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‘Sweet above compare’? Disputing about taste  
in *Venus and Adonis*, *Love’s Labour’s Lost*,  
*Othello*, and *Troilus and Cressida*

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Introduction

Early in *Venus and Adonis* (1593), the eponymous Goddess begins wooing the reluctant Adonis by asking him to alight from his horse. ‘If thou wilt deign this favour’, she promises, ‘for thy meed / A thousand honey secrets shalt thou know’ (15–16). Venus’s description of the delights she offers as ‘honey secrets’, and her punning on ‘meed’ as reward and mead (an alcoholic drink made with fermented honey), associates erotic gratification both with the epistemological satisfaction of knowing ‘secrets’ and with the gustatory pleasures of sweetness. Later in the poem, Adonis adapts Venus’s vocabulary of tasting and knowing to emphasize her precipitousness. ‘Before I know myself’, he pleads, ‘seek not to know me’, for ‘the mellow plum doth fall, the green sticks fast, / Or being early plucked is sour to taste’ (525–8). Figuring his anticipated growth into sexual maturity as a form of ripening (premature ‘plucking’ will be sour), Adonis entreats Venus to refrain from attempting to ‘know’ him sexually before he ‘knows’ himself in the fuller moral and spiritual sense demanded by the *nosce te ipsum* maxim (a keystone of Renaissance ethics). Adonis’s plea, however, collapses what its speaker strives to hold apart: although Adonis overtly distinguishes between sexual knowledge and self-knowledge, his pun on ‘know’ conflates them.<sup>1</sup> In *Venus and Adonis*, ‘honey secrets’ are illicit and transgressive, but they may also hold out the promise of self-understanding and moral transformation.

Venus's use of the language of taste to associate sensual pleasure with clandestine knowledge is typical of a poem that repeatedly links sweetness, sex, and secrets – but it is also characteristic of Shakespeare's oeuvre, and Renaissance culture more broadly. Shakespeare's works are dense with the language of taste: the word and its cognates appear 111 times across his corpus, and related vocabulary is also frequent. Perhaps most strikingly, 'sweet' appears 873 times, and its variants and compound words are also numerous.<sup>2</sup> Often, too, such language is associated both with sensual desire and with knowledge and understanding – sometimes simultaneously. In the Renaissance, the verb 'taste' could be used in a sense that is now obsolete, to mean 'have carnal knowledge of'.<sup>3</sup> Thus, in *Cymbeline* (1611; 1623), Posthumus challenges Iachimo to test Imogen's fidelity by daring him to 'make't apparent / That you have tasted her in bed' (2.4.55–6). As we shall see, this notional and lexical association between taste and sex derives, in part, from the low status of both, their joint status as disreputable appetitive desires. As the common euphemism for intercourse – carnal *knowledge* – implies, however, taste and sex are also allied insofar as they are both ways of knowing.

An omnipresent association between the sense of taste (especially sweetness) and sexual pleasure is also ubiquitous in the Renaissance more generally: plays, prose fiction, and poetry alike linger lasciviously on the beloved's cherry lips and syrupy kisses. Conversely, experiences of sexual frustration, jealousy, rejection, and betrayal are commonly described as bitter. Such language is so common it can come to seem meaningless or bland. It is certainly deeply conventional, with precedents in the classical and scriptural traditions.<sup>4</sup> Towards the end of Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* (c. 1594–5; 1598), however, we find a moment that reminds us that 'sweet' not only serves as a generic word for that which is pleasant or attractive, but also designates a distinctive flavour. In response to Berowne's plea for 'one sweet word with thee', the masked Princess (whom Berowne believes to be his adored Rosalind) replies 'Honey, and milk, and sugar: there is three' (5.2.230–1). 'Sweet', grown insipid through reiteration, is restored to gustatory immediacy by the Princess's witty literalism.

Indeed, the sugary lexicon of Renaissance love poets and playwrights can be read as the textual residue of real sense experience. Renaissance women

were both industrious producers and avid consumers of sweetness, serving as domestic manufacturers of marchpane, suckets, and other sweetmeats – including ‘kissing comfits’ which served not only to counter bad breath but also to flavour the mouth. John Murrell’s *A daily exercise for ladies and gentlewomen* (1617), for example, contains a recipe ‘to make Muscadinaes, commonly called kissing-Comfits’, by beating ‘halfe a pound of double refined Sugar’ with musk, ambergris, and iris-root powder to form a paste, which would then be rolled out and cut into ‘little Lozenges.’<sup>5</sup> The salacious associations of these kinds of sweets are evident in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1602), when Falstaff imagines a thunderstorm of aphrodisiacs, including ‘hail’ of ‘kissing-comfits’ (5.5.20). Perhaps, then, the lips of Adonis’s and the Princess’s real-life counterparts really did taste sugary.

Wendy Wall has observed that uses of the language of sweetness in early modern depictions of sensual pleasure are paralleled in ‘condemnations of fiction’ by ‘Puritan thinkers’, which similarly employ a saccharine vocabulary.<sup>6</sup> Wall explains this correlation by suggesting that anti-theatricalists adopted such language because of the prior associations of sweetness with degenerate erotic pleasure. ‘Historically’, she comments, ‘sweetness had been linked to an ethically troubling sensuality’, and plays were considered ‘syrupy’, because, like sex, ‘they had the capacity to act on the body and to discourage the use of reason by drawing the mind from virtue.’<sup>7</sup> Wall’s discussion of the symbolic complexity of syrups in the period is rich and revealing, but her analysis of the moral valence of sweetness is somewhat one-sided, for it was not only anti-theatricalists who employed syrupy analogies to describe the experience and effects of attending plays or reading poetry. Drawing on the Horatian injunction that poets should combine the *utile* (useful or profitable) with the *dulce* (sweet or pleasurable), humanist poetics associated sweetness with readerly discrimination, pleasure, and erudition.<sup>8</sup> As such, defenders of the poetic arts also used images of sweetness for opposing ends, attributing their adversaries’ distaste for poesy to their pathologically imbalanced humours. In his *Defense of Poesy*, for example, Sir Philip Sidney claims of those who dislike philosophical poetry that ‘the fault is in their judgement quite out of taste, and not in the sweet food of sweetly uttered knowledge.’<sup>9</sup> For aficionados of poesy, sweetness stands not for mindless sensuality but for considered literary discrimination.

In this chapter, I want to invert and expand on Wall's suggestion that uses of the language of sweetness to describe audiences' responses to theatre figure those responses as akin to sexual desire – that is, as irrational and corrupt. Instead, I suggest, in some contexts uses of the language of sweetness to describe sensual pleasure intimates that desire is a form of judgement. Attending to the language of taste reveals that, for Shakespeare and for many of his contemporaries, erotic gratification is a matter not only of sordid, sensual self-indulgence but rather incorporates a crucial (and potentially morally redemptive) discriminative, cognitive, and creative aspect.

When, for example, Francis Meres asserts that 'the witty soul of Ovid lives in mellifluous & honey-tongued Shakespeare', offering as evidence 'his Venus and Adonis, his Lucrece, his sugared sonnets among his private friends', he does more than simply pay the author a compliment on the musicality of his verse.<sup>10</sup> Specifically, Meres associates Shakespeare's poetic virtuosity with the eroticized sweetness of a beloved's honeyed kisses, as both Meres's comparison with the notoriously amorous Ovid and his subsequent specifying of Shakespeare's most notoriously licentious works makes clear.<sup>11</sup> As well as blending sweet sounds and sweet tastes in his pun on 'mellifluous' (from the Latin *mel*, honey), that is, Meres also affiliates sensual and literary sweetness, implicitly invoking a causal relationship between sexual experience and poetic skill. In so doing, he draws on and reduplicates an association that Shakespeare himself had drawn, in his drama and poetry, between sweetness, sensual desire, and forms of knowledge and understanding, including intersubjective judgement and self-knowledge, as well as rhetorical expertise.<sup>12</sup> As Berowne argues in *Love's Labour's Lost*, Navarre's Neoplatonic conviction that the intertwined sensory pleasures of feasting and female company are a menace to scholarship is misplaced: 'love, first learned in a lady's eyes [...] gives to every power a double power, / Above their functions and their offices' (4.3.301–6). Most pertinently here, 'Love's tongue proves dainty Bacchus gross in taste' (4.3.313); the lover is a kind of sensory superman, able to taste with an acuity that outdoes even Bacchus. Subsequently, 'when Love speaks, the voice of all the gods / Make heaven drowsy with the harmony' (4.3.318–19). For Berowne, then, a side effect of love's heightening and honing of the senses is the enhancement of oratorical skill – in experiencing more intensely, the lover is also inspired to speak more compellingly. Before I expand on the

suggestion that the erotic pleasures of taste are associated, in Shakespeare's works, with knowledge, understanding, and with literary skill, however, it is worth considering attitudes to and ideas about taste in Renaissance culture more broadly.

### The ambivalence of taste

In Renaissance England, the sense of taste was radically ambivalent. On the one hand, following Adam and Eve's disobedient tasting of the forbidden fruit and the subsequent Fall described in Genesis, it was linked to base, sinful, intemperate appetites. As the poet and moralist Richard Brathwaite laments in his essay 'Of Tasting' (1620):

This Sence makes mee weeppe ere I speake of her; sith hence came our greefe, hence our miserie: when I represent her before my eyes, my eyes become blinded with weeping, remembring my grandame *Eve*, how soone she was induced to *taste* that shee ought not [...] this one *Sence* [...] corrupted my pristine innocencie.<sup>13</sup>

Here, taste – personified and feminized as 'her', and associated with 'my granddame Eve' – is blamed for the corruption of humankind's 'pristine innocencie': it is the ultimate source of all sin and misery. These negative scriptural associations were reinforced by the classical tradition, notably the works of Plato, which preserved a hierarchy of the senses that privileged the distal senses of vision and hearing, which work remotely from their objects, from the proximity senses of taste and touch, which depend on direct contact with their objects.<sup>14</sup> In this model, taste is associated with boorish physical gratification, as opposed to the supposedly purer, more spiritual forms of pleasure and understanding offered by sight and hearing. The sensuous pleasures of taste are imagined to distract from the reasonable pursuit of virtue: as the neo-Stoic writer Lodowick Bryskett puts it in *A discourse of civill life* (1606), taste and touch are the 'two senses that make us most like unto brute beasts, if we suffer our selves to be led by them, following our delights as they do: for they corrupt mans prudence, put his mind astray, & take away from him the light of reason.'<sup>15</sup>

In both *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594), the animalistic, irrational, rapacious nature of taste is established in images of hawking and hunting. Venus's enthusiastic embrace is both aggressive and quasi-cannibalistic: she is 'an empty eagle, sharp by fast', who 'tires with her beak on feathers, flesh and bone, / Shaking her wings, devouring all in haste, / Till either gorge be stuffed or prey be gone' (55–8). The pleasure taken in eating, such images remind us, is predicated on the consumption, hence the obliteration, of its object.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, sexual desire can also be violent, immoderate, and ultimately *self-destructive*, as well as damaging to its object: overindulgence can lead to surfeit and revulsion.<sup>17</sup> 'Lust', as Adonis notes, 'like a glutton dies' (803). Similarly, in the *Rape of Lucrece*, Tarquin is described, following his ravishment of Lucrece, as like 'the full-fed hound or gorged hawk' which 'balk[s]' at its usual 'prey':

So surfeit-taking Tarquin fares this night  
His taste delicious, in digestion souring,  
Devours his will that lived by foul devouring.

(694–700)

The pun on 'fares' as both 'feeds, eats' and as 'gets on, behaves' underscores the connection between eating and sexual conduct. Sensual satiation slides into surfeit, as the 'delicious' but ephemeral 'taste' of sensual pleasure turns sour in the stomach and the 'will' to devour Lucrece's body consumes or 'devours' itself. Later, Lucrece rails against 'Opportunity', lamenting that 'thy sugared tongue' turns 'to bitter wormwood taste' (894), and determining that her husband Collatine 'shalt not know / The stained taste of violated troth' (1058–9) – that is, that he will not 'know' her sexually again. Here, the pleasures of taste are clearly associated with a vicious form of appetite which is simultaneously corrupted and corrupting.

This is not, however, the whole story: the sense of taste also had a range of much more positive associations in Renaissance culture.<sup>18</sup> For a start, following Aristotle, a number of writers and thinkers emphasized the indispensability of taste, highlighting its crucial role in motivating us to eat, and hence in sustaining the body. As the anatomist Helkiah Crooke writes, along with touch, taste is 'absolutely and simply necessary to our life'.<sup>19</sup> Others elaborated on the social importance of eating together as a way of cementing the bonds

of friendship. Indeed, the imagery of uncontrolled and animalistic appetites in *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* is effective partly because it is predicated on the violation of more positive, celebratory norms and attitudes. Venus, for instance, attempts to frame her desire as a natural and legitimate form of hunger, contrasting her appetite for Adonis with what she portrays as his solipsistic self-worship. Just as ‘torches are made to light’, Venus claims, so too are ‘dainties [made] to taste’ (163–4). The body that is sustained by the earth has a duty to replenish it with new inhabitants: ‘Upon the earth’s increase why shouldst thou feed, / Unless the earth with thy increase be fed?’ (169–70). Venus implies that procreative sex is a necessity, not a sinful luxury, and – however perverse her lust – the association between taste and generous reciprocity that she exploits has an undeniable appeal. Similarly, it is worth noting that, as Lucrece’s guest, Tarquin has already indulged in a literal, legitimate, convivial supper provided by her household. Shakespeare’s use of the language of eating and tasting to describe Tarquin’s rape of Lucrece is shocking and effective partly because it is a reversal of the positive role that the pleasures of taste play in establishing and sustaining social bonds: it reminds us that Tarquin transgresses the rules of hospitality as well as those regulating sexual interaction.

As I hinted in the introduction to this essay, moreover, taste was also valued as an analogy for, or even as a form of, discrimination and knowledge about the external, material, and social world. Most obviously, in the Renaissance as today, the language of taste was used figuratively to indicate aesthetic and literary discrimination. As Allison Deutermann observes, quoting as evidence Hamlet’s request to the players to ‘give us a taste of your quality’, although ‘the concept of “taste” as aesthetic discernment has been assumed to be anachronistic to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England [...] this abstracted sense of taste was already forming at the start of the seventeenth century.’<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Lucy Munro notes that ‘[m]any Jacobean and, especially, Caroline playwrights employed a discourse of taste in order to shape spectators’ responses, drawing on an emergent model of aesthetic taste that is more often seen as characteristic of eighteenth-century culture.’<sup>21</sup>

At the point at which Shakespeare wrote, the ‘abstracted’, ‘aesthetic’ sense of taste as literary discrimination was well established enough to be a subject of parody – but not so well established that it had lost its connection to literal acts



of eating and drinking. Notably, it is this form of judgement that Nathaniel claims in *Love's Labour's Lost*, when he proclaims himself a man 'of taste'. Nathaniel compares himself and Holofernes to the aptly named Constable Dull. 'Sir', he says to Holofernes:

[Dull] hath never fed of the dainties that are bred in a book.  
 He hath not eat paper, as it were; he hath not drunk ink. His intellect is not  
 replenished. He is only an animal, only sensible in the duller parts.  
 And such barren plants are set before us, that we thankful should be –  
 Which we of taste and feeling are – for those parts that doe fructify in us  
 more than he.

(4.2.24–9)

Nathaniel's posturing is clearly supposed to be funny, and we are laughing at, not with, him: because the audience is already well acquainted with his pedantry and self-importance, his words are bathetic. In calling himself a man of 'taste and feeling', Nathaniel inadvertently reveals his own immersion in the lower senses he claims to disdain – an implication reinforced by the way he highlights the physical underpinnings of the taste metaphor, claiming (in contradistinction to Dull) to have 'eat paper' and 'drunk ink'. Nonetheless, Nathaniel's words also attest to a wider cultural sense that 'taste' is a marker of literary erudition and judgement, and as such a marker of the social distinction he aspires to.<sup>22</sup>

The sense of taste, however, was not *only* associated with aesthetic and literary judgement in Renaissance England: it also had a much wider set of associations with different forms and modes of knowing. A brief consultation of the *OED* elucidates some of the epistemological range of the word 'taste' in this period.<sup>23</sup> Firstly, taste could indicate 'mental perception of quality; judgement, discriminative faculty' more broadly, in a variety of different realms, not limited to the aesthetic and literary. Other definitions of the noun 'taste' link gustation to the kinds of experiential and experimental knowledge that were in the period increasingly central both to religious life, and in the proto-scientific realms of medicine and natural philosophy: in the Renaissance, a 'taste' could indicate 'a trying, testing; a trial, a test, an examination'. Edmund uses the word in this way in *King Lear* (c. 1606): 'I hope, for my brother's justification, he wrote this but as an essay, or taste of my virtue' (1.2.44–5). To taste can also

mean ‘to have experience or knowledge of’ more broadly, as when, in *Pericles* (c. 1607), Cleon implores: ‘O, let those cities that of plenty’s cup / And her prosperities so largely taste [...] heed these tears!’ (1.4.52–4). Here, ‘taste’ is a synonym for first-hand experience. Relatedly, ‘a taste’ can indicate – as it does today – a small sample or slight experience of something. Touchstone, for instance, uses the word in this way in *As You Like It* (c. 1599), when he offers Rosalind ‘a taste’ of his ability to compose bad love poetry (3.2.97).

Taste also had epistemic value in a religious context – a value which provided a counterbalance to its negative associations with the Fall. Psalm 34.8, ‘O taste and see that the lord is good’ (KJV), frames taste as an intense, experiential, affectively charged means of knowing the divine characterized by sweetness (the Latin word usually translated as ‘good’, *suavis*, translates more literally as sweet). Reformed theologians and writers across the confessional spectrum cited it frequently, often associating it with the potentially redemptive tasting of the Eucharistic elements of bread and wine.<sup>24</sup> It is this tradition, associating the pleasures of taste with spiritual illumination, that informs Oliver’s response, near the end of *As You Like It*, to Celia’s question about his fraught relationship to his brother Orlando: ‘was’t you that did so oft contrive to kill him?’ Oliver’s answer is both candid and gnomic:

’Twas I, but ’tis not I. I do not shame  
To tell you what I was, since my conversion  
So sweetly tastes, being the thing I am.

(4.3.134–6)

The context here is not explicitly religious: Oliver’s change in attitude is primarily a secular one, based on his gratitude to Orlando, who has recently rescued him from the attack of a lioness. In linking the language of conversion and sweetness, however, Shakespeare also implies a more wholesale spiritual transformation – one which makes him worthy of Celia’s love.

In the Renaissance, then, attitudes to taste were deeply conflicted. On the one hand, taste was associated with base and sinful appetites. On the other, it was associated with positive and potentially virtuous forms of knowledge and discrimination. These positive associations of taste, moreover, frequently carried over into writing about the sweetness of sex. Guillaume Du Vair’s influential *The moral philosophie of the Stoicks* (1598) is revealing here.

Whilst Du Vair sticks to his neo-Stoic guns in warning against the dangers of unlicensed desire, he also celebrates its nuptial value:

Let us [...] provide our selves of strong rampires and bulwarkes to warde us against this passion [...] she baites us with honie, to glut us with gall: she setteth before our eyes a vaine shew of pleasure, which passeth away in a moment, and leaves us sorrow and griefe which remaineth for ever [...] Let us altogether abstaine from it (if it be possible) before wee bee married: for [...] it makes them lose the sweetnesse of marriage which they alone doe taste which have not used it before, a sweetnes which souldereth and knitteth together the friendship of marriage.<sup>25</sup>

Sexual desire ‘baites us with honie, to glut us with gall’; here, the sweetness of sex is dangerously deceptive. Within the legitimate bounds of marriage, however, it also serves an important and valuable role, working to forge conjugal harmony and so to consolidate moral virtue.

### Sweetness in *Othello*

The language of erotic sweetness, then, swings both ways: it can either gesture towards humankind’s fallenness and irrationality, or it can indicate the presence of a discriminative, potentially redemptive form of apprehension and affection. The ambivalence is also central to *Othello* (c. 1603), which dramatizes both the tension between taste as brutish, sensual appetite, and taste as a mode of judgement, and a conflict between vision and taste as alternative sources of knowledge. Early in the play, Cassio offers Desdemona an elegant (albeit conventional) compliment. Othello, he says,

hath achieved a maid  
That paragons description and wild fame;  
One that excels the quirks of blazoning pens[.]

(2.1.61–3)

Cassio implies that Desdemona poses a challenge: if she cannot be depicted, she also cannot be known. Indeed, Desdemona’s resistance to apprehension is translated, by various characters in the play, as a dubious secrecy. Noticing this, Stanley Cavell interprets Othello’s suspicion of his wife as an

expression of epistemological, as well as moral, outrage: it is a response not only to the possibility that he might not possess his wife's chastity but also to the impossibility of ever knowing, for certain, that he does so.<sup>26</sup> Other scholars have explored the ways in which Desdemona's body is presented as a mystery which might be understood and controlled if it can be accurately and comprehensively *seen*. Patricia Parker, for example, identifies in the play a 'network of associations' between the female genitalia and hidden knowledge, which prompts in the jealous Othello an 'ocular impulse [...] a fascination [...] with exposing what lay hid to the scrutiny of the gaze'.<sup>27</sup> This kind of reading is characteristic of new historicism's visual and political preoccupations. The language of *Othello*, however, is not only permeated with visual metaphor; it also interweaves desire, sexual jealousy, and taste. Take Act 3, Scene 3, in which Othello is transformed from a loving husband to a man wild with suspicion. He laments:

I had been happy if the general camp,  
Pioneers and all, had tasted her sweet body,  
So I had nothing known.

(3.3.348–50)

Othello both draws on taste's associations with sexual knowledge and – in his use of the epithet 'sweet' – retains its connection to physical sensation. Importantly, Othello's choice of verb at this critical moment is not an isolated example: throughout the play, he consistently links sexual and gustatory appetites. Perhaps most obviously, Othello's epithets for his wife linger on her supposed flavour: they include 'honey' (2.1.203), 'sweeting' (2.3.248), and 'sweet' (3.3.55–6, 5.2.50). And while Othello extensively utilizes the language of erotic tasting, *Othello* offers a covert but sustained reflection on the meaning and value of such language, testing its negative (lapsarian) and positive (discriminative) associations against each other.

Initially, the play appears to be invested in the narrative associating both gustation and eroticism with degenerate, irrational appetite. Othello and Iago, of course, occupy very different places in Shakespeare's Venice. Othello's marriage to Desdemona quickly exposes his social position, as a successful and apparently well-respected soldier, as contingent on his exclusion from the inner sanctums of Venetian social and familial life, his tacit acceptance

of a fundamental, raced 'otherness': Desdemona's recourse to Othello's 'sooty bosom', Brabantio accuses, can only be explained by witchcraft (1.2.70). Iago's professional frustrations, on the other hand, grow partly from a sense of entitlement ('I know my price') which is itself dependent on his identity (in contrast to the 'Florentine' Cassio) not only as an Italian but as a Venetian (1.1.11, 1.1.20). Iago's sense of his own difference from 'the Moor' Othello, however, is undermined by their sensory similarities: both Othello and Iago frame the association between sweet tastes and sensual pleasures pejoratively.

Early in the play, Othello insists that his support of Desdemona's request to join him in Cyprus is motivated not by 'the palate of my appetite' but rather by a wish 'to be free and bounteous to her mind' (1.3.263–6). Othello uses the language of 'appetite' to denounce sexual desire as capricious and mindless. What are we to make of this? As Mary Floyd-Wilson has pointed out, the portrayal of Othello's 'passionate jealousy' not only reflects a broader 'racial stereotype' regarding the supposed intemperance of 'Moors'; it also 'has its prior origins in England's obsession with an Italianate and urban form of dramatic jealousy'. For a Jacobean audience, Floyd-Wilson explains, jealousy could be 'a symptom of hypercivility rather than barbarism' and was sometimes viewed as one outcome of a pathological form of 'neo-Stoic control': 'Italians came to represent over-disciplined interventionists, whose wilful self-regulation produced pathological inwardness rather than temperance.'<sup>28</sup> In this context, Othello's dismissal of his 'appetite' for his wife seems less like laudable self-control than symptom of incipient suspicion: it is a sign of his assimilation to a particularly Italianate form of refinement that is, nonetheless, never more than a hairsbreadth away from extreme violence.

This suggestion is buttressed by the fact that Iago takes a similar tack: anticipating the deterioration of Othello and Desdemona's initial state of marital bliss, he reassures the lustful Roderigo that Desdemona's 'eye must be fed. And what delight shall she have to look on the devil? [...] her delicate tenderness will find itself abused, begin to heave the gorge, disrelish and abhor the moor' (2.1.223–31). And if Desdemona will, as Iago predicts, come to 'disrelish' Othello because of his supposedly devilish appearance, Othello will be brought to feel distaste for Desdemona by Iago's own machinations. Whilst Othello currently finds his wife 'luscious as locusts' (that is, sweet cassia pods), the suspicion of her fidelity that Iago himself instils will ensure that

she 'shall be to him shortly as acerb as coloquintida' (the fruit also known as the bitter-apple) (1.3.349–50). Here, Iago positions himself as a *corrupter* of Othello's natural tastes. Iago exploits and confirms Othello's initial belief that sexual tastes offer a fallen, irrational form of pleasure which should be rejected: they correspond, not to the reality of the thing itself (or, rather, the woman herself) but to arbitrary, transient, and malleable predilections and revulsions. Othello's jealousy, then, might be understood partly as a result of his assimilation – encouraged by Iago – of Italian social and cultural norms: his rejection of his 'sweet' Desdemona grows partly out of a form of sophistication predicated not only on the control, but on the rejection, of natural appetites.

Conversely, a number of characters in the play associate vision with epistemological mastery. Most famously, Othello's demand for 'ocular proof' (3.3.363) of his wife's alleged betrayal exemplifies his wider conflation of vision and certain knowledge (this conflation is built, for instance, into his assertion that Iago 'sees and knows more [...] than he unfolds' (3.3.247), where the conjunctive 'and' suggests a presumed equivalence between seeing and knowing). For a number of critics, the disastrous consequences of this desire for 'ocular proof' indicate an implicit critique of the new empirical natural philosophy.<sup>29</sup> Notably, James Knapp argues that 'Shakespeare presents us with an object (the handkerchief) so unstable that it becomes emblematic of the flaws endemic to empiricist (materialist) epistemologies.'<sup>30</sup> The failure of the visual emblem of the handkerchief to materialize the reality of Desdemona's spousal fidelity represents the failure of vision to apprehend the truth of the material world.

In the context of the failure of ocular proof, taste – derided by the villainous Iago and the misguided Othello as akin to lustful appetite – takes on a new value. In particular, taste comes to stand for a form of knowledge which is *experiential* without being, precisely, *empirical*. In her speech offering a partial vindication of female adultery, Emilia points to this possibility. 'I do think,' announces Emilia:

it is their husbands' faults  
 If wives do fall. Say that they slack their duties  
 And pour our treasures into foreign laps;  
 Or else break out in peevish jealousies,  
 Throwing restraint upon us; or say they strike us,

Or scant our former having in despite,  
 Why, we have galls: and though we have some grace  
 Yet have we some revenge. Let husbands know  
 Their wives have sense like them: they see, and smell,  
 And have their palates both for sweet and sour  
 As husbands have. What is it that they do  
 When they change us for others? Is it sport?  
 I think it is. And doth affection breed it?  
 I think it doth. Is't frailty that thus errs?  
 It is so too. And have not we affections?  
 Desires for sport? and frailty, as men have?<sup>31</sup>

(5.1.85–100)

Poised between her initial ascription of women's infidelity to husbandly abuse, and her subsequent suggestion that, like men, women take lovers simply as a result of their natural 'Desires for sport', Emilia's declaration that wives 'have their palates both for sweet and sour' is ambiguous. On the one hand, it describes female rationality: women have enough sense – in both senses – to respond negatively to mistreatment. On the other hand, it describes female corruptibility: just as men and women have their senses in common, so too do they share a yearning for sensual pleasure. For Iago, the difference between the sweetness of cassia pods and *coloquintida* bitterness is a matter of pure affect: of irresistible desire versus sexual disgust. For his wife, however, to have a palate 'both for sweet and sour' – in other words, to have *taste* – can mean to possess trivial appetitive desires for sexual 'sport', but it can also indicate possession of reasonable, universally shared, fundamentally rational preferences and aversions, guided by judgement as well as by instinct.

Emilia's speech, then, clears the way for an alternative interpretation of Othello's preoccupation with Desdemona's sexual sweetness. According to Iago's association of taste with irrational, sinful sexual desire, Othello's honeyed endearments for Desdemona might be understood (despite his own protestations to the contrary) to betray Othello's enthrallment to 'the palate of [his] appetite'. On the other hand, they also prefigure Emilia's ultimate vindication of Desdemona as 'sweet Desdemona [...] sweet Mistress', and 'the sweetest innocent' (5.2.120, 197). The narrative trajectory of the play thus bears out Othello's perception – disclaim it though he may – that Desdemona

is 'sweet'. Despite its denigration, taste – and the sexual appetites it entwines with – proves a surer route to certainty than vision, offering a kind of intuitive experiential knowledge that the play opposes to an ocularcentric empiricism. *Othello* indicates – if it does not wholeheartedly endorse – a conception of gustatory and erotic tastes as valuable sources of intersubjective and erotic knowledge, and of sweetness as a marker of virtue.

### *De gustibus non est disputandum?* Taste and value in *Troilus and Cressida*

In *Venus and Adonis*, Adonis's sense of his own unripe sourness is counterparted by Venus's insistence on his lip-smacking sweetness: he is, she tells him, 'sweet above compare' (8). This points to another aspect of taste: not only was the *moral* status of the sense in contention, so too was the basic *nature* of specific taste sensations. In Shakespeare's England as today, the Latin adage *de gustibus non est disputandum* (there is no disputing about tastes) was axiomatic.<sup>32</sup> The sense of taste, this maxim implies, is so idiosyncratic, so personal and arbitrary, that there is simply no point in arguing about it. As Brathwaite comments, 'of all others, this *Senſe* produceth the diverſt qualities [...] this facultie, either by an indisposition of the bodie, or a diſtinct operation in the ſubject, ſhows this pleaſing and acceptable to one, which is noiſome and different to an other.'<sup>33</sup> Precisely because taste is subject to such differences of opinion, one should resist contesting it. Despite this, disputes about taste raged amongst physicians, writers, and philosophers alike. Should taste be associated primarily with brutish and irrational physical appetites, or with mental discrimination and judgement? Does the subjectivity of taste make it more or less useful as a source of knowledge? Who has the authority to distinguish healthy from unwholesome tastes?

According to Renaissance medical theory, discrepancies in taste could be explained as a result of a pathological imbalance of the humours: individuals with jaundice, for instance, might 'find Honey to be bitter in taſte' because of 'the great cholera and inflammation wherewith their tongue and palate of their mouth is infected.'<sup>34</sup> In some cases, then, the subjectivity of taste was a symptom of sickness. But in the context of humoralism, such subjectivity was



also, simply, a basic feature of taste: the perception of flavour was understood to be affected by aspects of humoral constitution which were not necessarily pathological but simply a result of ordinary variations in physical complexion, as well as factors such as age, sex, and circumstance. As Sir Walter Raleigh puts it in his posthumously published *Skeptick, or speculations* (1651), a partial translation of the ancient Greek philosopher and physician Sextus Empiricus's *Outlines*, 'divers creatures [...] having tongues drier, or moister according to their severall temperatures, when they tast the same thing, must needs conceit it to be according as the instrument of their tast is affected, either bitter, or sweet.'<sup>35</sup> Variations in taste are a result of humoral disposition, as well as indisposition.

Because of this inherent subjectivity, the language of taste emerges in the Renaissance as indispensable for articulating and exploring the broader questions about the nature and reliability of knowledge raised by the sixteenth-century revival of sceptical philosophy. As Michel de Montaigne writes in 'An Apologie of Raymond Sebond':

The distasted impute wallowishnesse unto Wine: the healthie, good taste; and the thirstie brisknesse, relish and delicacie. Now our condition appropriating things unto it selfe, and transforming them to it's owne humour: we know no more how things are in sooth and truth; For, *nothing comes unto us but falsified and altered by our senses.*<sup>36</sup>

Here, the subjectivity of taste – which is both pathological *and* an innate aspect of 'our condition' – is archetypal of the variability and unreliability of all the senses, and hence our inability to know anything at all 'in sooth and truth'. Variations in gustatory perceptions are typical of our broader tendency to remake the world in our own image – or more accurately here, according to our own tastes.

Shakespeare, of course, was deeply engaged with sceptical thought – and nowhere more so than in *Troilus and Cressida* (c. 1602), a play that, as William Hamlin and numerous others have noted, 'exposes human acts of valuation to relentless sceptical scrutiny'.<sup>37</sup> In particular, it is concerned with the philosophical question of whether value itself should be taken as intrinsic to and fixed in specific objects and individuals (a position held by the medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas, amongst others), or whether value is extrinsic and

unstable, conferred by and in acts of subjective evaluation (a position which would later be articulated and developed by the political philosopher Thomas Hobbes).<sup>38</sup> As scholars including Caroline Spurgeon and David Hillman have observed, moreover, the play also draws extensively on culinary and gustatory language, often using such language to interrogate the ethical status of sexual desire.<sup>39</sup> In the eat-or-be-eaten world of Troy and its environs, conventional, courtly images of eroticized sweetness are pushed to a cannibalistic extreme: women are (as Pandarus and Troilus joke of Cressida in the opening scene) consumables, cakes to be ground, kneaded, baked, and eaten (1.1.14–24).<sup>40</sup> Less frequently explored, however, is the interweaving of these two concerns: that is, the way the play's philosophical interrogation of the nature of 'value' proceeds through sensory images of sexualized tasting and consuming.<sup>41</sup>

In *Troilus and Cressida*, the philosophical question of whether value is objective and innate, or subjective and contingent, is articulated most pressingly in relation to Helen and Cressida's *sexual* value.<sup>42</sup> Is Helen, for example, valued (desired) because she is valuable (desirable), as Troilus implies when he claims that she is 'a pearl / Whose price hath launched above a thousand ships' (2.2.81–2), or is she valuable (desirable) because she is valued (desired), as he suggests when he claims that she 'must needs be fair, / When with your blood you daily paint her thus' (1.1.86–7)? And because erotic desire is repeatedly described in terms of alimentary appetite, the question of value is also a question of (sexualized) taste. More specifically, I want to suggest, *Troilus and Cressida* proposes that if value is innate, then the subjective character of taste will inevitably compromise our ability to accurately perceive and understand the world around us – including other people. If, on the other hand, value is conferred or accrued in acts of evaluation, then the subjectivity of taste is not only a means of apprehending but a way of constituting the value of objects it apprehends.

When Priam points out reprovingly although Helen is experienced as 'honey' by the 'besotted' Paris, she is 'gall' to his compatriots, who suffer besiegement because of her (2.2.143–4), he implies that the subjectivity of taste is aberrant and abhorrent. Hector agrees: Paris's craving for Helen is the 'hot passion of distempered blood' (2.2.169), a sickness which corrupts his reason and prevents him from knowing her as she really is. Similarly, Diomedes' answer to Paris's question – 'Who, in your thoughts, merits fair Helen most, / Myself

or Menelaus?’ (4.1.55–6) – implies that both parties’ desire for Helen can be explained by the pathological corruption of their appetites:

Both alike.

He merits well to have her that doth seek her,  
Not making any scruple of her soilure,  
With such a hell of pain and world of charge;  
And you as well to keep her that defend her,  
Not palating the taste of her dishonour[.]

(4.1.56–61)

Helen, asserts Diomedes, is soiled goods, and in not recognizing the true ‘taste of her dishonour’, Paris and Menelaus reveal the vitiation of their senses.<sup>43</sup> Paris’s rejoinder, ‘you are too bitter to your countrywoman’, turns the accusation back on Diomedes himself, but Diomedes is firm: ‘she’s bitter to her county’ (4.1.69–70). According to Priam, Hector, and Diomedes, in their fidelity (or enthrallment) to Helen, Menelaus and Paris have cut themselves off from the consensus of their respective countries and aligned themselves with the appetite of their bitterest opponent – each other – in an estrangement that is as much sensory as political and social.

At other points in the play, however, the question is not so much *who* has the authority to arbitrate in matters of value or taste – the infatuated Paris or the suffering citizens and soldiers – but rather whether that arbitration *itself* has any role in determining value or taste. In other words, the issue is whether value is an objective quality *of* an object or individual, something with an independent existence which may or may not be accurately apprehended, or whether value is conferred *through* intersubjective acts of evaluation.<sup>44</sup> In the case of Helen, the question becomes not whether she is sweet or bitter, honey or gall, but whether she is really either of these things all at, or only insofar as she is experienced as such. Thus, in the debate about whether to return her to the Greeks in order to end the war, Hector urges Troilus to agree: ‘She is not worth what she doth cost / The holding’ (2.2.51–2), he reasons. Hector implies that Helen’s ‘worth’ (or rather, lack thereof) is independent of her ‘cost’. Troilus, however, disagrees: ‘What’s aught but as ’tis valued?’ (2.2.53), he replies. For Troilus, desire itself has a role in *determining* value: it is a form of evaluation which confers worth on its object.

As the debate proceeds, however, the lines between Hector's and Troilus's positions become blurred. Thus, whilst Hector's reply seems firmly to refute Troilus's constructivism, it is in fact somewhat ambiguous: 'But value,' he admonishes Troilus:

dwells not in particular will;  
It holds his estimate and dignity  
As well wherein 'tis precious of itself  
As in the prizer.

(2.2.53–6)

Hector's assertion that 'value dwells not in particular will' seems unequivocal enough, and indeed commentators on this passage have tended to take it (ironically enough) at face value.<sup>45</sup> Hector's position, however, is closer to Troilus's than it initially appears: by asserting that value derives '*as well* wherein 'tis precious of itself / As in the prizer' (my emphasis), he frames intrinsic value as *supplementary* to that conferred by 'the prizer'. As such, he concedes that value is (at least partially) created, rather than simply recognized, in acts of valuation.<sup>46</sup>

Conversely, Troilus's epistemological relativism is paired with a kind of moral absolutism, which he turns to the terms of taste to articulate. 'How may I avoid,' he asks Hector, 'Although my will distaste what it elected, / The wife I chose? [...] [T]he remainder viands / We do not throw in unrespective sieve / Because we are now full' (2.2.65–72). Here, Troilus uses the language of taste to anticipate and pre-emptively answer the obvious ethical objection to his insistence that 'value' resides partly in 'the prizer': namely that if this is indeed the case, such value is impossibly unstable, for (as we saw in *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*) the sweetness of desire has a tendency to segue, once it is satisfied, into disgust and distaste. For Troilus, the fact that Helen was once perceived to be 'worth keeping' (2.2.82) entails an ethical and social commitment: just as we do not thoughtlessly throw away food once we are replete, we ought not discard a woman because our appetite for her is sated.<sup>47</sup> Taste itself may be radically subjective, but eating practices teach us that this epistemological uncertainty does not necessarily engender a state of moral nihilism. Like *Othello*, therefore, *Troilus and Cressida* interrogates both the epistemological and the ethical status of taste – especially a specifically sexualized experience of sweetness.

Indeed, in *Troilus and Cressida*, the sense of taste is repeatedly linked to a form of certainty which emerges through, not in spite of, subjective differences of opinion. We can see this, for instance, in the way that the play uses the language of tasting and consuming in order to compare and contrast erotic love and what Priam calls the ‘hot digestion of this cormorant war’ (2.2.6) as allied, though ultimately distinct, testing grounds of masculine virtue. The association between love and war is, of course, conventional enough – but it gains sensuous force and ethical and epistemic specificity in the context of the play’s alimentary obsessions. Take Troilus’s reply to Cressida’s teasing assertion that ‘all lovers swear more performance than they are able’ (3.2.81–2): drawing on taste’s epistemic associations with experiential trial and testing, he asks her to ‘praise us as we are tasted, allow us as we prove’ (3.2.87–8).<sup>48</sup> Troilus’s words are playful, but they also echo both Nestor’s description of the anticipated contest between Hector and Achilles as a ‘trial’ in which the Trojans will ‘taste our dear’st repute / With their finest palate’ (1.3.338–9), and Agamemnon’s subsequent warning that if he refuses to fight, Achilles’ ‘virtues’ are ‘like fair fruit in an unwholesome dish [...] like to rot untasted’ (2.3.115–19). On one level, the echo implies that Troilus’s boasting is a transparent attempt to frame effeminate sensuality as martial heroism; as such, it ironically marks their incompatibility. On another, however, ‘taste’ serves in both the martial and the erotic realms to indicate a form of certainty that is forged precisely in an adversarial clash of perspectives, as differences of opinion are translated into the terms of physical contact. Both martial combat and seduction, such language implies, are scenes of *self*-testing, as well as of intersubjective antagonism: love and war alike are forums for the tasting/testing of a certain kind of male subjectivity that emerges when it is contested. Just as Achilles’ virtues will rot and decay if they are not tested in combat, Troilus’s true nature can only emerge in the lists of love.

*Troilus and Cressida* never quite resolves the questions it raises about the role of personal opinion in evaluating and determining value.<sup>49</sup> But it does suggest that – here and elsewhere in Shakespeare’s works – the language of taste is an invaluable resource for probing this question, offering a vocabulary which combines the forceful, persuasive immediacy of physical experience and intense affective response with radical uncertainty, ephemerality, and unreliability. At the end of the play, Pandarus sings, ‘sweet honey and sweet

notes together fail': Shakespeare's dramatic interrogation of the nature of intersubjective knowledge and the morality of desire is inextricable from his poetics of taste.

## Notes

- 1 Coppélia Kahn notices Adonis's pun on 'know' as sexual and self-knowledge, and interprets it as evidence of his inability to recognize that he cannot 'know what his self is by isolating it from the experiences that help to form it', in *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 40.
- 2 See Martin Spevack, *The Harvard Concordance to Shakespeare* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 1253, 1328–41.
- 3 *OED*, s.v. 'taste, v.'
- 4 On the 'classical connections' between eating and eroticism, see Uwe Baumann, 'Food, Famine, Appetites and Eroticism in Plays by William Shakespeare and his Contemporaries', in *The Pleasures and Horrors of Eating: The Cultural History of Eating in Anglophone Literature*, ed. Marion Gymnich and Norbert Lennartz (Bonn: Bonn University Press, 2010), 65–6; see also Chris Meads, *Banquets Set Forth: Banqueting in Renaissance Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), ch. 2, esp. 29–32.
- 5 John Murrell, *A daily exercise for ladies and gentlewomen* (London, 1617), F8<sup>v</sup>–F9<sup>r</sup>.
- 6 Wendy Wall, 'Just a Spoonful of Sugar: Syrup and Domesticity in Early Modern England', *Modern Philology* 104, no. 2 (2006): 168.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 159, 168.
- 8 Horace, *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*, Loeb Classical Edition, trans. and ed. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929), 447.
- 9 Philip Sidney, *An Apology For Poetry (Or The Defence Of Poesy)*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd and R. W. Maslen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 86.
- 10 Francis Meres (compiler), *Palladis tamia*, ed. Nicholas Ling (London, 1598), 201<sup>v</sup>–02<sup>r</sup>.
- 11 On Shakespeare's reputation for sweetness, see Katherine Duncan-Jones and H. R. Woudhuysen's Arden 3rd edition of *Shakespeare's Poems*, 4–7, and Adam Hooks, 'Wise Ventures: Shakespeare and Thomas Playfere at the Sign of the Angel', in *Shakespeare's Stationers*, ed. Marta Straznický (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 53–4.

- 12 The association between sensual desire and rhetorical facility is often articulated via authors' exploitation of etymological links between the words 'sweet' and 'persuade'. See Jeffrey Masten, 'Toward a Queer Address: The Taste of Letters and Early Modern Male Friendship', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 10, no. 3 (2004): 374.
- 13 Richard Brathwaite, *Essaies upon the five senses with a pithie one upon detraction* (London, 1620), D3<sup>r</sup>.
- 14 On this hierarchy, see especially Louise Vinge, *The Five Senses: Studies in a Literary Tradition* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1975), 18, 69; Constance Classen, *Worlds of Sense: Exploring the Senses in History and Across Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2003); and Robert Jütte, *A History of the Senses: From Antiquity to Cyberspace* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), 55–71.
- 15 Lodowick Byskett, *A discourse of civill life containing the ethike part of morall philosophie* (1606), Bb2r. This work is 'heavily adapted' from Giambattista Giraldi Cinthio's *Tre dialoghi della vita civile*, which is itself the second part of his *De gli hecatommithi* (1565). Richard A. McCabe, 'Bryskett, Lodowick (c. 1546–1609)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004. Available online: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/3817>. The passage quoted echoes Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Oxford World Classics, ed. Lesley Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 56.
- 16 On the innate aggression of eating, see Margaret Visser, *The Rituals of Dinner: The Origins, Evolution, Eccentricities, and Meaning of Table Manners* (London: Penguin, 1992).
- 17 Michael Schoenfeldt explores Shakespeare's interest in 'the nexus at which desire is satiated, and mitigates into its opposite, disgust', highlighting his suggestion that the tempering of bitterness serves as a 'strategy for sustaining desire in the face of satiation', in *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 81–2.
- 18 See, for example, Charles Burnett, 'The Superiority of Taste', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 54 (1991): 230–8. On the ethical potential of the proximity senses, see Holly Dugan and Lara Farina, 'Intimate Senses/Sensing Intimacy', *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies* 3, no. 4 (2012): 374.
- 19 Helkiah Crooke, *Mikrokosmographia: A Description of the Body of Man* (London, 1615), I1<sup>r</sup>.
- 20 Allison K. Deutermann, "'Caviare to the general"? Taste, Hearing, and Genre in *Hamlet*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (2011): 236–7.

- 21 Lucy Munro, 'Staging Taste', in *The Senses in Early Modern England, 1558–1660*, ed. Simon Smith, Jackie Watson, and Amy Kenny (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 28. See also Farah Karim-Cooper, 'Touch and Taste in Shakespeare's Theatres', in *Shakespeare's Theatres and the Effects of Performance*, ed. Farah Karim Cooper and Tiffany Stern (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2013), 231–4.
- 22 For a highly influential theorization of the relations between taste and social class, based on empirical research from 1960s France, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).
- 23 *OED*, s.v.v. 'taste, *n.*1', 'taste, *v.*'
- 24 As George Herbert urges in 'The Agonie', 'Who knows not Love, let him assay / And taste that juice [...] Love is that liquour / sweet and most divine, / Which my God feels as bloud; but I, as wine.' George Herbert, *The Temple* (Cambridge, 1633), B3'. On the psalm (33.9 in the Vulgate), see Rachel Fulton, "'Taste and see that the Lord is sweet" (Ps. 33:9): The Flavor of God in the Monastic West', *The Journal of Religion* 86, no. 2 (2006): 169–204.
- 25 Guillaume Du Vair, *The moral philosophie of the Stoicks*, trans. Thomas James (London, 1598), E8<sup>v</sup>.
- 26 Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 137.
- 27 Patricia Parker, 'Othello and Hamlet: Dilation, Spying, and the "Secret Place" of Woman', *Representations* 44 (1993): 66.
- 28 Mary Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern English Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 132–3.
- 29 Thus, John Gronbeck-Tedesco writes that Othello's acceptance of Desdemona's handkerchief as the requested visual evidence, 'teaches the shortcomings of empiricism in its early throes'. John Gronbeck-Tedesco, 'Morality, Ethics and the Failure of Love in Othello', in *Othello: New Critical Essays*, ed. Philip C. Kolin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), 267.
- 30 James A. Knapp, "'Ocular Proof": Archival Revelations and Aesthetic Response', *Poetics Today* 24, no. 4 (2003): 716.
- 31 Munro also makes reference to this passage, but reads it differently, as 'map[ping] a descent from the higher to the lower senses, as the case that Emilia makes for women's agency becomes increasingly sexualised'. Munro, 'Staging Taste', 30.
- 32 There is no consensus about the origins of this phrase; see Steven Shapin, 'The Sciences of Subjectivity', *Social Studies of Science* 42, no. 2 (2012): 172.



- 33 Brathwaite, *Essaies*, D4<sup>r</sup>.
- 34 Robert Basset, *Curiosities: or the cabinet of nature* (London, 1637), M12<sup>v</sup>.
- 35 Walter Raleigh, *Sceptick, or speculations* (London, 1651), B4<sup>v</sup>–B5<sup>v</sup>.
- 36 Michel de Montaigne, *Essayes*, trans. John Florio (London, 1613), 2G2<sup>r</sup>. This passage is also discussed by Simon Smith in this volume (115–16).
- 37 William Hamlin, *Tragedy and Scepticism in Shakespeare's England* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 167. Discussions of 'value' in the play include, inter alia, William R. Elton, 'Shakespeare's Ulysses and the Problem of Value', *Shakespeare Studies* 2 (1966): 95–111; Gayle Greene, 'Language and Value in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*', *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 21, no. 2 (1981): 271–85; Jonathan Gil Harris, "'The Enterprise Is Sick': Pathologies of Value and Transnationality in *Troilus and Cressida*", *Renaissance Drama* 28 (1998): 3–37; and Paul Yachnin, "'The Perfection of Ten': Populux Art and Artisanal Value in *Troilus and Cressida*", *Shakespeare Quarterly* 56, no.3 (2005): 306–27.
- 38 See Greene, 'Language and Value', 272.
- 39 Caroline Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery and What it Tells Us* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988; first edition 1935), 320–4. David Hillman reads the play's alimentary images as 'bulimic' and 'cannibalistic' in *Shakespeare's Entrails: Belief, Scepticism and the Interior of the Body* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), ch. 2. Sophie Emma Battell comments on the way the play's gustatory language 'exploits the imaginative potential of the association between adulteration and sexual adultery' in "[L]ike a fountain stirred": Impure Hospitality in *Troilus and Cressida*, *Études Épistémè* 33 (2018). Johann Gregory reads the play's food metaphors as evidence of its links with the Inns of Court, and as a way of managing audience expectations in 'Shakespeare's "sugred Sonnets", *Troilus and Cressida* and the *Odcomian Banquet*: An Exploration of Promising Paratexts, Expectations and Matters of Taste', *Shakespeare* 6, no. 2 (2010): 198–203.
- 40 Troilus, too, is 'minced' and 'baked' in Cressida's lexicon (1.2.247): this is equal-opportunity eroticized cannibalism.
- 41 One exception is C. C. Barfoot, '*Troilus and Cressida*: "Praise us as we are tasted"', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (1988): 45–57. Barfoot traces how the play's language of tasting/testing intersects with its interest in praising, prizing, and pricing.
- 42 As Harris notes, the women in the play are 'coded as public yardsticks of value' ('Pathologies of Value', 13).
- 43 Diomedes's fastidious moralism at this point is, of course, rendered ironic in the context of his later entanglement with Cressida.

- 44 This is part of what is at stake in 3.3, when Achilles interrupts Ulysses reading an unidentified book which, Ulysses informs him, argues that ‘man [...] Cannot make boast to have that which he hath, / Nor feels not what he owes, but by reflection’ (3.3.91–3).
- 45 Harris, for instance, hears Hector’s pronouncement as a normative assertion that ‘any object’s value ought to be “precious of itself”’ (‘Pathologies of Value’, 13).
- 46 Recognizing this makes Hector’s ultimate *volte-face* in this scene, as he resolves to keep Helen on the basis of ‘our joint and several dignities’ (2.2.193) less surprising than it is often taken to be (Frank Kermode, for instance, calls it ‘unconvincing’ in ‘Opinion in *Troilus and Cressida*’, *Critical Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (2012): 93).
- 47 On the connections between eating and ethics in Renaissance literature and culture more broadly, see David B. Goldstein, *Eating and Ethics in Shakespeare’s England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
- 48 On the relations between tasting and testing in this passage, see Barfoot, “‘Praise us as we are tasted’”, 53–4.
- 49 As Harris observes, ‘even as the play disqualifies the possibility of fixed and intrinsic worth, it [...] also literally pathologizes attributive value’ (‘Pathologies of Value’, 17).