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Plays, Plague, and Pouches The Role of the Outside in Early Modern English Plague Remedies

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Abstract

The article analyses the connection between seventeenth-century English needlework, drama, and plague. Frog pouches – needleworked, perfumed sweet bags used to repel the miasmatic spread of plague – reveal wider attitudes about foreign landscapes in seventeenth-century London and England more generally. This article, then, uses the works of Shakespeare, Jonson, and other playwrights and authors of the period, as well as the materials of frog pouches themselves, to explore the exoticism and accessibility of those environments that frogs inhabit. Foreign animals that lived far from English shores, the article argues, thus provided the scents for pouches. The animals that these pouches mimic reveal a reverence for the rural landscape closer to home but just as unknown.

Keywords: *Foreignness, Frogs, Needlework, Plague, Theatre*

1. *Introduction: The Curious Case of the Frog Pouch*

A curious frog pouch lies within the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (Figure 1).[1] But the sparse amount of literature exploring the symbolism of this item is concerning, since the physical form of the pouch at the Ashmolean recurs in another pouch within a heavily-worn embroidered cabinet at the University of Alberta (Figure 2) and at least four other examples.

[1] Frog pouches are minuscule, needleworked bags made to resemble frogs, with silk-wrapped wire appendages, bodies of metallic and silk threads in detached buttonhole stitch, and bead eyes. Each pouch has an internal bag made of silk whose opening aligns with the frog's mouth. Museum collections label these as frogs but, given the lack of differentiation between frogs and toads in the seventeenth century, these pouches may possibly depict toads.

Figure 1 – 'Frog Purse', 17th Century, silk and metal threads, silk floss, silk fabric, leather (?), metal purl, wire, and glass beads, 6 cm x 7.5 cm x 1.5 cm. WA1947.191.324 Anonymous, Frog Purse Image © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

Figure 2 – Gold-coloured Crocheted Frog Bag. Metal thread (frog), yellow silk (bag), blue glass beads with black dots (eyes). Found in a stumpwork box, England, 1645. Anne Lambert Clothing and Textiles Collection (1992.15.1d). Photograph by Anne Bissonnette © Department of Human Ecology, University of Alberta

The meaning, which recurs in the physical appearance of both pouches, still requires exploration in scholarly discourse. What rationale, in other words, brought about the production of these pouches in early modern English society, and what made them appealing within the early modern marketplace? The anarchic, unpredictable, and unfamiliar landscapes recurring in early modern English drama, we shall go on to show, may answer this question; the frog-like animal features within the Senecan forest of *Titus Andronicus* and in the tempestuous landscape of a Scottish heath in *Macbeth*. The ambivalent, albeit hellish, setting in Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Queens* (c. 1609) reserves a place for this creature too. These strange settings beyond the experience of the early modern Londoner went with those otherworldly landscapes sourcing the materials that lay within these areas. An otherworldly power adorns these pouches as a result, as individuals sought to find new ways to counter the miasmatic effects of plague in early modern England.

The mystery of these pouches strengthens when we note how scholars have disagreed over their purpose and production date, although their minute size and materials suggest that they were sweet bags made in the latter half of the seventeenth century.[2] The little mention of these pouches in contemporaneous texts does not help things either, and they do not appear in the visual record. But, given their similarities in size, materials, and purpose to bellow-shaped pouches from the latter half of the seventeenth century, it is likely that these frog pouches are from the same time.[3]

The reasons why the pouch appears like a frog are difficult to pin down too. These containers could have been inspired by any number of frog-centric events or print sources. The prominence of the frog in the cultural zeitgeist of early modern English society may become clear when we consider how this animal may have been socially and politically relevant. The frog, for instance, may have returned in stitched form after it featured in the royal court towards the end of the sixteenth century. Francis, Duke of Anjou and Alençon, gave Elizabeth I an earring imitating this animal, and Elizabeth gave him the affectionate nickname of 'frog' as a result. When Francis died in 1584 at the premature age of 30, the queen was heartbroken. The pouches, then, may have become monuments to the queen's lost love (Weir 1998, 50). The return of the frog in other contexts, however, complexifies any attempt to uncover the symbolism of this animal. This creature returns in dramatic settings; the hags in Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Queens* speak of a purset made from the skin of a frog's back (1970, ll. 171-173), while the 'toe' of a frog descends to the bottom of a hellish broth brewed by the weird sisters in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (4.1.14).[4] These animals feature in the second edition of John Ogilby's *The fables of Aesop paraphras'd in verse* as well; an engraving complementing the fable entitled 'Of the Frogs Fearing the Sun Would Marry' displayed clothed frogs gathered outside the town hall in Amsterdam. The anti-Dutch satire emerges here, and the use of the 'frog' as

[2] Scholars do not disagree on their English origin, though. The pouches closely resemble both contemporaneous English sweet bags and the other minute animal-shaped needleworked objects made out of wire and silk and metallic threads found within cabinets and caskets embroidered by English schoolgirls. Although the lack of documentation prevents scholars from proving the frog pouches' English origins, there has never been reason to question their provenance. The needlework matches most closely that made in England at the same time.

[3] Bellows-shaped purses are approximately the same size as frog pouches and were likely used as sweet bags. Bellows purses are found within several embroidered cabinets and caskets from between 1650 and 1700, the most famous being Martha Edlin's in the Victoria and Albert Museum, casket which is part of an entire needlework suite. Edlin was born in 1660 and her casket is dated 1671, so the bellows purse is likely from the 1670s or perhaps early 1680s. It can be said with certainty the bellows purse is from the latter half of the century, so it is likely the frog pouch is, as well.

[4] All Shakespeare quotes are taken from Taylor *et al.*, 2017.

a seventeenth-century derogatory term for the Dutch becomes clear in turn.[5] These pouches, then, may have enabled the English to achieve a form of physical control over their enemies in the Anglo-Dutch Wars.

There are, of course, problems meeting the hypotheses given above. Certainly, the legacy of Francis does not explain why these pouches return in the seventeenth century: the memory of the Duke may have dissipated after Elizabeth I died in 1603, and the similarity of these frog-shaped pouches to the bellow-shaped pouches made in the seventeenth century reveals an interest succeeding the political contexts of Elizabeth's court. A political reason seems difficult to justify too, since it is likely that these pouches did not feature exclusively within court circles. Anyone who could afford the monetary costs of the materials that constructed these items could purchase them. The return of the frog in dramatic settings, moreover, recalls the importance of the frog in the cultural zeitgeist as well. The influence of anti-Dutch sentiment in the frogs that fall into the murky liquid of the potion in *Macbeth*, for instance, hardly seems likely. But the symbolism of the frog in dramatic performances remains potent. The physical form of these pouches is thus significant; the frog became a particularly powerful image in early modern society that went beyond the confines of court circles.

The physical characteristics of the pouch muddies hypotheses about their use as well. These pouches may have been used as tiny purses for coins. But it is much more likely that these containers were sweet bags used to hold fragrances, since the drawstring mouth is too small to reach into with more than a finger (Brooks 2004, 76). What merits, in other words, would emerge if one could only extract coins from the pouch with a single finger? Such a task would doubtless irritate any buyer paying for goods in the early modern marketplace.

But the function of these pouches as the carriers of sweet-smelling substances brings another hypothesis into view; an emphasis on smell may recall plague treatments in the seventeenth century. This focus on cleanliness, whereby sight and smell played a role in discussions about how one contained and countered pestilence in early modern England, becomes particularly clear in a pamphlet written by Thomas Thayre in 1603:

> that al ye stréetes, lanes, and allies be kept cleane and swéete, as possible may bée, not suffering the filth and swéepings to lie on heapes, as it dooth, especiallie in the suburbes, but to be caried awaie more spéedily: for the uncleane kéeping of the stréetes, yéelding as it dooth noisome and vnsavuory smelles, is a meanes to increase the corruption of the aire, and giueth great strength vnto the pestilence. (8)

The danger of unsavoury smells from sewage piled in city streets comes into focus in the passage above. The diffusion of such smells corrupted the air; bad smells were seen as pathological for, when breathed in, harmed the inside of the body (Wear 2000, 319). Indeed, the 'sweete, cleane, and healthie ayre', Christoph Wirsung claimed in a treatise in 1598, maintained a healthy heart (654).

2. *Textiles and Contagion in Early Modern England*

The function of the frog pouch as the carrier of sweet-smelling items is thus a rare example of a textile used to fight off sickness. These textiles stood apart from their counterparts; the connection between fabric and contagion had established itself by the time the plague returned

[5] <www.oed.com/view/Entry/74855>, accessed 1 March 2021. For the symbolism of frogs to express anti-Dutch sentiments, and Ogilby and Hollar's specific use of frog symbolism to convey such ideas, see the ample discussion in Smith 2007.

to London in 1665. To seventeenth-century writers, wool became the most dangerous textile in times of plague (Bowden 2013, 5-6). This unfortunate attribute, whereby wool became a vector of disease, had a history in official and royal decrees. Henry VII, for instance, levelled an act against upholsterers about contaminated bedding in 1495 (North 2020, 54). The threat of wool returned in seventeenth-century medical discourse, when physician Stephen Bradwell recommended 'for Garments [to] avoide (as much as may bee) all leather, woollen, and furres' (1636, 15). The dangers of woollen fabric emerged again when Gideon Harvey spoke about the London outbreak of plague in 1665; pestilence, he argued, 'may be preserved several yeares' in 'woollen cloaths, beds, [and] furniture' (1665, 9).

The dangers of wool hastened their destruction in turn, since individuals saw these textiles to spread pestilence from an infected person to healthier members of the population (North 2020, 55).[6] Textiles were, in other words, burnt to prevent the miasmatic spread of sickness. They were vessels of illness – an inevitable problem because woollen clothing and bedding were necessities. A plague outbreak in the small village of Eyam, Derbyshire, in 1665-1666, when a bale of cloth brought the London outbreak to George Viccars, a local tailor, offers us a poignant example in this regard. Viccars set this cloth out by the fire; the infected cloth led Viccars to die of plague a few days later, but his movements throughout this community infected much of the village as well.[7]

But clothing, bedding, and mass-produced textiles were not the only fabric goods burnt. Decorative home goods and clothing accessories met their destruction as well. Indeed, a note within a mid-seventeenth-century embroidered cabinet, now at the Ashmolean, speaks about the systematic destruction of these items:

> The cabinet was made by my mother's grandmother who was educated at Hackney School. After the plague in London all the young ladies' works were burnt [crossed out] destroyed that then were about at that time. She left school soon after, therefore this was made viz before year 1665. (Brooks 2004, 11)

'All the young ladies' works' met fire and destruction in the above passage, as the plague tore through the packed streets of early modern London and its outskirts. These items would have included band samplers, raised work mirror frames, embroidered cabinets or caskets, embroidered pin cushions, needle cases, and beadworked jewellery cases.[8]

3. *The Foreign Origins of Frog-Pouch Materials and Scents*

It is, then, intriguing to note that, while some textiles were destroyed to prevent the spread of pestilence, other textiles were made. Embroidered gloves and embroidered sweet bags, for instance, were spared the treatment of their counterparts. Wirsung's comments about

[6] During times of plague, wool was avoided in life. But it was unavoidable in death. In the face of a dying wool industry in England, King Charles passed Acts for Burying in Woollen in 1666, 1678, and 1680. It was 'intended for the lessening the Importation of Linnen from beyond the Seas and the Encouragement of the Wollen and Paper Manufactures of this Kingdome' and required all those who died, except for those with plague and those too poor, to be buried in local woollen cloth. In times of sickness in seventeenth-century England, local textiles were abandoned and foreign materials utilised. But there was an inevitable return to local materials when buried in local ground (Charles II, 1677 & 1678: An Act for burying in Woollen 1819, 885).

[7] <https://wellcomecollection.org/articles/XO0I9RAAAGo8a2St>, accessed 1 March 2021.

[8] See two of the most famous surviving suites of needlework made by seventeenth-century girls, Martha Edlin and Hannah Downes. Both suites (T.432-1990 and T.31-1935) are at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

sweet-smelling air, which we spoke about earlier in this article, resonate here; the popularity of embroidered gloves and embroidered sweet bags revolved about the ease by which they could be perfumed to counter miasma. The status of these gloves as important symbols of social currency drove forward their popularity in the first decades of the seventeenth century, while their perfumed states helped to stymie the odours of pestilence. Most of the sweet bags that survive, moreover, were created between 1600 and 1650, roughly contemporaneous with perfumed gloves. But it is likely that these bags were actually made and used throughout the seventeenth century, not just in the first half.[9] These sweet bags were needleworked pomanders; images of plants, flowers, and animals adorned their exteriors, while sweet-smelling fragrances lay within them.

The frog pouch at the Ashmolean Museum is one example of these sweet bags. This item shared the function of the two items discussed above, since substances with strange-smelling scents lay within them. But the materials that construct this pouch are striking as well; an exotic focus emerges when one subjects this pouch to a close examination. Two padded sections, possibly made of leather and covered in green silk, form the base of this pouch. A network of stitching made of metal thread criss-crosses the base of the pouch as well; a 'mottled appearance ... created on the bottom section by laying down little patches of green silk floss between the silk and the needleworked mesh' (Brooks 2004, 17) emerges as a result. Metal purl surrounds the eyes of the frog pouch too, which are made of green and black glass beads. This material also adorns the upper section and edges of the pouch. A bag of cream silk, moreover, lies inside the base of the pouch, which is attached at the hinge and at the opening. The limbs and fingers of this pouch are made of wire bound with silk thread, and the drawstring chord is made of five silk and two metallic threads. The small size of this pouch returns in its five known contemporaries. Needleworked bodies, wire appendages, mouths forming the opening of the pouches, and drawstring cords feature in these other items too.[10]

The expanse of silk, metal purl, and glass featuring in this frog pouch is intriguing. Certainly, the wire of these pouches was local, made in England (Caple 1992, 244). The country sourcing metal purl, which was used to decorate several of the pouches, is uncertain, as it involves both wire and silk threads. One would, presumably, have constructed the skeleton of this frog pouch using local materials – such as wire – and then apply the array of silk, beads, and glass on top. An emphasis on the foreign, however, comes across clearly when we consider how much of the silk, silk threads, beads, and wire came from European lands across the sea; Italy and, to some extent, France, ruled the European silk industry by the seventeenth century, although China supplied this material prior to then.[11] The silk industry in seventeenth-century England was, conversely, lacking. This profession did not begin in earnest until after 1685, when the Edict of Nantes was revoked and French Huguenots migrated to England in large numbers. The reliance of Londoners on Italy and France for their silks is, then, telling. An overseas emphasis emerges in turn, since places abroad sourced the silks constructing the pouches before 1685.

[9] It is possible that some surviving sweet bags were made later in the seventeenth century but have been dated incorrectly because so many examples have been dated 1600 to 1650. No sweet bags used during plague epidemics survive, as they were worn out by constant use or discarded after the fear of plague or other miasmatic diseases subsided. Surviving sweet bags are made of fine, expensive materials and have very little wear, which suggests they survived because they were rarely used. Sweet bags that were used every day were surely worn out and therefore do not survive.

[10] The small number of extant frog pouches is likely due to their small size, making them easy to lose or misplace. It is likely that at least several more exist in private collections and are not publicly known.

[11] See Watt 2003, <https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/txt_s/hd_txt_s.htm>, accessed 1 March 2021.

Silk embroidery threads may have come from overseas as well, but it is unclear if the embroidery threads were dyed in their country of origin or once they had arrived in England. The cord forming the drawstrings included in each frog pouch may have held foreign connotations too. Many threads may have formed this element of the pouch, which would make it either a foreign product or an item made by amateur needleworkers using foreign material (Volo and Volo 2006, 263). Overseas areas also sourced the beads used as eyes on several of these pouches; Venice and Amsterdam were, after all, the centres of bead making in the seventeenth century (Hume 2001, 53).

An emphasis on the foreign emerges again when we examine the scents within the pouch. This strangeness becomes clear in the many sixteenth- and-seventeenth-century publications providing instructions for the manufacture of perfumes and scent mixtures in pomanders. For example, in William Salmon's art treatise, detailed instructions about the creation of perfuming oils, essences, unguents, powders, balsams, tablets, wash balls, soaps, and pomanders for bracelets feature (1673, 307-332).[12] Four recipes for pomander perfumes appear in this text; an overseas trope returns, since lands thousands of miles from England provided the ambergris, musk, and civet common across all four recipes.

Ambergris, determined relatively recently to develop in a whale's intestines, came from whales in the tropical waters of the Indian Ocean and the South Atlantic (Dannenfeldt 1982, 385). This scent becomes more frequent when European trade and exploration in Asia and the Americas unveiled new supplies. The exoticism of ambergris, however, did not revolve around its ambiguous area of origin; questions were also asked about how it came to be. The strangeness of this substance remained a mystery, since the 'precise nature of the association between ambergris and whales remained problematic' (391). This ambiguity becomes clear when we consider how seventeenth-century writers attributed ambergris to bird excrement, cow dung, a mixture of wax and honey gathered by bees, and a product formed at the bottom of the sea which was then eaten and expelled by whales (386, 392, 394 and 395). Such speculation about the geographical and biological origin of this material, then, goes with its use in early modern European perfumery. The mystery of this substance strengthens, since ambergris came from so far outside the normality of seventeenth-century London and, by extension, European life.

The familiar theme of foreignness returns when we consider how musk and civet were, like ambergris, from faraway lands. The first of these perfumes came from the perineal glands of the musk deer; the mountainous areas of modern-day China, Myanmar, Vietnam, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Asia through India, Iran, the Arabian Peninsula, and Egypt were the places of residence for these animals. These regions supplied the musk scent that emerged, eventually, in the marketplaces of early modern Europe. But an ambiguity emerges in this scent as well, since Europeans were unclear about the geographical and biological origins of musk (Borschberg 2004, 10). Asia, Africa, and Southern Europe, moreover, sourced the civet. Overseas landscapes far from the environs of early modern England come across as a result.[13] This exoticism strengthens when one considers how some Londoners – including Daniel Defoe – sought to breed the animal to create a secure, local source (James 2019). The demand for civet becomes clear here. But attempts to establish a stable, domestic supply of

[12] Given the short length of the frog pouch drawstring cords, it is likely that they were worn on the wrist instead of around the neck or waist.

[13] See James 2019, <https://recipes.hypotheses.org/15008>, accessed 1 March 2021.

this scent were ill-fated, since the animals were unable to acclimatise to the locked cages and artificially-heated spaces confining them.[14] This farming misadventure illustrates just how foreign civets were to England. These animals operated in environmental conditions beyond the comprehension of those seeking to retain them. But their strangeness manifested in other ways as well; the physical form of the civet featured in the shop signs and trade cards of at least seven perfumers in the City (James 2019). The exoticism of the civet, then, became a conspicuous feature of the early modern marketplace.

4. *Islands, Anarchies, and Otherworlds: The Ambiguity of the Overseas Landscape in Early Modern Drama*

The strange symbolism of the frog pouch will return later in this article. The recurrence of the overseas location, however, becomes clear in the recipes of William Salmon (1673); the strange-smelling ingredients of ambergris, musk, and civet went with the silks, metal purl, and glass beads forming the seventeenth-century frog pouch in the Ashmolean. Ambiguous and unfamiliar materials replace locally-sourced goods here, as individuals sought to acquire solutions that countered the 'venomous vapours' of early modern plague outbreaks (Lord 2014, 6). But this preference for foreign goods over locally-sourced materials in times of plague requires further discussion. Why, in other words, did unfamiliar materials and substances feature so extensively in these early modern solutions to plague outbreak? The anarchic landscapes featuring in travel literature and early modern drama may answer this question. Environments that operated beyond the familiarity of an early modern English landscape feature in these sources; forces rebelling against early modern conceptions of normality and stability offered an otherworldly power that emerged in the perfumes, materials, and imagery of the frog pouch.

These uncharted landscapes found overseas become particularly clear in early modern discourse. Accounts about the Spanish colonisation of the New World, along with their massive extractions of gold and silver from mines in Peru and Mexico, brought about an English political urgency to explore these locations and acquire the materials found within them (Glover and Smith 2008, 17 and 20). This interest becomes clear in court, when Elizabeth I received Richard Hakluyt's *The Discourse of Western Planting* in 1584 (Helfers 1997, 163). But this fascination emerges in popular circles as well; Hakluyt's later *The Principall Navigations* (1589) met a warm reception, while Sir Walter Ralegh's *The Discoverie of Guiana*, published in 1596, enjoyed a rich printing history. Three editions of this latter manuscript were printed by Robert Robinson in the same year; the 'extraordinary general curiosity' (Lorimer 2006, lxxxiii) about Ralegh's travels abroad becomes particularly clear.

The voyages to these strange locations became the subjects of early modern literature too; easily-accessible travel stories 'romanticised ocean voyages to foreign places', while the dangers of these ventures abroad returned in discourse as well (see Blayney 1990, 325-327). Anthony Nixon, for instance, wrote about the departure of a traveller from England in July, 1607: many of the sailor's friends, 'both learned preachers, and others went about to disswade him [the traveller] from his adventurous enterprise'. This attempt, they argued, brought about a 'great sinne in tempting the mercie of God in so strange and unhearde-of matter of boldnesse' (quoted by Parr 2015, 1). A weariness about the sea, and the tempestuous and unfamiliar weather systems within these maritime climates, also becomes clear in William Strachey's account about the

[14] See the 'Civet' entry in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/animal/civet-mammal-Viverridae-family>, accessed 1 March 2021.

Atlantic storm that met the *Sea Venture* off Bermuda in 1609; an otherworldly environment becomes clear, as Strachey speaks about 'Windes and Seas' that 'might not hold comparison' with the storms that he encountered in Mediterranean settings off 'the coast of Barbary and Algeere, in the Levant, and once more ... in the Adriatique gulfe' (quoted by Hulme 1986, 96). Another storm of similarly unnatural proportions features in colonial discourse, when a hurricane devastated a colony of Sir Thomas Warner on the isle of St. Christopher in the Leeward Islands in 1624 (Mulcahy 2008, 11). John Taylor spoke of a further storm in 1638. The otherness of this tempest comes into focus, since there is something strange about the definition of a storm as an 'attribute of savagery itself' (Hulme 1986, 99).

The danger and instability of these oceanic environments returns in early modern drama as well. The sea in William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, Laurence Publicover concludes in a piece about this play, is a 'tumbled heap within which consideration – taking a stance, and positioning oneself in the world – is drowned' (2014, 153). The established foundations of civilisation and selfhood endemic in early modern society, in other words, shudder and break as they meet the chaos of an unpredictable and tempestuous ocean. This maritime environment rebels against experience as well. Let us take the speech of the Clown in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, who follows a shepherd onstage to discover Perdita, the daughter of Leontes, and a chest of gold. The anarchic setting of the ocean becomes particularly clear in these moments:

Clown. I have seen two such sights, by sea and by land! But I am not to say it is a sea, for it is now the sky: Betweext the firmament and it you cannot thrust a bodkin's point.
Shepherd. Why, boy, how is it?
Clown. I would you did but see how it chafes, how it rages, how it takes up the shore. But that's not to the point. O, the most piteous cry of the poor souls! Sometimes to see 'em, and not to see 'em; now the ship boring the moon with her mainmast, and anon swallowed with yeast and froth, as you'd thrust a cork into a hogshead. (3.3.76-84)

An oceanic body rebels against the comprehension of the Clown here: the sea is, at the same time, the 'sky'. The contradiction in terms in this description reveals an ocean that operates outside the definitions and understanding of the speaker. This body of water is transgressive; to the Clown, the waves move beyond the restraining line of the horizon and, more broadly, the construction of the known world, 'boring [scraping]' the astrologically significant body of the 'moon' above. Those caught within this tempest fade in and out of existence as well. Publicover's comments about the sea and the self become clear here; the sailors are sometimes seen and sometimes not seen, fading in and out of the Clown's perceptions of existence as they struggle – unsuccessfully – to keep their vessel afloat. The fragility of the mariners in this maritime environment, along with the vessel that they stand astride, becomes very real as a result. This chaotic setting appears again in *The Tempest,* when the Boatswain chastises the court party as he struggles to control the ship of Alonso and his courtiers in the opening moments of the play:

Boatswain. Hence! What cares these roarers for the name of the king? To cabin; Silence! Trouble us not. (1.1.15-16)

The 'roarers [waves]' challenge the absolute stability and power of the 'king' in this passage. The capacities of this oceanic environment to work in ways beyond the expanse of rules and customs that a king oversees and controls becomes particularly clear as a result. The power of the ruler becomes subject to even greater manifestations of natural power in this environment instead.

The mysterious landscapes supplying the substances featuring within Salmon's recipes come back into view when we note that the otherness of those oceanic landscapes returns in those equally strange locations lying within them. These strange climates become clear and extensive in travel literature. Areas 'controlled by supernatural forces', for instance, lie at the end of taxing voyages across oceanic spaces in Early-Irish *immrama* (Hilliers 1993, 66), while a 'beautiful noble island' across a 'mighty intolerable ocean' contains the 'trains of angels' who welcome Brendan, an Irish abbot and later saint, in the fifteenth-century Book of Lismore (Burgess 2002, 6). These mysterious areas return in sixteenth-century discourse too. Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) offers one example, while dialogue within Richard Eden's 1555 translation of Peter Martyr d'Anghiera's *De Orbe Nove Decades*, an account about the conquistadores' encounters with native populations in the New World, describes a world beyond the realities of early modern Europe. The mysteries of these landscapes become particularly clear in the third book of this latter text's second decade, when a conversation with the elder son of Comogrus, a local ruler, speaks about a 'Region flowinge with goulde' (quoted by Hadfield 1998, 74). The lands on the other side of a dangerous ocean, in other words, held items above and beyond the fantasies of those who went there. This landscape seemed, according to Amerigo Vespucci in a letter to his patron Lorenzo de' Medici, close to the Garden of Eden, the 'terrestrial paradise' in the Book of Genesis (Houston 2010, 8).

The otherness of those environments overseas emerges again in early modern drama. These landscapes become clear in Shakespeare's *Richard III*; something mysterious and otherworldly associates itself with Ireland when the king tells Buckingham about an Irish bard who prophesised that he should not live long. This sense of otherness returns again in *Hamlet*; the sulphur ejected by Mount Hecla, a volcano in Iceland across the North Sea, may lie behind the ghost's return to 'sulph'rous and tormenting flames' (1.5.3) (Poole 2011, 126). The purgatorial 'fires' (1.5.11) that await the ghost's return resemble the hostile and barren wasteland of this volcano instead.

The ambiguity of these unpredictable and unknown maritime climates, and the terrestrial environments located within them, become particularly clear in *The Tempest*. This otherness appears when Ferdinand sees Miranda as a 'goddess' (1.2.421) who resides within Prospero's isle. An otherworld beyond Ferdinand's comprehension comes into focus, as the nobleman sees the island to host, albeit mistakenly, the divine. A world operating beyond the constraints of early modern understanding emerges in Caliban's disposition too, as Trinculo and Stephano encounter him within this landscape:

Trinculo. What have we here – a man or a fish? Dead or alive? A fish, he smells like a fish; a very ancient and fish-like smell; a kind nit-of-the-newest poor-john. A strange fish! Were I in England now, as once I was, and had the fish painted, not a holiday-fool there but would give a piece of silver. There would this monster make a man. Any strange beast there makes a man. When they will not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar, they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian. Legged like a man, and his fins like arms! Warm, o'my troth! I do now let loose my opinion, hold it no longer: this is no fish, but an islander that hath lately suffered a thunderbolt. (2.2.23-32)

Caliban's contradictory characteristics emerge prominently in the passage above. Indeed, the islander is either 'dead or alive'; his very existence transgresses across two permanent states that stand against one another. The term 'fish' has ambiguous connotations as well; one may recall the 'fish' that 'hangs in the net' (Scene 7, 104) in *Pericles*, which turns out to be, a few lines later, Pericles' rusty armour. Suffered 'a thunderbolt' (*The Tempest*, 2.2.32) adds to this effect too; to Trinculo, Caliban's complexion is blackened and charred. Further observations, such as 'legged like a man' with 'fins like arms' (2.2.30), reveal the progression of thought as the jester

begins to realise that Caliban is, in fact, human. But his description muddies any complete identification, since these phrases mesh two sets of physical characteristics together.

The otherness of this islander returns shortly afterwards, as Stephano emerges onstage drunk to encounter Trinculo, who has crawled under Caliban's cloak to shield from the storm, and Caliban onstage:

Stephano. What's the matter? Have we devils here? Do you put tricks upon's with savages and men of Ind? Ha? I have not scaped drowning to be afeared now of your four legs. For it hath been said: 'As proper a man as ever went on four legs cannot make him give ground'; and it shall be said so again, while Stephano breathes at' nostrils. (2.2.51-55)

The humour comes from our knowledge that Trinculo has crept beneath the cloak of Caliban to shelter from the storm; the splayed legs of the jester provide Caliban with four legs, revealing a monstrous physical form in turn. But this realisation does not dawn on Stephano immediately. The 'otherness' of a landscape operating beyond the comprehension of the 'drunken butler' (5.1.277) returns again: the 'tricks' of devils (2.1.51) on this island, Stephano supposes, lead him to encounter an entity utterly incomprehensible back at home instead.

5. *Incomprehensibility Closer to Home: The Wilderness, Witchcraft, and the Return of the Frog*

The familiar theme of incomprehensibility, however, becomes clear in the third scene of *Macbeth*'s second act. Here, a hungover Porter advances across the stage to answer the knocking of Lennox and Macduff at Dunsinane's 'south entry' (2.2.67). His speech sounds alongside his advance to open the stage door for the thanes waiting backstage:

Porter. (Knock) Knock, knock, knock. Who's there? Faith, here's an English tailor come hither for stealing out of a French hose. Come in, tailor. Here you may roast your goose.
Knock [within]. Knock, knock. Never at quiet. What are you? But this place is too cold for hell. I'll devil-porter it no further. I had thought to have let in some of all professions that go the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire. (2.3.10-25)

The pronouns of the thanes transform in the passage above; the 'who' provides the thanes with a human disposition in the first lines of the speech. But this disposition changes later; an ambiguity emerges in 'what', as the Porter continues to speculate about the things that knock at the door in these moments. Here, the thanes become something else. The closed stage door does not resolve the Porter's problem either, obscuring the bodies of the thanes from the bleary eyes of the Porter and, by extension, those who are watching the play. To the Porter, the door to the backstage space, which offers an exit to the Scottish wilderness beyond Macbeth's castle, offers an entrance to a world of considerable mystery. The area outside the entrance hall and, by extension, beyond the reality of the playhouse, becomes the place of residence for the otherworldly instead.

A more sustained discussion about the implications of this scene is for another time. But the ambiguity and anarchy of the Scottish wilderness in these moments returns throughout the play. Those entities 'That look not like th'inhabitants o'th' earth, / And yet are on't' (1.3.36-37) work their magic within this landscape in the first scene of the play's fourth act:

Second Witch. Fillet of a fenny snake
In the cauldron boil and bake.

Eye of newt and toe of frog,
Wool of bat and tongue of dog,
Adder's fork and blind-worm's sting,
Lizard's leg and owlet's wing,
For a charm of powerful trouble,
Like a hell-broth, boil and bubble.
All Witches. Double, double, toil and trouble.
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble. (4.1.12-21)

The chaotic connotations of this scene become clearest when we observe the metric peculiarity of the charm itself. An otherness becomes particularly clear as a result; each verse line in the incantation inverts the metrical structure of the traditional, iambic metre featuring in blank verse, hobbling like 'a Brewers-cart' to their end (Jonson 1640, 132). Strong stresses in the 'Fill—' of 'Fillet', 'In', 'Eye', and 'Wool' replace the weak stresses that begin vernacular and ordinary verse lines instead. This distinction is consistent throughout the rest of the speech, since strong stresses adorn the 'Add—' in 'Adder', the 'Liz—' in 'Lizard', 'For', and 'Like' as well. This strange, trochaic metre returns as the hags utter the first line of the refrain to this ghoulish chant; the 'Doub—' in 'Double' holds a strange, trochaic rhythm, while the two strong stresses on 'Fire burn' in line 21 are consecutive, adding to the metrical chaos of the speech.

A similar setting comes across in the opening moments of Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Queens*. A sense of otherworldliness becomes particularly strong in these moments. The 'ugly hell' (Dedication, l. 21) opening the masque is vivid; flames billow from beneath the stage, smoking 'unto the top of the roof' (l. 22). The hags who emerge onstage have an equally otherworldly disposition; the anarchic behaviour of Macbeth's crones returns here, as Jonson's witches emerge onstage to 'infernal music' (l. 26), 'making a confused noise' and performing 'strange gestures' (l. 30). But elements of a rural and worldly landscape emerge as well. The speech of the eighth hag is particularly striking in this regard, as she speaks with her colleagues about the items she possesses:

8th Hag. The scritch-owl's eggs and the feathers black,
The blood of the frog and the bone in his back
I have been getting, and made of his skin
A purset to keep Sir Cranion in. (ll. 170-173)

The frog motif comes across strongly in the passage above. The blood of this animal and the 'bone in his back' offer the foundations for the magical practice of the eighth hag, and the frog-shaped pouch emerges as the 'purset' keeping 'Sir Cranion in'.

The point that we would like to linger on, however, concerns how elements of a rural English countryside feature in both scenes above. The frog, of course, is prominent in both performances; the hags drop a 'toe' (4.1.14) of this animal into their hellish broth in *Macbeth*, while the frog-shaped purset plays a starring role in Jonson's later anti-masque. But both animals feature alongside other creatures residing within the rural landscapes of early modern England. The 'owlet' in *Macbeth* (4.1.17) and the eggs of the screech owl in Jonson's masque, for instance, may recall the screaming owl that sounds after Macbeth assassinates Duncan in the second scene of *Macbeth*'s second act (2.2.15). The shrieks of the 'melancholy bird' (2.3.7), which resemble the Duchess's cries as she gives birth in John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, may be recollected too, as the anarchic elements of the rural landscape envelop the chaotic activities taking place within these plays. The tempestuousness nature of these wildernesses, and

those otherworldly activities taking place within them, return in witchcraft discourse as well. A secluded clearing over the River Ribble, for instance, oversaw four participants' perverse acts of sexual intercourse with 'foure black things' near Samlesbury, Lancashire, in 1612 (Sharpe 2003, 2), while a Scottish lochside set the scene for Elspeth Reoch's encounter with two supernatural creatures in 1616 (Purkiss 2000, 90-91).

The strangeness of these rural wildernesses comes across particularly strongly as Tamora speaks to her two sons, Demetrius and Chiron, within a wooded clearing in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*. As such, we think it a fitting place to end:

Tamora. Have I not reason, think you, to look pale?
These two have 'ticed me hither to this place.
A barren detested vale you see it is;
The trees, though summer, yet forlorn and lean,
O'ercome with moss and baleful mistletoe.
Here never shines the sun, here nothing breeds
Unless the nightly owl or fatal raven.
And when they showed me this abhorréd pit
They told me here at dead time of the night
A thousand fiends, a thousand hissing snakes,
Ten thousand swelling toads, as many urchins
Would make such fearful and confuséd cries
As any mortal body hearing it
Should straight fall mad or else die suddenly. (Scene 3, 91-104)

The otherworldly elements of the forest become particularly potent in these moments, as the wooded vale within Atrius' citadel in Seneca's *Thyestes* looms into view (Perry 2019, 23). The death gods that groan in Seneca's work return as the 'thousand fiends' that 'make such fearful and confused cries' in the passage above, as Tamora adds otherworldly imagery to this particular wilderness. A sun that 'never shines' (96) is reminiscent of a supernatural landscape too. The darkness in this area may, indeed, return when Malvolio, who stands incarcerated backstage in the latter moments of *Twelfth Night*, sees his prison to be as dark 'as hell' (4.2.37). The animals within this wilderness feature in Tamora's hellish description. The amphibious creature recalled in the pouch beginning this article returns; the 'ten thousand swelling toads' (101) reside alongside the 'thousand hissing snakes' (100), the ten thousand 'urchins' (101), and the hellish fiends who howl into the night in chains. An otherworldly and hellish dominion takes the place of this unexplored, mysterious wilderness instead.

6. *Fighting Fire with Fire: Mysterious Items Meeting a Mysterious Disease*

The wilderness in *Titus Andronicus*, we conclude, reveals a profound sense of anarchy in the rural landscape. These anachronistic settings return elsewhere; known traditions and customs strain, shake, and shatter as Jonson's weird sisters move strangely about the stage in these regions, while the unpredictable, peculiar-sounding metre of the weird sisters as they work their magic on the Scottish heath rebels against the established prosodic forms of blank verse. A set of customs rebelling conspicuously against early modern understanding emerges as a result. These anarchic environments, however, exacerbated the qualities of the items within them; those strange substances located in alien maritime environments acquired otherworldly characteristics of their own, as individuals came to terms with locations that operated outside known understandings of the world as they knew it. The mystery of the frog pouch returns

here; an avid sense of the unknown reaches its climax when one considers the allure of the pouch body and the sweet-smelling, but strange, scents that lay within it. It is, then, no surprise that these mysterious items countered the threat of plague in the seventeenth century; a wish to fight the pestilence with a set of otherworldly items seems clear, as individuals sought to fight an elusive and dangerous disease with equally elusive and otherworldly objects.

While frog pouches, with their detached button hole stitch bodies, wire digits, and ambergris, musk, and civet scents, are the superlative symbols of that intersection between strange otherworldliness and the potency to counter plague, they are not alone. Frogs, in both their needleworked and theatrical forms, are merely the beginning. For that connection between needlework and theatre-going, two activities so central to life in the capital, can be seen in the equally amphibious, albeit more fictional, neighbours of frogs: sea monsters. From Caliban on the stage in *The Tempest* to swimming sea monsters on the dress of Jane, Lady Thornhaugh's 1617 portrait by William Larkin, to sea monster prints on the interiors of embroidered schoolgirl cabinets from the third quarter of the century, sea monsters were ever present in early modern England. Discovering connections between otherworldly creatures and their appearances in seventeenth-century drama and stitchery can reveal not only new understandings of the fight against sickness, but also of the uses of visual culture in a largely illiterate society. Opening the frog pouch, as we have done in this article, is merely the first step toward untangling the rich yet complicated relationship between plague, plays, and plied needles.

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