only do discover that they are in fact two killers from their own friend group, who kill out of revenge.

The trope of murderous figures from the past is so frequently used in horror because it represents a universal terror of our pasts, and our inability to change, or ever atone for some of our biggest mistakes. This is showcased in perhaps the most well known (and heartbreaking) scene in *Macbeth* - the second banquet.

This time, and unlike the first terrible banquet, Macbeth is ready to perform his character of “host.” But after raising his glass, Banquo's murderers enter to make clear



Macbeth's best friend is dead by his order, and we realize that "it is only as a ghost can Banquo attend the feast to which he was invited (Heffernan, 136)." In fact, the actual ghost of Banquo appears, and we know that just like before Macbeth was King, no merriment will be taking place, and he will not be able to perform his most sacred hosting duty.

Lady Macbeth does not help matters when she tried to get him back on track:

"From thence, the sauce to meat is ceremony;

Meeting were bare without it." (37-41)

She tells Macbeth, as she did in the first feast, that he cannot forget his role, now that he will be King. He must make the banquets "saucy" - delightful, fun, as they must be. But just as he goes to toast once more - Banquo's ghost appears. He even goes to Macbeth's chair (the King's chair that Duncan had sat on), and "sits" in it. Macbeth shouts at the ghost only he can see, believing Banquo is there for a confession. Lady Macbeth, clearly mortified, tells the guests to "feed and regard him not" (69). He then holds up his cup to toast for what seems like the 100th time, and says "give me some wine. Fill full." (107) Then the ghost enters the room again.

Not only is Macbeth thirsty, but his empty cup is a metaphor for the hole in his heart that was placed there by both murders. The first of his King, whom he loved. The second of his closest friend Banquo, who he also loved. He does his best to shake it off, but ends up yelling at the ghost, everyone leaves, and he and his wife remain alone, as the banquet - meant to honour him and those that served him as he did once King Duncan - is smashed to bits. No one is nourished (Puhvel, 1993).

#### THE DELICIOUS DEMISE

One of the most satisfying of moments in horror - though these days the typical "evil" being vanquished is becoming less popular, as the world becomes more complex - are when the killer causing the horror is either caught, beaten, or killed themselves. This is a very important moment in horror, because that is the main reason people have loved the genre. The ability to watch to most horrific of actions, and then the pathos of having the person/people in charge being eliminated, and thus, everything they represented eliminated as well. If we take as example the movie that seemed to start the horror renaissance of the mid 2010's, *Get Out* (2017), we are confronted with a horror that is old, and yet showcased in a brand new way, racism. But it's bizarre, strange, the racists have voted for Obama. What does that mean? In today's world, it means that things are not black and white, no pun intended. Evil is not clear cut, which is arguably when horror is at its best and shows true humanity. In the film, Chris is a young African American man and a talented photographer, brought home to visit his girlfriend's (rich) family. It turns out he is part of a scheme to kidnap him, sell him off to the highest (white) bidder, remove his brain/consciousness, and replace it with the bidder's brain, as they are either dying from old age, or some disease. Chris manages to escape, but not before every single family member is very, very dead. When his best friend picks him up and helps him, he says "I told you so," and we laugh uproariously. Pathos is achieved.

In *Macbeth*, there are very few moments of levity, though reading the scene of the second banquet offers a lot to interpretation. There have been theatrical productions that have presented it in a more comedic manner, such as the moment the ghost of Banquo "sits" on what is supposed to be Macbeth's chair. However, if you read the play in the dramatic way most of the play is written, this is a moment of no return, and one that highlights how the banquet scenes are pivotal for the plot, but also for the thematic flow, executing both the language element, the actions of the murderous duo, and the symbolism of Macbeth's demise.

As Dyson (1963) put it: "Macbeth begins the scene place as king; he ends it knowing that he has passed the toward damnation. It is in this scene that Macbeth achieves tragic insight:

the realization that he is living in an ambiguous over which he has no control, a world in which dead from our stools (370).” Macbeth does not “only” see Banquo due to guilt – he is now a part of the dead, in his own way. Banquo sits on his throne, which makes as much sense as Macbeth sitting on it (Dyson, 1963). The ghost brings chaos with him, not only ruining the hospitality/banquet, but chaos in Macbeth’s head. Ironically, the last words of his guests leaving are: “...better health attend his Majesty!” (3.4.148).

Similarly, Brzozowska (2012) notes: “...until the feast, Macbeth was still safe as the “hidden deviant”. During the feast, as his front starts to disintegrate, and he loses control of himself, he is slowly beginning to enter the image of the “pure deviant” which will characterize him until his death (8).” As if an opposing force to the intangible ghost and unseen crimes he has committed, Macbeth becomes too seen, and this time not just by his wife, but his entire court, people who need him to perform as the King so that he can maintain that station, for which he murdered for. No longer hidden or masked, he loudly asserts his position as someone that can be topples, and heralds the beginning of the end for his brief career as monarch.

## BODIES, SERVED

The body has been used from the beginning of horror in American films, the 1931 releases of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*. The body was one of the main tropes used then, because of the technological limitations that are long gone today. Both *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* used the body in different ways to provide a metaphor for what is humane, and what is not. Dracula used to be human, but was turned into something different, and he feeds on bodies – or their blood – and nothing else. The way Dracula grabs the neck of humans, drains them, and the bodies go limp, is the horror of mortality, but also of our frailty against any “evil.” In *Frankenstein*, the body is the star. The monster is, literally, a bunch of body parts sewn together, creating the most terrifying of monsters. The irony, of course, that the inhumane is *Frankenstein* and his treatment of the monster, who does not start out as a killer, but becomes one due to his father/master’s actions.

A ghost is a form of body horror because it still looks like a human, you can see how the person used to look with all their features, but they are translucent, floating, only seen by certain people, and often malevolent. Thought Banquo is not a “bad” ghosts, he still manages to be the catalyst to Macbeth doing the worst of his actions (murders), as well as ruin a perfectly nice dinner party.

The ghost is seen in the sense that it exists, but in Macbeth, his murdered friend Banquo, murdered on his command, comes back as an intangible ghost with no corporeal form. In Hannibal, the body is merely a vessel to hold organs which the good doctor eats at his pleasure.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

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

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

Carroll (2015) notes that a monster is not just the “evil”: “In its dual role as a fear-inducing and stabilizing figure, the monster personifies our human crises, and depicts how we may address and repair these crises as a society. The monster permits a modicum of incivility to exist in our highly ordered world and engages in behavior normative society shuns (42).”

While this is true on a psychological level and when watching a horror film to get the pathos we need in a world like ours, so full of monsters, the problem is that society decides what is deviant. There are places in the world today, in 2025, where cannibalism is performed. On a more universal scale, here in the US laws and rules change – literally – according to which State you are in. Some countries do not allow chewing gum (Singapore). In England, one can go to jail if they hold a salmon that was illegally fished. In China, it is illegal to promote time travel in movies/TV so as not to distort the country's history and culture.

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

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

## REFERENCES

- Brzozowska, N. Dangerous Feasts and the Social Appetite in *Macbeth* and *Titus Andronicus*. *Proceedings of the congresses of the French Shakespeare Society*, (2012), 29, 81-91. <https://doi.org/10.4000/shakespeare.1710>
- Carroll, A. "We're Just Alike": Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter, and the Monstrous-Human. *Studies in Popular Culture*, (2015), 38(1), 41-63. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44259584>
- Crowl, S. *Shakespeare and Film: A Norton Guide*, 2008, Norton, New York, NY.
- Dyson, J. P. The Structural Function of the Banquet Scene in *Macbeth*. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 1963, 14(4), 369- 378. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2868169>
- Fuchs, N. Cooking with Hannibal: Food, liminality and monstrosity in *Hannibal*. *European Journal of American Culture*, 2015, 34(2), 97-112. [10.1386/ejac.34.2.97\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/ejac.34.2.97_1)
- Greenblatt, S. Introduction to *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, In Greenblatt, S. et al (Eds.), *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2016, Norton, New York, NY.
- Hariss, T. *Red Dragon*, 1981, G. P. Putnam's Sons, NY, New York.
- : *The Silence of the Lambs*, 1988, St. Martin's Press, New York: NY.
- : *Hannibal*, 1999, Delacorte Press, NY, New York.
- : *Hannibal Rising*, 2006, Delacorte Press, NY, New York.
- Heffernan, J. A. W. Staging Hospitality: Shakespeare. In *Hospitality and Treachery in Western Literature*, 2014, 117–148, Yale University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt13x1t0m.8>
- Hutchings, P. *Theaters of blood: Shakespeare and the horror film*, 2008, Routledge, Oxfordshire: UK.
- Kottman, P. Hospitality in the Interval: *Macbeth's Door*. *Oxford Lit Review*, 1996, 182, 97. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44244483>
- Puhvel, M. The Perplexing Ghost of Banquo: Ambiguity and Its Roots. *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 1993, 94(3/4), 287-296. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43345952>
- Schwegler-Castañer, A. The art of tasting corpses: the conceptual metaphor of consumption in *Hannibal*. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 2018, 32(5), 611-628. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2018.1499874>
- Shakespeare, W. *Macbeth*, 2015, Oxford University Press, London: UK.
- : *Titus Andronicus*, 2017, Penguin's Classics, London: UK.
- Tassi, M. A. Rapture and Horror: A Phenomenology of Theatrical Invisibility in *Macbeth*. *Exploration In Renaissance Culture*, 2018, 44, 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1163/23526963-04401001>

Ziomek, E. Hannibal Revived: An Aestheticized Portrayal of Hannibal Lecter in NBC's TV Series Hannibal. *Crossroads: A Journal of English Studies*, 2018, 23(4), 46-58.  
[10.15290/cr.2018.23.4.04](https://doi.org/10.15290/cr.2018.23.4.04)

## FILM

Barantini, P. (Director). (2021). *Boiling Point* [Film]. Ascendant Films; Burton Box Films; White Hot Productions.

Branagh, K. (Director). (1996). *Hamlet* [Film]. Columbia Pictures.

Browning, T., & Freund, K. (Directors). (1931). *Dracula* [Film]. Universal Pictures.

Demme, J. (Director). (1991). *The Silence of the Lambs* [Film]. Orion Pictures; Strong Heart/Demme Production.

Ducournau, J. (Director). (2016). *Raw* [Film]. Petit Film; Rouge International; Frakas Productions.

Eggers, R. (Director). (2015). *The Witch* [Film]. Parts and Labor; RT Features, Rooks Nest Entertainment; Mott Street Pictures; Code Red Productions.

Ephron, N. (Director). (2005). *Bewitched* [Film]. Columbia Pictures; Red Wagon Entertainment.

Ephron, N. (Director). (2009). *Julie & Julia* [Film]. Columbia Pictures; Easy There Tiger Productions; Scott Rudin Productions.

Favreau, J. (Director). (2014). *Chef* [Film]. Aldamisa Entertainment; Fairview Entertainment; Kilburn Media.

Griffin, D. (Director). (1998). *Practical Magic* [Film]. DiNovi Pictures; Fortis Films; Stargate Studios.

Mylod, M. (Director). (2022). *The Menu* [Film]. Searchlight Pictures; Hyperobject Industries.

Myrick, D., & Sánchez, E. (Directors). (1999). *The Blair Witch Project* [Film]. Haxan Films.

Ortega, K. (Director). (1993). *Hocus Pocus* [Film]. Walt Disney Pictures; Touchwood Pacific Partners.

Polanski, R. (Director). (1971). *Macbeth* [Film]. Columbia Pictures.

Taymor, J. (Director). (1999). *Titus* [Film]. Clear Blue Sky Productions.

Vernon, C., & Tiernan, G. (Director). (2016). *Sausage Party* [Film]. Columbia Pictures; Annapurna Pictures; Nitrogen Studios Canada.

Wells, J. (Director). (2015). *Burnt* [Film]. 3 Arts Entertainment; Double Feature Films; PeaPie Films.

Whale, J. (Director). (1931). *Frankenstein* [Film]. Universal Pictures.

## TV

Ackerman, H. (Executive Producer). (1964-1972). *Bewitched* [TV series]. Ashmont Productions; Screen Gems Television.

Burge, C. M. (Executive Producer). (1998–2006). *Charmed* [TV series]. Spelling Television; Northshore Productions; Viacom Productions.

Cutforth, D., et al. (Executive Producers). (2022–). *Is It Cake?* [TV series]. Netflix Studios; Alfred Street Industries.

Dong-hyuk, H., & Kim, J-Y. (Executive Producers). (2021–). *Squid Game* [TV series]. Firstman Studios; Siren Pictures.

Fuller, B. (Executive Producer). (2013-2015). *Hannibal* [TV series]. Dino De Laurentiis Company; Living Dead Guy Productions; AXN: Original X Production.

Keller, E., Calin, D., & Weintraub, R. (Executive Producers). (2004–2018). *Iron Chef America* [TV series]. Insider Entertainment; Triage Entertainment.