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The Towneley ‘First Shepherds’ Play’: Its ‘Grotesque’ Feast Revisited

With few exceptions, criticism of the Towneley ‘First Shepherds’ Play’ maintains that the food consumed by the shepherds in their feast-scene must have been imaginary and that performed consumption of this imaginary food must have been mimed. This essay counters this view, arguing that the shepherds’ menu includes food commonly served at English medieval Christmas feasts, and that, given the play’s theme, the play itself was likely performed in conjunction with — or even during — the actual Christmas feast. The play offers evidence of performance practices that integrated audience food consumption with the play itself.

Before an angel announces the birth of Christ to them, the three shepherds of the Towneley ‘First Shepherds’ Play’ share a meal and drink together. The shepherds — Gyb, John Horne, and Slawpase — order their servant, Jak Garcio, to set a table at which they can eat the generous and eclectic feast they then produce, seemingly from thin air. Gyb shares a cow’s foot, ground pork, sausages, and mutton, while John Horne contributes brawn of a boar, braised oxtail, a meat pie, a hare (without the loin), and two swine snouts. Not to be outdone, Slawpase offers a goose leg, a tart, pork, roast chickens, a partridge, and, finally, grilled calf-liver served with verjuice. For good measure, the shepherds wash these dishes down with ‘good ayll of Hely’, and then, after singing a drinking song, they gather up the feast’s leftovers to give to ‘Ye hungré begers freys’ (352, 412).¹ The three fall asleep content, only to wake to the angel’s song and announcement of Christ’s birth.

Critical readings of this scene tend to follow A.C. Cawley’s influential argument, made in his 1955 essay ‘The “Grotesque” Feast in the *Prima Pastorum*’, that the shepherds’ feast must have been imaginary in nature: ‘The playwright’s mixing of high-class and low-class table delicacies makes a ludicrous gallimaufry that

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can never have existed except in his imagination'.² In these readings, the imaginary feast — 'a magical midnight supper ... quite beyond the wildest hopes of any shepherd living in the workaday world' — complements the imaginary sheep at the heart of the quarrel between the Gyb and John Horne.³ Martin Stevens, for example, identifies the shepherds' imaginative supplement of absence as the play's governing theme:

It is not the physical presence of sheep but the idea of sheep that causes the territorial dispute between Shepherds One and Two. It is not a full sack of meal but rather an empty one, and not a real feast but an imaginary one which provides the sustenance of the shepherds and the substance of their games. The emphasis throughout this early scene seems to be deliberately on the unseeable perhaps to prepare emotionally for the Incarnation which occurs at the end.⁴

The absent sheep and food serve as counterpoint to the visual and real revelation of divinity at the play's end. The imaginative feast the shepherds stage through their mimed satiation of their hunger draws attention to the spiritual hunger that the birth of the Christ-child, the true spiritual food, will satisfy.⁵ Miming the acts of eating renders the shepherds' material concerns grotesquely humorous, and critics maintain that the play achieves a structural unity by formally contrasting the shepherds' experiences of dearth with the spiritual plenitude the unimagined and very real Christ-child offers. In other words, critical consensus holds that the shepherds' feast must be imaginary so that it can signify better: the absence of material food contrasts the spiritual food Christ will offer the shepherds and their audience at the play's conclusion.⁶

As compelling as these readings are, they accept Cawley's assertion that the shepherds' feast 'can never have existed', a claim that is at odds with much of the evidence of traditional Christmas feasting practices.⁷ Cawley's claim, moreover, relies upon at least three assumptions that warrant critical attention. First, criticism assumes that the play was part of a summer cycle play and that, in the context of such performance, the shepherds' feast could only signify a displaced Christmas festivity. Second, the assertion that the feast was beyond the means of the shepherds extended to those staging the play, and, indeed, the practical and financial considerations of staging such an elaborate feast several times during a summer cycle performance rendered the feast impractical unless it was mimed. Third, and consequently, understanding the shepherds' description of their feast as referring to absent items assumes that this part of the play-text works differently than its other parts. The shepherds' references to a star, for example, indicate

the presence of a star-prop; the shepherds' references to particular dishes, in contrast, indicate their absence.

In this essay, I interrogate these assumptions and argue that the shepherds' feast dialogue operates not as a sign of absence but as a sign of festive hospitality. The shepherds' detailed itemization of their feast refers to dishes Christmas feasts would serve, but rather than simply evoking the idea of Christmas festivity these references offer evidence of the play's performance at such a festive event. We should understand the shepherds' dialogue as a documentary witness of an ephemeral occasion or series of occasions at which the play was performed — or was to be performed. Like those Thomas Austin's *Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery Books* includes, feast menus such as the one the shepherds detail 'preserve and propagate the performative qualities of the perishable banquet and the ephemeral occasion, recording the event's integration of food, spectacle, and text'.⁸ The shepherds' dialogue thus can offer evidences of the play's integration with food and traditional festive practices.⁹

Even while carrying the traces of ephemeral festive food production and consumption, the shepherds' feast dialogue is not certain evidence of all historical performances of the play. The play clearly may be — and indeed may have been — performed in contexts where food was not present.¹⁰ The play nevertheless bears traces of its encounter with festive food and its consumption. In this respect, the 'Boar's Head Carol' may serve as a relevant analogy. Just as its first line — 'The boris hed in hondes I brynge' — is singable with empty hands and no boar's head in sight, so too is the Towneley 'First Shepherds' Play' performable with imagined food and mimed consumption (l.1).¹¹ But in the case of both play and carol, food and festivity nevertheless have left traces in the texts themselves.

As a consequence of the critical acceptance of the imaginarieness of the Towneley shepherds' feast, the play's diminished potential as documentary witness of feasting practices raises a methodological problem regarding the critical reception of the play's indexical language.¹² Whereas much criticism of the play rightly tends to fill in textual gaps and to understand minor comments in the dialogue as indications of staging and prop requirements, this criticism nevertheless insists mistakenly that this reading practice does not apply in the same way to the shepherds' feast dialogue. In what follows, I attempt to recover the Towneley shepherds' feast's entanglement with an alimentary performance context.

Not a Cycle

One of the underlying assumptions of Cawley's argument is that the play was part of a summer cycle. Revising this idea over the past few decades, critics now accept the Towneley manuscript to be a collection of plays whose performance provenance remains unknown.¹³ It may be that the Christmas season was an occasion for the performance of some of the Towneley plays, and critics consider several to be candidates for performance during the Advent and Christmas seasons. Garrett Epp identifies an 'Advent sequence' in the Towneley collection that includes 'The Prophets', 'Caesar Augustus', 'The Annunciation', and 'The Salutation' and Joseph plays. The sequence, as long noted, lacks a Nativity play.¹⁴ Epp postulates that the 'First Shepherds' Play' would precede a Nativity play, if one existed at one point.¹⁵ Lawrence Clopper wonders whether the Wakefield Master's

plays were not occasional pieces for that season [Christmas]. Or ... we may ask whether the plays may not have been designed to be played alone at appropriate seasons of the year. Since so many of these plays could have been performed as single pieces, and since a number of them seem to be associated with Christmas, perhaps the Wakefield Master is to be identified as the *ludimagister* of a school in or near Wakefield.¹⁶

More recently, Alexandra F. Johnston argued that the two Towneley Shepherd plays, along with the manuscript's Herod play, represent 'examples of the genre of Christmas play,' that is, stand-alone plays performed during the Christmas season.¹⁷

Suzanne Westfall identifies several characteristics of the 'Second Shepherds' Play' that suggest a Christmas performance by chapel players.¹⁸ The 'First Shepherds' Play' shares several of these features, including sophisticated musical requirements and an extended exposition of scriptural prophecy. While it does not make reference to winter weather as does the 'Second Shepherds' Play', the 'First Shepherds' Play's' seasonality appears in its reference to an extensive Christmas feast, many dishes of which were seasonal in nature.¹⁹ Several of the interludes Westfall associates with household chapel performance stage a feast or meal of some sort.²⁰ Of these, Henry Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucrez*, for which Westfall posits a Christmas performance, makes extensive reference to the festive context of its performance, as does the 'First Shepherds' Play'.

The Nature of the Feast

Judging by the food itemized by the shepherds, the feast in the 'First Shepherds' Play' appears very similar to medieval Christmas feasts. Cawley's claim that the shepherds' feast must be imaginary is worth reconsidering given that the play may be a Christmas play. Cawley draws support for his claim that the shepherds' feast must be an imagined one from the feast menus collected by Thomas Austin in his *Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery Books*, as well as from the description of a 'dynere of flesche' in John Russell's 'The Boke of Nurture'. Austin's collection of ten feast menus includes some of the items the shepherds share, particularly those dishes the third shepherd, Slawpase mentions. Cawley notes the inclusion of chickens endored, roast partridges, and 'tard riall' in a 1387 menu for Richard III and the 1443 feast for the installation of John Stafford as archbishop of Canterbury. Cawley locates Slawpase's reference to verjuice in Russell's text, which identifies the sauce as correct to serve with veal.²¹

Cawley turns his attention to those items he drily identifies as 'plebeian delicacies', dishes he claims, 'would be vain to look for ... in the aristocratic menus and recipes of mediaeval England; they are the delicacies of humble folk, and they were never ceremoniously borne with "crakkyng of trumpes" to the dais in the hall'.²² These include Gyb's sauced cow's foot, as well as his blood and liver sausages; John Horne's oxtail 'That wold not be lost', his two swine snouts, his loin-less hare; and Slawpase's goose leg (325, 331, 332). Cawley correctly asserts that these specific items do not appear in Austin's collection of menus or in Russell's description of meals.

In doing so, however, Cawley implies that the shepherds' description of portions of dishes inadequately denotes the complete dishes from which the portions originate, an inadequacy that signals the shepherds' poverty or lack of sophistication. Cawley, for example, asserts that Slawpase's "leg of a goys" ... as distinct from a whole goose, may be humorously meant'.²³ He similarly finds John Horne's sharing of 'All a hare bot the lonys' to be 'suspect', noting that the loin was likely 'considered the tastiest morsel'.²⁴ Cawley implies here that the shepherds are incapable of imagining a feast in its entirety and can only imagine what will most immediately satisfy their individual cravings.

While feasts may have served whole geese, the birds required carving before consumption. Russell unsurprisingly offers detailed instructions on carving roast goose and cony into portions so that that they may be served properly. In his instructions for carving roast goose, for instance, Russell directs that the legs be cut from the body first and the wings next. The body then should be laid in a dish

with the legs and wings arranged around it; the goose's body should be carved into strips.²⁵ Russell also instructs that when serving cony, the carver should first skin and then break the cony's spine in front of the haunches before slicing loin from carcass. Once done, the carver should reassemble the cony's body, laying it on its belly to be served on a plate. The loin should be reserved for the lord: '*witþ þe sides serve youre souerayne*'.²⁶ Indeed, conies and rabbits appear frequently on feast menus, and as several recipes requiring hare survive, presumably hare was served at times as well. Goose appears on menus less frequently than do conies and rabbits, but the bird was clearly served at feasts. In the context of Russell's carving instructions, then, Slawpase's goose leg and John Horne's 'All a hare bot the lonys' appear to be plausible — if not accurate — descriptions of feast dishes after they have been carved and served.

Like roast goose and cony, meat dishes often were cooked and served in almost nose-to-tail entirety to be carved at table. The consumption of all parts of an animal — albeit not at one sitting or by all classes — was common as well, and the shepherds' feast develops this theme of frugal — and perhaps status-related — consumption of remnants and less desirable cuts of meat. For instance, while swine snouts clearly do not feature on feast menus, they are nevertheless present on boar's heads and roasted pigs. Pigs often were roasted whole — as at pig roasts today — and their snouts would have been available for consumption, albeit perhaps as undesirable remnants.²⁷ Gyb's mutton, too, might be considered in this light. Russell describes a franklin's dinner that includes boiled mutton, and while Russell obviously omits to mention whether the franklin's mutton died of rot, boiling was nevertheless the method by which such meat was cooked.²⁸ Clearly, Gyb's reference to mutton here develops the scenario he describes in the first part of the play, and his inclusion of such mutton here works satirically. But this joke does not mean that the mutton must be imaginary.

John Horne similarly identifies his oxtail as one which 'wold not be lost', indicating at least the butchering, if not the cooking, of an ox (325). In fact, such preparation of oxen must have been made prior to the feast celebrating John Stafford's induction as bishop of Wells as the feast menu includes oxen chine.²⁹ At the very least, John Horne's comment speaks to the real possibility of an ox — or parts of it — served at a feast. Gyb's sauced cow's foot likewise indicates the preparation of beef. His blood and liver sausages also were made from parts of an animal slaughtered for consumption. In fact, serving puddings at feasts was not unprecedented. While made of rarer meat than Gyb's sausages, swan-neck puddings appear on the menu for the funeral of Nicholas Bubbewyth, bishop of Bath and Wells.³⁰

While some of the shepherds' food lacks the magnificence associated with the dishes served at feasts, several items, particularly the goose leg, the hare without its loin, and even the swine snouts, are recognizable portions of grander dishes of roast goose, hare, and pig. The play's description of these items as portions, moreover, reasonably signals their service at a meal or feast: the description of the goose leg and hare resembles Russell's account of the serving arrangements. Alongside the typical feast dishes of boar's brawn with mustard, saffron glazed chickens, roast partridge, a meat pie, and a 'tart for a lorde', the carved portions of goose and hare do not seem out of place at all (339). Even the swine snouts signal their potential origin in the roast pigs feasts often served. Taken together, these foods do not form a 'grotesque' feast. Rather, these foods likely appeared at feasts.

While other holidays occasioned feasts, the Christmas season was 'the prime occasion in the year for the provision of general entertainment'.³¹ Such events served as displays of generous hospitality, occasions on which 'tenants and poorer neighbours were given temporary access to the lord's generosity, usually ... in return for the enforced gifts that were the mark of their dependence'.³² One feast in North Curry, Somerset, in 1314 included much ale, along with bacon, beef, and poultry.³³ Alice de Bryene's meal on 1 January 1413 comprised goose, beef, and pork.³⁴ They could be quite large affairs: on Christmas Day 1507, the Duke of Buckingham hosted 182 for dinner and another 176 at supper. At his Epiphany feast, he hosted 319 at dinner and 279 at supper.³⁵ Alice de Bryene hosted 300 'tenants and strangers' at her January 1413 feast.³⁶ Household food expenses reflected the generosity of these larger feasts as well as the smaller meals consumed during the Christmas season. Expenses during the period were often double or triple the usual.³⁷

Victor Kolve sees the shepherds' feast as similar to those offered at medieval Christmas feasts. Noting that 'Tenants bore obligatory gifts to the lord, and with them he organized a great feast, adding food of his own, since the right of a peasant to a Christmas feast from his lord was often contractual', Kolve asserts that 'When the rich and the poor banqueted together, it is likely that the feast was made up of both the plain and the fancy'.³⁸ There are perhaps two reasons for critics not accepting Kolve's objection. First, Kolve locates the humour of the shepherds' feast in its irony: the feast's large size as well as its pastoral setting combine to make it an unlikely if not absurd event. Despite this, Kolve argues that the feast itself establishes the temporal setting of the play: the shepherds partake of a Christmas feast, and in doing so, evoke the season. In Kolve's view, the feast works 'not merely to represent the historical action ... but to invest that action with some of the mood and custom of medieval Christmas celebration, familiar

in every detail to its original audience'.³⁹ The implicit consequence of these two points is that the feast must be staged in order to achieve these effects, yet Kolve offers no solutions to this staging problem.

Despite their disagreement on the actuality of the feast, Cawley and Kolve share the sense that the shepherds' feast is an evocation of a Christmas feast. For his part, Cawley takes some pains to minimize the similarities between the shepherds' feast and traditional Christmas celebrations. Highlighting several textual similarities between the shepherds' feast and a Christmas dinner Russell describes, Cawley speculates that the author of the play was perhaps familiar with Russell's work. Whereas Cawley understands the shepherds' feast as a textual echo, Kolve understands the feast in mimetic terms, seeing it as a representation of Christmas festivity. As he maintains, the 'outlandish Christmas banquets' of the Towneley 'First Shepherds' Play' and the Chester play help 'create a mimetic world for Christ to be born into'.⁴⁰ That the shepherds' feast should mimetically stage Christmas celebrations is required by the plays' (Towneley and Chester) performance 'in cycle-sequence: the contrast between the two feasts [Christmas and Corpus Christi feasts] is therefore strong'.⁴¹

As I note above, the shepherds' foods have a seasonal quality to them, and food historians have identified many as foods produced over winter. While these items were available throughout the year, the degree of their availability depended on seasonal production. The butchering of pork typically took place in late autumn, and the 'offal was made into sausages and puddings. December appears to have been a particularly busy month for preparation and consumption of these items, and they were served regularly from Christmas to Candlemas'.⁴²

Household consumption of beef was highest in December and January while consumption of mutton peaked in late summer and again at Christmas.⁴³ Consumption of pork and rabbit also peaked in midwinter, with both rabbits and suckling pigs appearing to be Christmas specialties.⁴⁴ Butchering at this time also produced inexpensive by-products such as calves' feet and heads as well as offal.⁴⁵ Boars were a speciality in demand for all major feasts but were particularly associated with Christmas celebrations.⁴⁶ The consumption of birds also was seasonal, with young geese consumed in July and mature geese in late autumn and winter.⁴⁷ Winter, particularly December to February, was the peak period for consumption of geese, partridges, pheasants, and swans.⁴⁸

The similarities among Russell's text, the feast menus, and the items detailed by the shepherds indicate the descriptive accuracy of their feast. Indeed, both Cawley and Kolve recognize this accuracy but interpret it as an evocation of festivity rather than festivity itself. Cawley thus emphasizes the play's textual echo of

Russell's text and the feast menus rather than its possible reference to the practices and objects those texts document. He also understands the mixture of high and low dishes as an evocative sign of festive impossibility: only in the playwright's imagination could such a mixture happen. For his part, Kolve reads the feast's descriptive accuracy in mimetic terms, and for him the shepherds' feast becomes a representational device in the play's summertime depiction of Christmas.

The seasonality of the food in the shepherds' feast, however, suggests that the feast may have been staged as a part of Christmas festivity rather than an evocation of it. Given that many now think this a Christmas play, its staging as an entertainment at a Christmas feast appears plausible. Were the play staged in such a context, perhaps the shepherds' itemization of their feast was indexical in nature. That is, the shepherds' dialogue may have referred to food items present at the feast, and might serve not as an evocation of Christmas festivity but as documentary witness to it.

Telling and Showing

Critical acceptance of the 'make believe' nature of shepherds' feast raises a methodological problem. On the one hand, asserting the feast to be imaginary requires the relevant dialogue to work non-indexically, that is, for the dialogue not to indicate the presence of either food or prop in performance. Cawley argues for this non-indexicality on the grounds that the shepherds' feast dialogue operates according authorial imagination (the feast 'can never have existed except in his imagination'). Subsequent thematic readings of the feast's imaginariness do likewise, elaborate on the significance of the feast's absence.

On the other hand, understanding other parts of the play's dialogue as working indexically in a straightforward manner is critical commonplace, with particular lines of dialogue taken to indicate the likely existence of stage props mentioned. Indeed, much of the work fleshing out the play's performance details relies on reading its dialogue indexically. The text, for example, indicates that the shepherds give particular gifts — 'This lytyll spruse cofer', 'This ball', and 'This botell' — to the Christ-child, and these moments in the dialogue are understood to indicate the necessity of props for the shepherds to give (672, 681, 694).⁴⁹ Assuming these gifts are imaginary like the food seems unreasonable, as does their mimed donation to Christ. Similarly, the shepherds describe a blazing star moving across the sky, and their dialogue suggests a prop that may have moved across the playing area (463, 650–3).⁵⁰ Cawley and Stevens note the long tradition

of staging this 'important prop', inferring its staging in this instance and thus reading this piece of dialogue indexically.⁵¹

Indexical references also indicate the singing of several songs. The songs' music and lyrics are absent from the play-text, and there are no stage directions that indicate the players should sing. Nevertheless, the play's editors reasonably argue for the performance of these songs, going so far as to identify likely music and lyrics. The angel's song is the most telling example in this regard. The angel appears to the sleeping shepherds and announces (in speech) the birth of Christ (426–38). Yet Gyb wakes, wondering 'What was that sang?' (440). Later, John Horne also refers to the song: 'I wold that we knew / Of this song so fre' (588–9). He exclaims, 'Now, by God that me boght, / It was a mery song!' (595–6). Commenting on the melody's notes, Slawpase declares, 'I can thaim all', and requests that they join him in song (606, 620). Following the shepherds' rendition of the angel's song, Gyb notes, 'Now an ende haue we doyn / Of oure song this tyde' (621–2). The dialogue indicates a song sung twice, first by the angel and then by the shepherds.

As the play offers neither stage directions nor lyrics for these songs, the assertion that the angel and shepherds sing relies on understanding the dialogue to work indexically, and the play's editors reasonably interpret such moments indexically. Cawley and Stevens assert that the 'song sung by the Angels is, of course, the "Gloria in excelsis Deo" following the text of Luke ii.14'. While they note the lack of a stage direction, they refer to one in the 'Second Shepherds' Play' which explicitly directs that this song be sung, reasonably inferring the same for the 'First Shepherds' Play'.⁵² In other words, Stevens and Cawley supplement the textual absence of stage directions and of song lyrics by relying on the dialogue's indexicality.⁵³

Critics read the drinking that immediately follows the shepherds' feast indexically, too, and the relevant dialogue is worth quoting in detail to make apparent the dialogue's indexical nature. When Gyb asks his companions to 'Reche vs a drynk', John Horne responds, 'Have good ayll of Hely' (349, 352). Gyb approvingly declares 'This is boyte of oure bayll' before Slawpase demands that Gyb 'Now lett me go to' (357, 360). When John Horne curses 'I shrew those lyp-pys / Bot thou leyff me som parte', Gyb notes that Slawpase 'bot syppys' the ale (361–3). Following John Horne's drinking, Slawpase declares 'It was sadly dronken' and Gyb laments that 'To the bothom it is sonken' before John Horne discovers 'Yit a botell her is' (375, 377–8). John Horne proposes a contest before drinking this second bottle: 'Whoso can best syng / Shall haue the begynnyng' of the bottle (383–4). Gyb takes up the challenge, declaring 'I shall set you on

warke' and, in the next lines, 'We haue done oure parte / And songyn right weyll; / I drynke for my parte' (386–9). At this point, John Horne orders the others to 'Abyde, lett cop reyll' (390).

The dialogue indicates that the shepherds handle several stage properties, including a 'botell' and a 'cop' that are near at hand. While the dialogue clearly refers to ale, the drink does not clearly fill the bottle and cup. Given the relative ease of procuring ale, however, there is no practical reason to think that it was not used. Regardless, the pronouns 'this' and 'it' indicate that the shepherds refer to a bottle and a cup, passing them off to each other, whether or not ale fills these containers. As the characters note the ale's disappearance, fear they will receive none, and simply declare 'I drynke', the lines indicate that the shepherds drink (or mime drinking) from the bottle and cup.

The dialogue's several indications that the shepherds drink and handle a bottle and cup is consistent with early English drama's tendency toward indexicality, what Pamela King calls its 'tell-and-show convention'.⁵⁴ Indeed, the play's editors have unpacked the physical action and stage properties required by the scene.⁵⁵ Stevens and Cawley explain, for example, that lines 390–2 indicate that 'the First Shepherd is holding on to the cup, and the Second Shepherd admonishes him to stop drinking and pass it round'. On the one hand, this editorial explanation is unremarkable as it reflects the actions and objects the dialogue indicates. On the other, this explanation sharply contrasts that given to the shepherds' imaginary feast. Even if the ale were imaginary in this scene, the shepherds' interaction with the bottle and cup confuses the issue, as the ale's imaginariness would not be clear to the audience when the shepherds drink from the bottle or cup. That is, for the imaginary quality of the feast to continue into the drinking scene, the bottle and cup would need to be imaginary as well. The drinking scene's requirement of stage properties, however, undermines its imaginary quality.

My point is not to dispute these indexical understandings of the star, gifts, songs, bottle, and cup but to highlight the different interpretive practices that are brought to bear on these parts of the play: reading the shepherds' feast dialogue non-indexically is at odds with reading other parts of their dialogue indexically. We can reasonably assume that the shepherds' feast dialogue tells-and-shows just as much as the shepherds' references to their gifts, the star, their singing, and their bottle and cup.

One might nevertheless object that the imaginary feast parallels the imaginary flock of sheep that Gyb herds near the beginning of the play, warranting a non-indexical reading of the feast. The play clearly marks Gyb's herd as imaginary, however, as several characters recognize it as such. While John Horne is caught

up and participates in Gyb's performance, he later confirms to Slawpase that Gyb's sheep do not exist. When Slawpase asks where Gyb's sheep are, John Horne replies, 'Now, syr, by my hode, / Yit se I no mo, / Not syn I here stode' (196–8). The two characters here explicitly acknowledge Gyb's sheep as imaginary, despite Gyb's absurd attempt to herd them past John Horne. The play thus identifies Gyb's sheep as imaginary.

Similarly, when Slawpase empties his sack of grain in order to demonstrate the others' folly, Jak Garcio appears suddenly, likening the three shepherds to the three fools of Gotham. Like John Horne and Slawpase's recognition that Gyb's sheep are imaginary, Jak Garcio's criticism explicitly declares the three shepherds' foolishness, grounding that recognition within the play itself. In both cases, the play comments on its own action through characters who, like the audience, can perceive the self-delusion of other characters.

In contrast, neither the shepherds nor Jak Garcio criticize the others for enjoying an imaginary feast. The three shepherds politely share their food without questioning the reality of the others' dishes; Jak Garcio exits the play without commenting on the apparent foolishness. Conflict arises among them at the feast's conclusion when they share two bottles of ale that become empty very quickly, and the joke may be that the bottles empty quickly because they do not exist. Nevertheless, as none of the characters in the play comment on the imaginary nature of it, the ale is not marked as the product of delusion.

The play thus treats the feast differently than it does Gyb's sheep, which the play explicitly acknowledges as imaginary. In contrast, none of the play's characters voice any criticism of those foolish enough to enjoy the feast. No evidence internal to the play exists that indicates the feast should be understood as imaginary.

Other Festive Plays and Interludes

As other contemporary plays require characters to consume food, that the 'First Shepherds' Play' should do so as well is unsurprising. Other English shepherd plays explicitly direct actors to eat, suggesting that the shepherds' feast was, if not traditional, familiar. A stage direction in the Coventry 'Pageant of the Shearmen and Taylors', for example, stipulates that '*the scheppardis drawys furth there meyte and doth eyte and dryke; and asse the drynk the fynd the star*'.⁵⁶ Similarly, the Chester 'Shepherds' includes a dialogue in which the three shepherds list their contributions to their meal, and a stage direction orders that they eat ('Tunc commedent').⁵⁷ Stage directions alone do not demonstrate that the players certainly consumed actual food or even the exact items they have described. These

stage directions nevertheless imply a certain degree of indexicality, requiring the players, at the very least, to mime the consumption of the props that signify the food items the shepherds detail. That is, the Coventry and Chester stage directions assume the presence of an object to complete the action of eating.

The Chester play, for which the Painters guild was responsible, almost certainly had consumable food items with its staging. Matthew Sergi persuasively argues that the items of the Chester shepherds' feast corresponded with the items the Painters purchased for their guild ceremonial meals, and that the shepherds' feast was 'quite literally part of the Painters' public feast'.⁵⁸ While the feasts of both plays include unexceptional foods such as ale, puddings, stewed cows' or pigs' feet, and 'groynes', the Chester shepherds consume more down-to-earth fare — bread, butter, onions, garlic, leeks, green cheese, and oat cakes — than do the Towneley shepherds, whose fare also includes roast hare, a goose leg, 'chekyns endorde', roast partridge, a 'tart for a lorde', and calf-liver with verjuice (336–42).⁵⁹ The difference in sophistication of the two shepherds' feasts indicates not that one is imaginary. Rather, the difference likely reflects the different performance context of each play. Whereas the Chester shepherds shared in the Painters' feasts, the Towneley shepherds likely shared in the Christmas feast(s) at which the play likely was performed.

Like those in its Chester analogue, the shepherds in the Towneley 'First Shepherds' Play' plausibly shared the food served at a feast. Given the play's references to Christmas feast dishes, the play may have been performed at — or designed for performance at — a Christmas feast, which reasonably might serve the shepherds' feast items. Whereas the Chester 'Shepherds' offers a model for the integration of feasting with guild-sponsored cycle performance, Henry Medwall's late-fifteenth-century interlude *Fulgens and Lucrez* provides a model for the integration of feasting — possibly a Christmas feast — with a great hall performance.⁶⁰

Medwall's interlude famously opens with a character identified only as 'A' interrupting a meal and chastising the audience: 'What mean ye, syrs, to stond so still? / Have not ye etyn your fill / And payd no thinge therefore?' (2–4).⁶¹ A notes that the audience's 'disshes be not bare, / Nor yet ye do the wyne spare' and marvels that 'after this mery drynkyng / And good recreacyon / There is no wordes amonge this presse' (9–10, 15–17). At the conclusion of the interlude's first part, A notes that as the audience has 'not fully dynd ... Some of them wolde falle to fedyng as fast / As thay had bene almost pyned'; he orders an usher to 'gete them good wyne therto, / Fyll them of the best' (1415–18, 1421–2). Introducing the interlude's second part, A summarizes what was performed 'whan ye where at dyner' (1441).

While his references to the audience's meal do not mention specific food items (other than wine), A's dialogue nevertheless works indexically, referring to the context of play's performance as well as to its audience. Audience members have eaten, although food remains on the tables before them, and, by the end of the first part, they have emptied the wine from their cups and perhaps are hungry again. Importantly, A moves easily between feast and interlude, thereby blurring the distinction between festivity and performance. By acknowledging the performance context in its indexical dialogue, the interlude absorbs that festive context, and the interlude's indexical dialogue serves as documentary witness of the interlude's performance context.

As with A's dialogue in 'Fulgens and Lucre's', the Towneley shepherds' feast dialogue indicates the festive context of the play's performance, blending contextual festivity with the play's action. By integrating festive food and context with its action, the play moves between event — the feast, of which the play is a part — and the play's enactment of the biblical action and characters, in effect extending the event's festivity to the fields outside Bethlehem and the incorporating the scriptural event into the present moment.⁶²

A's dialogue and direct address to the audience, moreover, offers insight into the Towneley character of Jak Garcio, who enters — or perhaps disrupts — the play in order to deliver chorus-like criticism of the shepherds. Like the shepherds' feast itself, Jak Garcio seems to appear from nowhere. The 'First Shepherds' Play' does not prepare for the boy's entrance, and he does not advance the play's action, delivering but seventeen lines before disappearing from the play. His lines appear contradictory as well, at first criticizing the shepherds for their foolishness as though he has witnessed their performance as an audience member. Jak nevertheless integrates himself into the play, responding to Gyb's inquiry about the shepherds' flock, Gyb's portion of which is imaginary.

Although finding the boy's role troubling, critics note his similarity to the antagonistic and combative character Trowle in the Chester 'Shepherds' play. Yet while the boy chastises the shepherds (his bosses) and perhaps responds sarcastically to Gyb's inquiry, his role is not developed to the extent of Trowle's. Indeed, some suggest the boy's appearance to be a consequence of a manuscript transcription error, and that the boy's lines should be attributed to the third shepherd.⁶³

In this light, Jak Garcio's interruption of the play does not make much sense in terms of the play's action. But, as a staged interruption of the play, it does: he enters the play from the feast and exits by drawing the shepherds into the feast. The boy's first lines appear chorus-like, criticizing the foolishness of the three shepherds and likening them to the 'foles of Gotham' as though he has witnessed

the action to this point, or at least Slawpase's rebuke and emptying of the corn sack (260).

The boy's entry to the play serves as a pivot between the first part of the play, which is set in the morning, and the feast, which is set sometime before nightfall. The play's opening episode draws to a close with the three shepherds gathering spilled corn meal, and John Horne noting that he and Gyb have been taught 'Wysdom to sup' (256). Given Jak Garcio's critical distance from the shepherds and the previous action, his response to Gyb's question, 'How pastures oure fee?', is unclear (270). Gyb has no sheep, and both Slawpase and John Horne repudiated his imagination of a flock. That the characters should revert to the collective imagination of the feast is at odds with the repudiation of the imaginary sheep. Slawpase returns the other two to their situation, recalling them from the imaginary to reality.

The boy's comments on the shepherds and his identification of their behaviour with the folkloric fools of Gotham indicate a critical distance from the action, and he comments on the play's preceding action as though he has witnessed it. Of course, he may well have witnessed the action from within the illusionist boundaries of the play world: the play-text lacks stage directions, and the boy could possibly enter the stage unseen by the shepherds earlier than the beginning of his speech.

Yet the boy perhaps enters the play from and as part of the audience's world, as does A in 'Fulgens and Lucre's', integrating the illusionist world of the shepherds with the festive context of the Christmas feast. In addition to the boy's knowledge of the prior action and his criticisms of the shepherds, this might be so for several reasons. The boy's entrance serves as a structural pivot in the play, turning the shepherds' attention from their gathering of the spilled grain to their collective desire for drink and food. The play passes from the morning of the shepherds' meeting to mealtime. As with the angel's appearance later in the play, a role the actor playing the boy may have doubled, the boy's appearance introduces another theme around which the play's action unfolds.

The boy also turns the shepherds' attention to drink and food by calling attention to the festive context of their performance. Having stepped into their performance space from the festive space of the audience, the boy points the shepherds toward that festivity, first drawing the shepherds' attention to the audience and then casting the audience as the shepherds' flock. Responding to Gyb's query regarding the feeding of their flock, the boy replies that 'Thay are grysed to the kne', adding 'If ye will ye may se; / Your bestes ye ken' (272, 274–5). Given that the shepherds have lamented their lack of sheep, the boy's response appears

either sarcastic or nonsensical, and some note that the boy here may joke about mid-winter miraculous pasture. Yet the flock may well refer to an audience that has just feasted, indicating the audience — and not the shepherds' imaginary sheep — are well-pastured, 'gryssed to the kne'. The boy's joke ('If ye will ye may se; / Your bestes ye ken') integrates the audience into the play *as* the shepherds' metaphorical sheep — who will accompany the shepherds to the newborn Christ by the end of the play — and also integrates the shepherds into the Christmas festivity.

The play prepares for this integration, introducing eating as a theme in the lines immediately preceding the boy's entrance: John Horne notes that Slawpase 'has told vs full plane / Wysdom to sup' (255–6). The boy develops the 'supping' motif in these lines, turning the shepherds' attention from the spilled meal to the eating and drinking flock-audience. The shepherds decide to join their flock in festive consumption. Gyb immediately proposes that they sit and drink, but Slawpase instead insists that they eat as well. He calls for food and a table: 'Gett mete, gett, / And sett vs a borde; / Than may we go dyne, / Oure bellys to fyll' (281–4). Slawpase's order conveniently serves as a direction for the boy to set up a table in another part of the playing area. Twenty-three lines of dialogue intervene between Slawpase's demand for a table and John Horne's order to 'Lay furth of oure store', allowing time for the setting up of a table (305).⁶⁴

While the shepherds fill the interval with bickering, the delay appears necessary only if the table and food were actually staged. In this interval, each of the shepherds proposes that they 'go' eat, suggesting that the group moves in some fashion across the performance space toward a table which has been set up for them. The shepherds itemize their contributions to the feast at this point. As their attention falls on the Christmas feast happening before them, they detail — and perhaps appropriate — the dishes the audience has enjoyed. As the shepherds cross the boundary between performance and feast, the play marks itself as a component of both hospitality and festivity. Just as the shepherds participate in the audience's feast, the audience, too, receives the angel's announcement of Christ's birth in Bethlehem.

'Here is to recorde / The leg of a goys'

In its record of a feast, the Towneley 'First Shepherds' Play' offers an early example of what today we would call 'food writing': a textual description of a meal and its components designed to record the quality of the food — in terms of its appetizing qualities and quality of preparation — as well as the food's effects on its

consumers, actual or potential. What the description lacks in sensory detail, it makes up for in variety and, in some cases, costliness. The dialogue documents these dishes as though the dishes were laid out in sumptuous and appetizing display.

The shepherds describe the dishes of a feast, drawing attention both to what they consume and what those at the feast have left behind. The shepherds enjoy not the loin but the carcass that remains after the loin has been trimmed from a roast hare. Similarly, they partake not of the succulent bits of roasted pork but the gristly remaining snouts, that part which Fergus Henderson describes as having 'the lip-sticking quality of not being quite flesh nor quite fat, the perfect foil to the crunch of the crispy ear'.⁶⁵ And in place of an entire roast goose, Slawpase secures a leg. As I argue above, the food and fragments of the shepherds' feast indicate a performance context: like late-medieval interludes such as Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucreces*, the play may have been performed at a Christmas feast, and perhaps should be understood to be a chapel play rather than part of a cycle.

The fragmentary nature of many of the items speaks to their status as having been already been carved for consumption. It may be, too, that these fragments are remainders of a feast, and the shepherds' appropriation of these items forms part of the gathering up that they later propose to do. The shepherds' feast in this way serves as witness to the feast itself, recording not the feast's sumptuous wholeness but rather its parcelling out for consumption as a sign of hospitality and generosity. Attesting to hospitality as a performative act, the play restages the feast and the host's generosity, documenting meal's hospitable provision as well as its festive consumption.

The play blurs the boundaries between its performance and the festive event of which it forms a part. The hospitality of the Christmas feast derives not only from the consumption of food generously shared with guests but also from the play's performance. The feast, shared by hosts, guests, and shepherds, integrates the festive event with the play's performance and with the devotion of the newborn Jesus at the play's conclusion. Whereas critics have thought the imaginari-ness of the shepherds' feast demonstrates the play's opposition of the shepherds' poverty and hunger with Christ's satisfaction of their spiritual destitution, the shared Christmas feast includes all participants in a communal and festive celebration of Christ's birth.

Postscript

Throughout this essay, I express caution with respect to the play's status as documentary evidence of the festive event of which I argue the play was a part. I note several times that the play may be, and may have been, performed without food. Of course, the inverse is true as well: the play may be and may have been performed within the context of a Christmas feast. In order to explore the performance implications for the reading I present here, I staged a performance of the play at a Christmas banquet on 6 December 2017.⁶⁶ Of course, a modern performance cannot confirm past performance practices, but the production did demonstrate the feasibility of treating the shepherds' description of their feast as indexical, with some qualifications.

The production was interested in the indexicality of food items rather than (or, more than) their thematic work. In specific terms, the production privileged the presence of food over its absence, staging material food objects — rather than a mimed consumption of them — in relation to the 'presence' of Christ, a point I tried to make by staging Baby Jesus as a basket of pastries that Mary distributed to some for dessert at the end of the performance.

While the performance exploited the indexicality of the shepherds' feast, it was not always able to do so exactly. The food, along with its service and consumption, was 'medieval-inspired' rather than accurate in its attempt at approximation. Suckling pigs substituted for 'brawn of a boar', and while Slawpase notes 'calf-liver scored', we had served liver pate as an hors d'oeuvre and so were unable to gesture to actual liver during performance. John Horne's reference to a pie was improvised as a 'plate of pork'. While the indexicality did not always work in exact terms — arranging for a caterer to prepare a hare without the loin is not easy — the players' ingestion of semiotic stand-ins for the indicated food was supported by their ingestion of properly identified food items.

Procuring two swine snouts for a performance is also difficult. Yet organizing a banquet with a menu approximating that of the shepherds' feast — including roast suckling pig — eased the burden of managing the feast as props: the food was present and available for use during the performance. I mean *use* in two senses: as prop and as semiotic object (chicken could be eaten but declared to be 'a roast hare without the loin'). Such an arrangement, while requiring organization in advance, suggests that the shepherds' menu can be — perhaps should be — understood as a trace of something like a site-specific performance, one that accommodates and incorporates the social and material context of performance at a feast. That is, assuming a historical performance of 'The First Shepherds' Play'

at a Christmas banquet effectively counters the argument that the shepherds' feast lies beyond the means either of guild members performing in an iterative, cycle performance like at York or at Chester or of a travelling troupe of players. Two further revelations came out of the production, the second of which was one of the more striking unanticipated discoveries of the production.

Food items appear as untimely objects — parts of the present caught up in the performance of past actions. In this light, food appears as a feature of medieval drama's untimeliness, its conflation or confusion of geographic and temporal spaces. In terms more specific to the Towneley playtext, the shepherds move from an English — in our case, Canadian, and, more precisely, Sudburian — countryside to one just outside Bethlehem, but also from the seemingly shared convivial and commensal present to the devotional time of the nativity.

Food mediates this untimeliness in at least two important ways. First, the ingestion of food from the audience's tables is a sharing of a material object in the present moment, a commensal act that synaesthetically complicates the boundaries between play and audience. This performance of the play staged not just action but also festive smells and tastes.

The shared food also charged the performance with a mild degree of conflict and discomfort. In this production, the shepherds' eating was not only an eating-with but also a taking-from the audience, an act of commensality as well as an act of theft. Understanding this theft as commensality relies on the hospitableness of the event itself, drawing attention to the very hospitality of which the play's performance is a part. More importantly, the roast suckling pigs caused the audience discomfort as their service spectacularly foregrounded what typically remains invisible — the fragmented animal bodies that make festivity possible.

This discomfort was the most surprising revelation of the production: food — particularly the suckling pigs — entered the play as both prop and character, working as a durable mediator of the event throughout the play's performance. Along with the carving of one of the roast suckling pigs, the carrying in of the pigs' heads and their placement at the heads of several tables were theatrical spectacles. The heads remained visible throughout the performance and formed a backdrop for the shepherds' adoration of the Christ-child. The pork was linked to the spectacle of carving, which preceded both dining and performance, and remnants remained on the tables until the performance was over.

In other words, food — its production, its service, and its consumption — was theatrical in itself, and its handling developed as a plot that converged with the play's. But more than this, the food — notably the pigs — established a material continuity between event and play: the spectacles of carving and of carrying in of

heads, their ingestion by most of the audience members, their display throughout the action of the play, and the handling of them by the play's characters integrated event and play, suggesting that the play itself might be considered to have been a component of a medieval hospitable food practice.

Notes

- 1 Martin Stevens and A.C. Cawley, eds, *First Shepherds' Play*, in *The Towneley Plays*, EETS 13–14 (Oxford, 1994). References to line numbers will be to this edition of the play unless otherwise indicated, and citations will be in the body of the text.
- 2 A.C. Cawley, 'The "Grotesque" Feast in the *Prima Pastorum*', *Speculum* 30.2 (1955), 216, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2848468>.
- 3 Bridget Henisch, *The Medieval Cook* (Woodbridge UK, 2009), 62.
- 4 Martin Stevens, 'Language as Theme in the Wakefield Plays', *Speculum* 52.1 (1977), 113, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2856898>; also see William F. Munson, 'Audience and Meaning in Two Medieval Dramatic Realisms', *Comparative Drama* 9.1 (1975), 61, who argues that the pretense of the feast, 'like the pretense of the one hundred sheep, grandly and playfully imagines a great abundance of food which, in fact, contrasts with the austere actuality' of the shepherds' economic status.
- 5 Margery M. Morgan, "'High Fraud": Paradox and Double-Plot in the English Shepherds' Plays', *Speculum* 39.4 (1964), 686–7, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2854751>; A.K. Nitecki, 'The Sacred Elements of the Secular Feast in *Prima Pastorum*', *Mediaevalia* 3 (1977), 232–3 argues that the 'imagined opulence of the feast' parodies the Eucharist. Suzanne Speyser, 'Dramatic Illusion and Sacred Reality in the Towneley "Prima Pastorum"', *Studies in Philology* 78.1 (1981), 13–15 argues that miming the feast emphasizes the feast's mimicry of the Mass.
- 6 Lois Roney, 'The Wakefield First and Second Shepherds Plays as Complements in Psychology and Parody', *Speculum* 58.3 (1983), 696–723, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2848964>; Warren Edminster, *The Preaching Fox: Festive Subversion in the Plays of the Wakefield Master* (New York, 2005), 43, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203942604> that although the 'feast is probably imaginary ... it represents the abundant hope and excessive optimism of all festive banquets'; Lisa J. Kiser, "'Mak's Heirs": Sheep and Humans in the Pastoral Ecology of the Towneley First and Second Shepherds' Plays', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 108.3 (2009), 344, <https://doi.org/10.1353/egp.0.0048> argues that the 'almost certainly imaginary' feast evokes nostalgia for a lost ideal of communal festivity, conjuring 'the ghost of village communal feasting past'; Christina M. Fitzgerald and John T. Sebastian, eds, *The First Shepherds' Play*, in *The Broadview Anthology of Medieval Drama* (Peterborough ON, 2013), 152n2 note that the 'The elaborate feast ... mixing aristocratic and plebeian dishes, is imaginary'; Garrett P.J. Epp, ed., '8. *The Shepherds (1)*', in *The Towneley Plays*, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo MI, 2018), n 300, <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/epp-the-shepherds-1> notes

that the feast ‘with its mixture of humble and courtly food items, is almost certainly imaginary, although each shepherd may well pull some actual food and drink from his bag ... such as simple bread and ale’.

- 7 Although several critics assume the food to be staged, explicit arguments for the staging of actual food are rare. Martial Rose, ed., *The Wakefield Mystery Plays* (New York, 1969), 300, asserts that the shepherds’ initial ‘groans of poverty and oppression give way to orgiastic delight in the Shepherds’ gargantuan feast’. Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1972), 387n14, notes that the thematic food descriptions indicate ‘an actual meal ... in the English plays’. Peter W. Travis, *Dramatic Design in the Chester Cycle* (Chicago, 1982), 120, remains ambiguous, noting the ‘extravagance of their (mock?) feast’. Robert Adams, ‘The Egregious Feasts of the Chester and Towneley Shepherds’, *The Chaucer Review* 21.2 (1986), 98 argues that a literal staging of the feast does not undermine the feast’s figural significance. Jeffrey Helterman, *Symbolic Action in the Plays of the Wakefield Master* (Athens GA, 1981), 85 sees the feast as significant in the shepherds’ development of imaginative capability. He argues that the shepherds more likely ‘have before them as simple a meal as possible, probably bread and ale, which they imaginatively convert into a gourmet dinner’. V.A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford, 1966), 160–6, associates the shepherds’ feast with those commonly celebrated at Christmas and that the feast establishes the anachronism of English shepherds outside biblical Bethlehem.
- 8 Robert Epstein, ‘Eating Their Words: Food and Text in the Coronation Banquet of Henry VI’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 36.2 (2006), 361, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10829636-2005-005>.
- 9 For criticism that demonstrates the entanglements of medieval drama with the alimentary context of their performance, see Epstein, ‘Eating Their Words’; Matthew Sergi, ‘Festive Piety: Staging Food and Drink at Chester’, *Medieval English Theatre* 31 (2009), 89–136; Claire Sponsler, ‘Edible Theater’, in *The Queen’s Dumbshows: John Lydgate and the Making of Early Theater* (Philadelphia, 2014), 147–66.
- 10 For an example, see Ryan Heffernan, *Sheep Squad Presents: The First Shepherd’s Play*, 4 January 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5RWFOJ44SVQ>.
- 11 Richard Leighton Greene, ed., ‘Balliol College MS’, in *A Selection of English Carols* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).
- 12 On medieval drama’s relationship to indexical language, see David Mills, ‘“Look at Me When I’m Speaking to You”: The “Behold and See” Convention in Medieval Drama’, *Medieval English Theatre* 7 (1985), 4–12; Garrett P.J. Epp, ‘Visible Words: The York Plays, Brecht, and Gestic Writing’, *Comparative Drama* 24.4 (1990), 289–305; Pamela M. King, ‘Seeing and Hearing: Looking and Listening’, *Early Theatre* 3

- (2000), 155–66, <https://doi.org/10.12745/et.3.1.595>; and John J. McGavin and Greg Walker, *Imagining Spectatorship: From the Mysteries to the Shakespearean Stage* (New York, 2016).
- 13 Barbara D. Palmer, "'Towneley Plays' or 'Wakefield Cycle' Revisited', *Comparative Drama* 21.4 (1987), 318–48, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cdr.1987.0034>; Garrett P.J. Epp, 'The Towneley Plays and the Hazards of Cycling', *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 32 (1993): 121–50; Barbara D. Palmer, 'Recycling "The Wakefield Cycle": The Records', *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 43 (2002), 88–130; Garrett P.J. Epp, 'Re-Editing Towneley', *The Yearbook of English Studies* 43 (2013), 87–104, <https://doi.org/10.5699/yearenglstud.43.2013.0087>.
 - 14 Epp, 'Re-Editing Towneley', 96–7.
 - 15 Ibid, 96.
 - 16 Lawrence M. Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period* (Chicago, 2001), 179.
 - 17 Alexandra F. Johnston, 'The Second Shepherds' Play: A Play for the Christmas Season', *Medieval English Theatre* 37 (2015), 135.
 - 18 Suzanne R. Westfall, *Patrons and Performance: Early Tudor Household Revels* (Oxford, 1990), 49–52, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198128809.001.0001>; for a dissenting point of view, see Clifford Davidson, *Festivals and Plays in Late Medieval Britain* (Burlington VT, 2007), 18–19, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315255293>.
 - 19 Westfall, *Patrons*, 50–3.
 - 20 Ibid, 56–7.
 - 21 Cawley, "'Grotesque" Feast', 214; Thomas Austin, *Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery-Books* (London, 1888), 68, accessed 12 February 2016, <http://archive.org/details/twofifteenthcent00austuoft>; John Russell, 'The Boke of Nurture Folowyng Englondis Gise', in *Early English Meals and Manners: With Some Forewords on Education in Early England*, ed. Frederick James Furnivall (London, 1868), 36, <http://archive.org/details/earlyenglishmeal00furnuoft>.
 - 22 Cawley, "'Grotesque" Feast', 215.
 - 23 Ibid.
 - 24 Ibid.
 - 25 Russell, 'Boke of Nurture', 26. Russell offers the same carving instructions for ducks, osprey, and swan.
 - 26 Ibid, 29.
 - 27 Austin, *Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery Books*, 67; while Ken Albala to Ernst Gerhardt, 13 April 2016, <https://tweetdeck.twitter.com/#> states with certainty that snouts were consumed in the late-medieval period, he notes that he has not 'seen them mentioned as separate from the whole head'. The Towneley reference is rare.

- For modern consumption of snouts, see ‘Pig Snout | I Try It So You Don’t Have To’, *So Good Blog*, 23 July 2013, <http://www.sogoodblog.com/2013/07/23/pig-snout/>; ‘Roasted Pig Snout | Houston Press’, 5 October 2009, <http://www.houstonpress.com/restaurants/roasted-pig-snout-6414356>; ‘Guest Post — Pot Roast Pig’s Head by Russell Everett | Nose To Tail At Home’, 15 February 2010; Fergus Henderson, *The Whole Beast: Nose to Tail Eating* (New York, 2004), 30.
- 28 Peter Brears, *Cooking and Dining in Medieval England* (Totnes, Devon, 2012), 368, describes as relatively common the preparation of sheep that have died in this way.
- 29 Austin, *Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery Books*, 62.
- 30 Ibid, 61. Also see the recipe for a porpoise pudding, 42.
- 31 Felicity Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1990), 70, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198217633.001.0001>.
- 32 Heal, 74–5; on the giving of food as ‘boon gift’, see Felicity Heal, ‘Food Gifts, the Household and the Politics of Exchange in Early Modern England’, *Past & Present* 199.1 (2008), 49–52, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtn002>.
- 33 C.C. Dyer, ‘Seasonal Patterns of Food Consumption in the Later Middle Ages’, in *Food in Medieval England: Diet and Nutrition*, ed. C.M. Woolgar, T. Waldron, and D. Serjeantson (Oxford, 2006), 210.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England*, 70–1.
- 36 Dyer, ‘Seasonal Patterns’, 210.
- 37 Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England*, 71–2.
- 38 Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, 164.
- 39 Ibid, 161.
- 40 Ibid, 166.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 C.M. Woolgar, ‘Meat and Dairy Products in Late Medieval England’, in *Food in Medieval England*, 93.
- 43 Dyer, ‘Seasonal Patterns’, 203.
- 44 Ibid, 203, 206.
- 45 Woolgar, ‘Meat and Dairy’, 94.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 D.J. Stone, ‘The Consumption and Supply of Birds in Late Medieval England’, in *Food in Medieval England*, 152, 156.
- 48 Ibid, 156.
- 49 The plays editors note the items, implying their reference to stage-properties. See Martin Stevens and A.C. Cawley, eds, *The Towneley Plays*, 494; Fitzgerald and Sebastian, *The First Shepherds’ Play*, 157n2–3; Epp, 8. *The Shepherds (1)*, n 672.

- 50 See Speyser, 'Dramatic Illusion', 18 who asserts that 'The star was almost certainly a dazzlingly visible prop dominating the stage as the shepherds moved toward the manger'. Stevens and Cawley, *The Towneley Plays*, 493n652 note that at the second reference to it, the star 'was made to move, perhaps on a transom, to guide the shepherds to the manger'. Fitzgerald and Sebastian, *The First Shepherds' Play*, 154n7 note that 'This star, as stage property, apparently moves, later in the play'. Epp, 8. *The Shepherds (1)*, n 463 explains that 'This star as stage property is moveable ... and its appearance likely accompanied that of the angel ... The use of the past tense ... likely indicates that the star disappears from sight at this point; it reappears suddenly ... [later], leading the way to the Nativity scene'.
- 51 Stevens and Cawley, *First Shepherds' Play*, 490n463; also see Epp, 8. *The Shepherds (1)*, n 463; Fitzgerald and Sebastian, *The First Shepherds' Play*, 154n7.
- 52 Stevens and Cawley, *The Towneley Plays*, 490n425 and sd; Epp, 8. *The Shepherds (1)*, n 426–38; Fitzgerald and Sebastian, *The First Shepherds' Play*, 154n4.
- 53 The play also concludes with a song, although Cawley and Stevens do not comment on it. Epp, 8. *The Shepherds (1)*, n 724, notes that 'They sing to close the play'. Fitzgerald and Sebastian, *The First Shepherds' Play*, 1.505 sd, include an editorial stage direction: 'They sing'.
- 54 King, 'Seeing', 163.
- 55 Stevens and Cawley, *The Towneley Plays*, 489; Fitzgerald and Sebastian, *The First Shepherds' Play*, 152–3; Epp, 8. *The Shepherds (1)*, n 352ff.
- 56 Pamela M. King and Clifford Davidson, eds, *The Pageant of the Company of Shearmen and Taylors in Coventry*, in *The Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, Early Drama, Art, and Music Monograph Series 27 (Kalamazoo MI, 2000), 1.228 sd.
- 57 R.M. Lumiansky and D. Mills, eds, *The Paynters Playe*, in *The Chester Mystery Cycle: Volume I — Text* (New York, 1974), 136 sd.
- 58 Sergi, 'Festive Piety: Staging Food and Drink at Chester', 100; see 93–104 for full discussion.
- 59 Lumiansky and Mills, *The Paynters Playe*, 113–46.
- 60 Westfall, *Patrons*, 56.
- 61 Henry Medwall, *Fulgens and Lucreces*, in *Medieval Drama: An Anthology*, ed. Greg Walker (Oxford, 2000). The text references cite line numbers in this edition.
- 62 Sharon Aronson-Lehavi, *Street Scenes: Late Medieval Acting and Performance* (New York, 2011), 3, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230118119>.
- 63 On the possibility that the lines are mistakenly attributed to Jak Garcio rather than to the Third Shepherd, see A.C. Cawley, 'Jak Garcio of the Prima Pastorum', *Modern Language Notes* 68.3 (1953), 169–72, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2909377>.

- 64 For example, in Lewis Wager, *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene*, in *Reformation Biblical Drama in England: An Old-Spelling Critical Edition*, ed. Paul Whitfield White (New York:, 1992), 1641–64, the setting out of a table for Christ and Simon occupies twenty lines of dialogue.
- 65 Henderson, *The Whole Beast*, 30.
- 66 Videos of the performance and of the event are viewable at *The Towneley First Shepherds' Play*, 9 May 2018, <https://sites.google.com/laurentian.ca/wakefieldplayers/the-towneley-first-shepherds-play>.