

THE KING'S TABLE: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF A MEDIEVAL NOBLE
BANQUET

by

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DEDICATION

To Melissa Keith, you may not know it, but you helped me find my voice in my writing. If you hadn't wrangled me to work the Boise State Writing Center, I wouldn't have even considered a Master's Degree. I can't thank you enough for seeing potential in me and for being there over the last few years every time I needed a hand, an ear, or a shoulder. You are an amazing teacher, a tireless leader, and an inspiration to so many. I am proud to have had you for a mentor and friend and hope that I can live up to your example. Thank you.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores an expanded definition of the words profile and profiling in order to demonstrate how a person or people construct images of themselves in order to join with, mold, and position themselves over other people or groups. For the purposes of this thesis, profiles are manifested in the form of physical events or tangible artifacts and are composed to represent, define, and impose the character of the person presenting the profile. Specifically, I focus on an actual medieval banquet in honor of King Richard II hosted in London on September 23, 1387.

I bring together semiotic theories common to literary criticism, rhetoric, linguistics, as well as social sciences such as anthropology and sociology to construct a lens through which I conduct my analysis. After providing historical context and a recreation of the banquet in question, I detail the analysis from the point of the observers who would have been present. The context of these differing evaluations explains the variety of accepted beliefs about Richard II and his noble character. Finally, I explain the relevancy of this lens and how it can be applied to various areas of study across nearly all disciplines. This explanation leads to an understanding of how individual profiling can be composed, observed, and interpreted by the composer as well as the observer across many times, places, and disciplines.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BSU	Boise State University
GC	Graduate College
MA	Middle Ages
PC	Profile Composer
PO	Profile Observer
TDC	Thesis and Dissertation Coordinator

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

During the Middle Ages, aristocratic banquets were common and often grandiose affairs. The various components of the medieval banquet—from the guest list and table manners to the entertainment and menu—were carefully cultivated and employed to exemplify the banquet's grand nature. The function of a banquet went beyond mere celebration of an event or holiday and became a tool for demonstrating a person's wealth, influence, piety, and generosity. These characteristics can then be examined all together as a representative *profile*.

For the purposes of this thesis, I am appropriating the words profile and profiling from other contexts and, rather than changing their definitions, I am expanding the current usage to include the act of creating or building an image of oneself to join with, mold, and position oneself over other people. As I will demonstrate, a profile can be represented by a single event planned and orchestrated by a composer to represent his overall character or persona.

This thesis will make a semiotic and pragmatic analysis of how a nobleman in the Middle Ages deployed particular cultural, social, and symbolic capitals in order to compose a profile of himself to use as a weapon of symbolic violence against his peers and subjects. This analysis proceeds by means of a lens through which the profiles of people and groups throughout history can be examined to understand their effectiveness.

Likewise, it enables an understanding of how those profiles evolve into what Roland Barthes might call a “mythology” (see Figure 1).

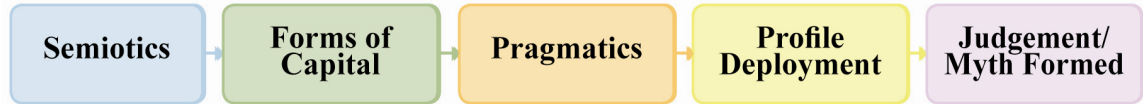


Figure 1. The Lens: Progression of theories employed for analysis.

First, I will outline the theories I have chosen with which to create my lens. I explain the principles of semiotics, also known as sign theory, to explain how individual objects, actions, and events possess meaning beyond their surface level representation. I also briefly explain why I have elected to adopt C.S. Peirce’s triadic model of semiotics rather than Saussure’s typically more recognized dyadic model. I then walk through an explanation of pragmatics also as suggested by Peirce. Pragmatics helps to explain how signs acquire contextual meaning significant to individual *profile observers* (PO).

While my progression of theories (see Figure 1) lists pragmatics third, I detail it second in my theory section to underscore the meanings of individual signs. I place it third in my mechanism in order to show how, once all individual signs have come together, a profile observer will evaluate and interpret the entire profile as a whole. This is an important note indicating, that while I show a “progression” of theories, that progression is not entirely static and an observer can move between the theories as necessary.

Next, I outline the forms of capital as defined by Pierre Bourdieu. While will briefly address the concept of Marxist ideology and economic influence, I detail why Bourdieu’s cultural, social, and symbolic capital are more relevant to my argument.

Following the Bourdieu's capitals, I explain his concept of symbolic violence. In my lens, symbolic violence is acknowledged as Profile Deployment. The final theory I detail is mythology as it relates to the definition prescribed by Roland Barthes. I end the theory section with a more detailed explanation of the theoretical mechanism represented by Figure 2.

Following the theory section, I provide historical context as it relates to the time period in question as well as detailing the banquet held on September 23, 1387 in London, England by Richard II. I include a brief explanation of feudalism, chivalry, medieval foodways, and religion in medieval England, as these contexts are crucial to understanding the semiotic performance of the banquet. This is then followed by specific historic events in England's history leading up to the banquet in question. Finally, I paint a picture of the banquet in great detail from a variety of sources, including historical texts, secondary sources, and contemporary images. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of Richard II's profile as embodied in the details I provide.

Chapter Four details my analysis and walks through the mechanism I created to explain how opinions and myths were formed about Richard II based on this particular banquet. Rather than detailing every individual sign, I have chosen a select few to represent the process as a whole. Finally, Chapter Five explains how such a mechanism can be employed to examine various time periods, events, and works of art or literature, people, etcetera. The purpose of this is to demonstrate that this is a potentially useful lens, which can be used across many subjects and disciplines. By understanding how profiles are created, adjusted, observed, and interpreted, we can better understand the nature of people, places, and things as they relate not only to us but to others as well. We can also

use this lens to understand how others might view us and make judgments about us based on the profile we create for ourselves.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORY

Most of the semiotic concepts I employ here are rooted in linguistic and literary theory, while others invoke ideas from social sciences, including anthropology and sociology. By joining them together, I am creating a lens for a rhetorical analysis. The semiotic and pragmatic theories of C.S. Peirce combine sign theory and experiential understanding. Bourdieusean forms of capital and symbolic violence help define the value and meaning of signs as well as how they can be employed. Barthesian mythology explains how profiles become accepted as truth. In order to better illustrate my points, I will also provide context of foodways and material and social culture of the era. Combined, these theories provide me the lens through which I am able to demonstrate how a profile is composed, read, and interpreted as well as what effect it has on the composer's perceived character.

Semiotics

Augustine asserts in Book II of *On Christian Doctrine*, “a sign is a thing which of itself makes some other thing come to mind, besides the impression that it presents to the senses” (30). Almost anything is capable of being a sign expressing a meaning or meanings, which go beyond the immediate sensory experiences of the sign itself. Augustine’s assertion would become a foundational principle of sign theory, or semiotics, nearly fifteen hundred years later.

Semiotics is the philosophical study of signs that focuses on their interpreted meaning, as they exist in natural or manufactured contexts and languages. The word “sign” is a very generalized term for any number of incarnations—such as metaphors, analogies, symbols, or symptoms—which could connote representation of something else (Peirce, “Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs” 99-100).

For the purposes of this thesis, I am invoking C.S. Peirce's triadic definition of signs. Pierce's sign is made of three parts: the representamen, the object, and the interpretant. In this model, the three pieces work in tandem to form a sign and no one piece stands alone as a sign. The interaction of the pieces working together is what Peirce referred to as semiosis (Peirce, “Pragmatism in Retrospect” 282).

The “representamen” is the manifestation in which an object is represented for interpretation. This sign can be in the form of a word, an image, or an object. Peirce's triadic model suggests that every man possesses one of three "sign vehicles" that, by its nature, aids in the interpretation of the object and affects its classification accordingly. These sign vehicles are virtues of quality, existential connection, or habitual (or legal) nature. In other words, the representamen consists of either feelings or possibilities; a reaction or resistance to the sign; or consists of a habit or law (Peirce, “A Syllabus of Certain Topics of Logic” 272-3).

The “object” is what the form is signifying. Rather than having a physical manifestation, the object is more of a concept, belief, fact, or law—something "thinkable." Given its ethereal nature, the object can either be real or fictional. Here again, objects can be divided into three categories: icons, indexes, or symbols. These subcategories indicate how the sign denotes its object. The icon possesses its own quality

or qualities that resemble its sign (i.e., portraits or scale models). Indexes function by factual connection directly relating to their objects (i.e., smoke or thermometers).

Symbols do not necessarily resemble or imitate the sign they represent but are typically arbitrary, but agreed upon, signifiers of a sign (i.e., national flags or numbers) (Peirce, "Excerpts from Letters to William James" 492).

Finally, the "interpretant" is the meaning or interpretation derived from the sign (Peirce, "Excerpts from Letters to William James" 493-4). An important aspect of the interpretant is that the meaning it relates to the observer about the sign is specific to the experiences and epistemic knowledge of the observer. In other words, the grand total of an observer's knowledge and experience as well as general social and cultural background are what come together to help the observer derive meaning from the sign. As with both the representamen and the object, the interpretant can be divided into three subcategories: rhemes, propositions, and arguments. Rhemes present interpretations of their objects according to a quality or qualities. Propositions present interpretations based on their factual relations to their objects. Arguments present interpretations as their objects relate to habit or law (Peirce, "A Syllabus of Certain Topics of Logic" 292).

Since the purpose of this thesis is to examine and discuss the social and cultural interpretations of individual and collective signs as well as the context in which signs were employed, it makes sense to use Peirce's more pragmatic model.

Pragmatics

"Consider what effects that might conceivably have practical bearings you conceive the objects of your conception to have. Then, your conception of those effects is the whole of your conception of the object" (Peirce, "How To Make Our Ideas Clear"

293). This is C.S. Peirce's original pragmatic maxim. Pragmatics is the study of the meaning of an utterance based on its structural and contextual composition by the composer as well as the interpreted meaning of the observer taking into consideration the observer's own context and understanding of the utterance. In other words, pragmatics looks at the meaning of a composer's message based on its structure, context, and desired effect (the intention), while taking into account the observer's contextual, experiential, and inferred understanding of the composition (the interpretation) (Peirce, "Critical Common-Sensism" 290-301).

Pragmatics generates a cyclical process of experience and understanding. A person gains understanding through experience and then reapplies the acquired understanding back to future experiences to further develop understanding. Applying this process in the terms of profiling oneself means composing together capital assets and past experiences to create an image of oneself and then adjusting the details of the profile based on the contextual reactions to it. In this sense, the profile continues to evolve until a generalized ideal is created. In order to understand how those assets come together and reactions are interpreted, we must understand the various forms of capital, particularly as defined by Bourdieu.

Capital

Karl Marx concerned himself with the economic form of capital. He asserted that exploitation of the labor force as well as control over the means of production and the money was at the heart of a person's mobility or dominance within a society. By controlling these forces, the exploiter can manipulate the ideology of a people, maintaining rule over and obedience from the labor force and the bourgeoisie. This

suggests that he who controls the money controls the aspects of individual self-promotion. This contrasts Bourdieu's theory by stating that economic capital is superior to social, cultural, or symbolic capital and that economic capital is what directly affects rise or fall on the social ladder. Bourdieu believed that economic capital was useful in the acquisition of the other capital assets but was not the primary force Marx suggests.

Signs can be categorized as assets of either cultural, social, or symbolic significance and function as various forms of capital to be employed by an individual, culture, or society to promote mobility and/or dominance (Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital"). While economic capital also has relevance, because financial resources are easily lost and gained and do not always denote power or ability, it plays only a secondary role in the mobility or dominance of a person or group (Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital").

Cultural capital is the non-monetary social assets that enable a person's social mobility further than the possibilities of his or her financial resources are capable of (Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital" 243). Examples of these assets are education, manner of speech, dress, material possessions, and physical appearance. While economic capital can play a role in the acquisition of these assets, it is the possession and employment of these assets that promote a person's ascent or descent on the social ladder. The belief is that the more of these assets one possesses the more social and economic capital one gains.

Social capital is recognized as the benefits of economic and social mobility gained through social networks and contacts (Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital" 248). Social capital is dependent on the value of "favors" or special affordances. These favors may

have certain economic value but also have a non-financial value such as positioning within an organization or the ability to influence or manipulate people or outcomes. Often, these manipulations or influences result in some sort of economic or social mobility gain. Amongst the wealthy or powerful, these favors and affordances may be more valuable than financial assets.

Symbolic capital is defined as the assets afforded to someone who has obtained a position based on merit, prestige, or honor. It is identified by the amount of respect or admiration the person or group receives based on great works, advancements, or sufferings (Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital" 249). Examples include war heroes, research scientists, public safety officials (i.e., police and firemen), and even teachers, actors, or sports figures. Often, these persons help to promote an ideal or a standard by which others choose to live or emulate.

Particularly in societal structures like feudalism or oligarchy, wealth and economic ability are not the dominant powers. While economic status may play a role in the success or failure of the individual or groups attempting to exert dominance, in many instances networking, favors, good breeding or education, or even honorable deeds or service are far more influential in the promotion of those individuals. While I will be taking into account economic capital and its effect on the other forms, I will be focused on the cultural, social, and symbolic forms to better explain the role of the banquet, as well as its parts and participants, as a powerful agent of social and cultural dominance. With an understanding of the forms of capital, I can better demonstrate the significance or interpretation of a sign by identifying what form of capital a person or group related

the interpretant to and how it affected their ability to move up the social ladder and achieve desired economic or political growth.

Symbolic Violence

Symbolic violence is the effective deployment of cultural, social, and symbolic capital assets to promote oneself among or over a person or group. For the purposes of this thesis, I present the composer profile, specifically the banquet, as the weapon of symbolic violence designed and employed by the composer. As I expound on various assets in the demonstration, I will explain how they fit into the overall profile composed for symbolic violence. A pragmatic analysis of the profile I demonstrate will help in understanding how the banquet was used as a weapon of symbolic violence.

The message (or profile in the terms of this thesis) is an act of aesthetic disposition; the art of knowing how to display the cultural assets one possesses in order to exert their dominance over others. Bourdieu simplified the term aesthetic disposition by referring to it as “taste” and described it as the style and arrangement of capital to compose a profile as a weapon. In terms of my example, aesthetic disposition is the bringing together of the signs to form the banquet. Executing the banquet is the act of symbolic violence. "It [Taste] functions as a sort of social orientation, a 'sense of one's place', guiding the occupants of a given place in social space towards the social positions adjusted to their properties, and toward the practices or goods which befit the occupants of that position" (Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* 466).

Demonstrating to the host's subjects as well as his peers that he was capable of leading and caring for them typically meant he had the money to supply and support a

campaign, the generosity to care for and reward those that assisted him, the power to command and conquer, the influence to draw from resources far and wide, and was pious enough to have God on his side. For my purposes, I intend to show how the various signs at a medieval banquet are identified as one of the various forms of capital, then composed together into a profile to be deployed as a weapon of symbolic violence, and how that profile is interpreted as well as what myths are created based on the desired intent and actual impact of that profile.

Myth

Once I have examined the cultural, social, and symbolic semiosis of the medieval banquet, I will turn my attention to the matter of symbolic misconception and endurance that comes to form what Roland Barthes would call a "myth." Myths are formed when commonly held beliefs that have been purposely manufactured become accepted as truisms within a culture or society (Barthes). It is important to note here myths are typically accepted as truths and not facts. Facts would denote the idea that they could not be easily disproven. Similarly, the perceptions and understandings of those myths are affected by whether or not the observer is a member of the group or an outsider.

Barthes makes a point to explain, "[m]otivation is necessary to the very duplicity of myth" (126). In other words, the reasoning for creating a particular profile is at the core of how the profile is composed. How the composer intends to manipulate or dominate his or her audience dictates how the myth is created and evolves. However, it is important to note that, according to Barthes, the function of a myth "is to distort, not to make disappear" (121). By this definition, rather than concealing or eliminating certain

aspects of a person's profile, the myth acts to distort the meaning and manipulate the observer's interpretation.

Another important note is that while there are similarities between stereotypes and myths. Stereotypes are misconceptions (often preconceived or learned prior to actual experience) of a group or groups of people, based on secondhand, experiential evidence that conforms to an arbitrary pattern whereas myths are typically purposely manufactured or misinterpreted meanings assigned to signs for the purposes of accepting or rejecting certain ideals. My purpose for employing this theory is to demonstrate how a composer's profile can evolve into a perceptual myth about them.

The Lens

The process of semiotic analysis I synthesize from the semiotic theories of Peirce, Bourdieu, and Barthes is graphically demonstrated in Figure 2. In detail, my analysis does the following:

Step 1: The representamen of a sign is presented and its object is identified.

Step 2: The object is then interpreted through the eyes of the composer and categorized as one of the forms of capital (cultural, social, or symbolic).

Step 3: Once the value of each capital asset is determined, the assets are composed into some form of a profile. In the case of this thesis, the composed profile takes the form of a medieval banquet.

Step 4: Once the profile has been composed, it is then deployed as a weapon of symbolic violence. Again, in this instance, the medieval banquet is that weapon and the actual execution of that banquet is the weapon in its deployed state.

Step 5: The profile is observed and interpreted by the audience who subsequently forms a judgment about the composer. This judgment results in a myth imposed on the composer by the observer. At the same time, composers also develop their own myths about themselves based on their interpretation of their own profile. This evaluation demonstrates the rhetorical process of bringing together cultural, social, and symbolic capital signs in order to compose an identity as a weapon of symbolic violence and form myths about the composer.

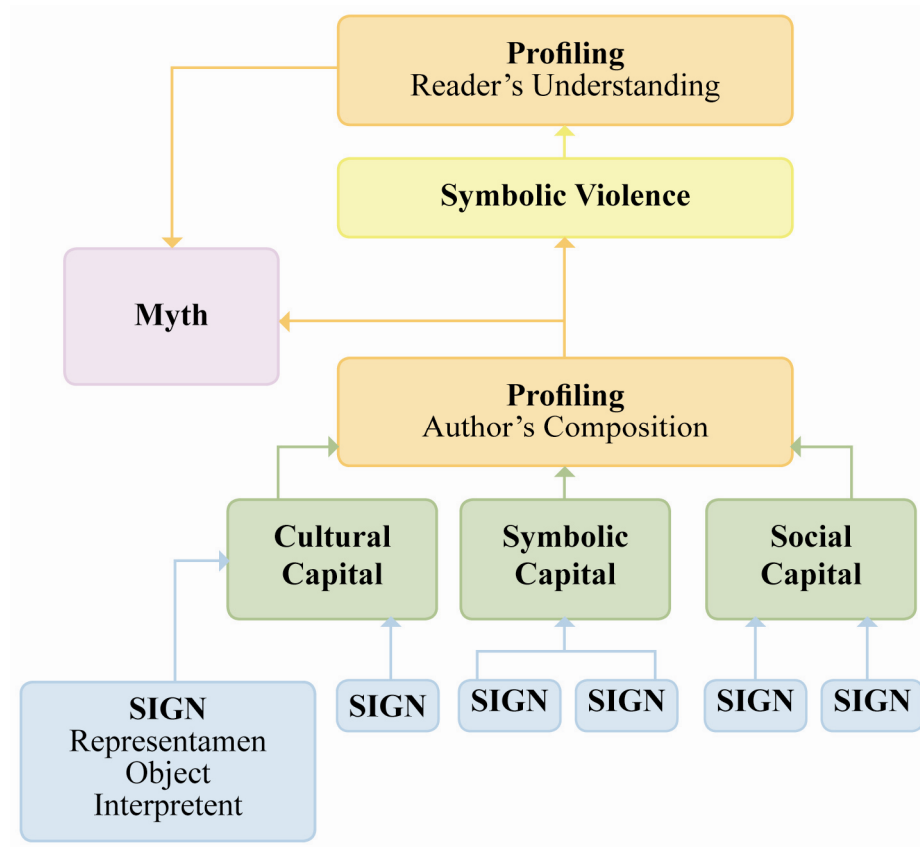


Figure 2. The Semiotic Mechanism of Profiling

CHAPTER THREE: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Medieval Life

Feudalism

The definition of feudalism changes not only from country to country but also between time periods, especially within the thousand years of the Middle Ages. While there exists commonalities, such as vassals, fiefs, military service, and law imposed by lords of the land, the intricacies of feudalism varied between nations like England, France, Italy, and Germany. The roles of titles and ranks were one such difference between nations while, within those nations, the structure might change between rulers. For the purposes of this thesis, I am speaking strictly of feudalism in 14th century England.

Feudalism grew out of the necessity for a system of government after the fall of the Roman Empire in the 5th century. As Rome was retreating out of England and back to Italy, it took with it its armies and the lords assigned from Rome to oversee those territories, leaving the people that remained to fend for themselves. Land and military strength quickly became the two most important commodities of the time. Possessing land meant a person could obtain wealth to pay for a military force to protect the land or to acquire more. Not possessing land meant working for those that did through agriculture, offering a trade or service useful to the landowner, or serving in the military. However, because there was no centralized form of government or authority,

interpersonal relationships bound them together. This system of loyalty between people was what gave rise to feudalism (Singman 4).

The system of hierarchy that formed in feudal England is what is commonly referred to as vassalage. Vassalage is subdivided into ranks of peerage: King, Duke, Marquess, Earl, Viscount, and Baron. Many other non-landholding nobles were knights in a noble court. A king assigned large amounts of land to lords who then in turn subdivided those lands to other vassals. The lord granted each fiefdom (fief) to a vassal in return for his pledge of loyalty known as fealty. Vassals took the oath of fealty promising to aid and defend the lord, in the form of military service, when called upon. They were also obliged to pay an annual fee to the lord, essentially giving him a percentage of whatever income or goods the vassal produced during the course of the year. In return for this oath of fealty, the lord promised to protect the land held in trust by the vassal as well as defend him in court or elsewhere if necessary. Vassals who held a great deal of land, they too might subdivide their land and have vassals of their own, obtaining their own oaths of fealty. Lands could be sold or traded between vassals but only with the lord's permission (Singman 5).

In order to unify groups of lords, for the purpose of defending each other from outside invaders, a sovereignty was formed and was ruled over by a king. The belief was that God chose the king from among the nobles and his reign was hereditary along his bloodline. If a king was overthrown and replaced by another lord, it was deemed the work or choice of God. It is also important to note that not all persons that held noble rank held land. Those that did not hold land but were titled, typically, were loyal to the King (or lord) and held other positions within the court. This system of nobility is what

comprises an aristocracy (Stephenson 56-61). While the aristocracy imposed law and order on its subjects, it was not without its own set of rules that governed their actions and conduct.

Chivalry

Much like feudalism, the definition and practice of chivalry varied between nations and rulers. As religion played a large role in the execution of chivalric duties, varying ideals and morals influenced what rules of chivalry were most important. War also leaned heavily on these noble commandments. Considering the chivalric code governed the actions and lives of knights in military service, the goals of the code changed. During wartime, a knight's chief concern was to be heroic and forthright and to protect the realm in the name of God. During times of peace, knights turned their attention to the defense and nobility of their fair ladies and to the good order of the kingdom. As with the discussion of feudalism, I refer only to the chivalric code as it was employed in 14th century England.

Understanding the structure and nature of feudal life, aristocracy, and the chivalric code in England during the Middle Ages provides a basis for understanding why the banquet was an important tool for noblemen. Maintaining possession of land, wealth, and title required loyalty from subordinates. In order to maintain that loyalty, it was necessary for noblemen to demonstrate their power over them. The influence of the chivalric code on the Middle Ages set a standard for behavior and expectations of both lords and vassals. The chivalric code grew out of the virtues of honor, gallantry, and service governing knights and knighthood and included service and loyalty to God, the

church, the knight's lord or king; leadership of troops and ruling over a county; as well as honor and etiquette (Stephenson 40-55).

Some lords chose to rule with an iron fist using fear and intimidation to maintain loyalty. However, a significant proportion of English noblemen tried to find less violent and more rewarding ways to retain loyalty, such as with gifts of land ownership, the granting of titles, and hosting large banquets. As a ritual of chivalry, the medieval banquet exemplified many of the commandments of the chivalric code as well as illuminated key aspects for understanding the foodways of the era.

Foodways

In social sciences, foodways are defined as the cultural, social, and economic practices relating to the production and consumption of food. Historical studies of foodways help sociologists, anthropologists, archaeologists, and other scholarly researchers gain insight into past cultures. This includes much discussion and theory about the study of foodways, such as the semiotics of food, food in literature, and the power of displaying wealth through food. Singman's *Daily Life in Medieval England* (1999) and Stephenson's *Mediaeval Feudalism* (1942) detail the intricacies of the feudal system and set on the broader picture of the relations between nobles, vassals, and serfs, but only skirts the topic of the banquet being as integral a tool as I am suggesting.

Cosman's *Fabulous Feasts* (1976) and Hammond's *Food and Feast in Medieval England* (1993) do examine medieval banquets, but focus primarily on one aspect at a time rather than the interplay of and between signs present at these banquets and the external contexts surrounding banquets as a whole. In other words, much research focuses on specific customs, ingredients, and methods of obtaining or preparing food, or

even the events during a banquet to explain how they individually affect the banquet itself; however, often those different aspects are not examined together to understand the combined rhetoric of the entire event.

If we think about them in terms of rhetoric, foodways are, quite literally, the invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery of food as dictated by the society they are a part of. Rhetoric as the art of effective expression and persuasion is demonstrated through the audience awareness, style, and selection of banquet components, and even the arrangement and delivery of the décor, menu, food preparation, and the manner of service in which it arrives at table. In this regard, foodways become a form of rhetoric beyond the oratory and include all of the senses. Engaging smell, taste, touch, and visual stimulations made the banquet an interactive and far more effective mode of expression. However, it is important to note that not only are the senses stimulated in this form of expression but also that of the ethos of foodways. In this regard, religion plays a major role in affecting the persuasiveness of the banquet.

Religion

Knowing that most people in the Middle Ages only ate two meals a day, what they ate at those meals, and the times of day they ate them, help us understand why an all-day banquet with a variety of foods would be seen as such a glorious event. One of the most important factors governing what, when, why, and how much people ate during meals in the Middle Ages—other than economics and location—was religion. The topic of food is a prominent recurring theme in The Bible, considering the purpose of eating, as directed by The Bible, was for the nourishment of the body and to the glory of God. In Genesis, God indicates to man what he can and cannot eat; gospels of the New Testament

detail the Last Supper, probably the most notable banquet among the gospels—if not history. "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10.31).

In contrast to religious-based eating is the act of fasting. Fasting is seen as a means of cleansing the mind and body for the acceptance and devotion to God. Interestingly though, there are no such commandments or direction by God that man must fast. The ritual of fasting was adopted from various Biblical Figures expressing the benefits of fasting, most notably Jesus and his 40-day fast in the desert to test his will against Satan (Matthew 4.1-4). Similarly, the Book of Isaiah states that the benefits of God will fill your soul after a successful fast. "Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard" (Isaiah 58.8).

However, at the same time fasting nourishes the spirit and cleanses the body, the Bible dictates that man's lot in life is to bear the toils and burdens of mortal existence. In that regard, Ecclesiastes 8.15 suggests man find pleasure in celebration to ease the strife: "And I commend enjoyment, for man has no good thing under the sun but to eat, and drink, and enjoy himself, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of life which God has given him under the sun" (The Holy Bible).

Understanding the act of fasting underscores the importance of medieval banquets. Given that the rules and importance for paying respect and devotions to God before filling one's belly demonstrated a person's piety. As gluttony is listed as one of the Seven Deadly Sins, resisting the temptations of the stomach and putting the will of God before oneself was to be master over the Devil. In the same regard, while fasting might be

understood as abstention from eating at all, it is important to note that church doctrine allowed for restricted diets during certain parts of the year such as Lent. Banquets held during such times were required to be a bit more creative with the permitted ingredients lists and often demonstrated how skilled a chef could be with a menu limited to salted herring (Hensch 33, 35).

History

As Richard II had ascended the throne before his tenth birthday, the governing of England was conducted mainly by a group of counselors to the King (later to be known as his "favourites"), which he retained long after he was of age to rule England on his own. Most of Parliament was unhappy with the current state of affairs and sought to eliminate this group of favourites. During much of the early reign of King Richard II, England lived under the threat of French invasion and in the fall of 1386, when Richard was nineteen, his Chancellor, Michael de la Pole, went before Parliament to request an unparalleled tax be levied in order to finance a campaign against France. For Parliament, this was the culminating event that led them to demand Richard remove de la Pole from his position (Saul 157). Richard flatly refused and in November of 1386, Parliament instituted a committee to oversee and govern Richard's finances and spending for a year. The usurpation of Richard's authority had been led by a group of nobleman known as the "Lords Appellant" and would prove successful in limiting sovereign rule, even if only temporarily. A few months later, in February 1387, Richard, now twenty years old, embarked on a "gyration" (tour) around England to garner support against the presumptive rule of Parliament (Tuck 189).

While history does not record an exact reason for it, on the 23rd of September 1387, he and the Bishop of Durham—John Fordham—hosted a feast in the hall at Durham House, the Bishop's castle (Pegge). As his former treasurer, the Bishop was one of Richard's closest advisors and commanded the respect and loyalty of many of the noblemen in and around London. Given the events of the previous 18 months and Richard's resulting gyration, it is fair to suppose that this particular feast was an effort to bring together the King's supporters and demonstrate his strength and secure the loyalty of the invited guests. While the exact number of guests was not recorded, considering its central location in London and the popularity of Richard's feasts, it is presumed that nearly 10,000 guests were in attendance and likely dined and reveled for nearly eight hours (Pegge).

In order to paint a complete picture of most medieval banquets, details must be pulled from a variety of sources. For example, The Great Roll of the Pipe, as maintained by Richard the Lionheart's Exchequer beginning in the late twelfth century, contains some of the oldest existing records about expenditures of banquets held at Westminster Hall. Likewise, inventory lists of royal possessions, visual records such as paintings by Froissart that chronicle the history of France and England in the fourteenth century, and historical texts each highlight aspects of banquets that allow observers to piecemeal events like these together. The banquet I document together here is only one example. Banquets of this nature would be held for a variety of reasons (i.e., weddings, funerals, coronations, celebrations of victory, etc) and could last for a couple of hours to several days or even a week, feeding anywhere from a dozen to thousands of people.

The recreation I outline of the feast here is based on specifics drawn together from a variety of sources. One such primary source includes *The Forme of Cury* as edited by Samuel Pegge and found in the Harleian Manuscript #4016, details the ingredients (see Table 3.2) and menus (see Table 3.3) for each of the three courses presented during the feast. Historical sources such as Anthony Tuck's *Crown and Nobility* (1985) and Nigel Saul's *Richard II* (1997) provide for the historical context. Bridget Henisch's *Fast and Feast* (1976), Madeleine Cosman's *Fabulous Feasts* (1976), and Peter's *Food and Feast in Medieval England* (1993) each provide a variety of details that both correspond with each other as well as fill in missing details. While none stands alone as a single repository, each contributes to the overall picture.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE BANQUET AS A WEAPON

As I explained in the Theory chapter, the concept of symbolic violence entails the deployment of cultural, social, and symbolic capitals against others to exert one's power and influence over others. In this instance, the King's capitals have been combined to create a profile in the form of a banquet. The banquet stands as a metaphorical weapon to be used as a form of symbolic violence. The execution of this particular banquet is the deployment of that weapon.

Inception of the Weapon

Given the context and political climate, a great banquet is to be held for all of his loyal supporters. In the interest of diplomacy and the practice of good politics, his opponents were also invited in. Approximately 10,000 guests, including lords and ladies, knights, vassals, merchants, and wealthy persons were expected to attend; each dressed in their finest attire and exhibiting the noblest manners and etiquette. The main dining hall was to be furnished with exquisite tapestries, large tables dressed in fine linens, the banners of the loyal noble supporters, and various other ornaments of the season from all over the countryside. For those seated on the dais and at the tables closest to the King, the tables were to be set with the finest utensils and equipment, including gilt goblets, saltcellars, fine linens, and a knife and spoon for each person.

The skill and flawless presentation of food would demonstrate a well-rehearsed pageant of pride and detail. The vast amount of food would ensure that none would go

away hungry. To that end, no expense was to be spared in obtaining exotic ingredients and in the preparation of the variety of dishes. The finest minstrels, actors, acrobats, and other entertainers were hired to keep spirits high amongst the guests. Likewise, wines and ales were to be brought in from the finest producers and would flow freely to the joy of all those in attendance. At the end of each course, a subtlety was to be presented to awe and delight the guests. When the banquet had concluded, the remaining scraps and leftovers would be divided and distributed to feed the guests' horses, local clerics, and the poor.

It is important to note that the banquet itself would not have been planned and executed by King Richard himself. In fact, I assert that while he may have had a hand in choosing the various dishes on the menu and the entertainments for the guests, Richard would likely have had little to do with the actual composition of his own profile. The likelihood is that his cooks would have been responsible for the planning of the menu, his court revelers would have overseen the selection of music and entertainments, and his noble courtiers would have planned the actual service and agenda.

Therefore, while Richard may have had the final word on some of the larger aspects, such as the food, wine, and guest list, it is more likely that the minor details were left to the ingenuity of his court subjects. In this light, I offer that Richard II's profile was composed in a sort of committee fashion and influenced by the opinions and decisions of those around him. This would suggest that Richard did not have complete control over his own profile and may have been subject to the influences of his own ideologies imposed on his kingdom.

What follows is a detailed representation of what likely occurred on the day of the banquet. It is important to reiterate that there are no single records that specifically list each of the details I outline here. The scene I recreate here is entirely my opinion and supposition based on a variety of sources including financial records, personal accounts, and historical references.

Deployment of the Weapon

At 10:30 in the morning, the trumpeters sounded the call for the guests to enter the hall and take their seats. The meal was to be served promptly at 11:00 and it was important that all guests seated in the main hall were present for the King's entrance. As the diners took their assigned places, the dais remained empty. Shortly before the meal was to be served, the trumpets sounded again, those seated rose to their feet, and the hall fell silent. The King entered preceded by the Bishop of Durham and followed by his uncle—the Duke of Lancaster. The three men took their positions on the dais and the King welcomed his guests. The Bishop, to the King's immediate right, gave a blessing for the meal and for the health and long reign of the King. The blessing received, the King welcomed his guests and took his seat; his guests followed suit.

After the menu, the guest list was of utmost importance to the host of a medieval banquet. Who the host chose to invite and who among them decided to attend spoke volumes about both parties. While I am certain there were many other lords and ladies, as well as knights and vassals, in attendance, using the historical references I have gathered together, I believe the men listed in Table 1 to be of the most significance. Each of these men commanded respect and loyalty throughout the country and brought with them a

bevy of other loyalists. What was special about these men was not only their influence over other noblemen in England—and even France—but upon the King himself.

This influence on the King was exactly what the Lords Appellant were trying to quash. Several of these men—de Vere, de la Pole, Beauchamp, Berners, and Burley—had all known the King since childhood but, more importantly, all of them had come from more humble beginnings. For most of them, their nobility was barely traceable to distant relations and was resented by many of the more distinguished and established noblemen of the time. For the King to take them into his confidence and rule based on the guidance of such diluted noble blood was seen as an aberration and was considered a disgrace to the crown by many in Parliament. Nevertheless, these men had the King's ear and experienced wealth, influence, and extravagance at the King's (and the nation's) expense.

**Table 3.1 Notable guests in attendance at the feast of 23 September 1387,
London, England (Table created from my own compilation of information.)**

Guest	Title	Relationship
John of Gaunt	Duke of Lancaster	The King's uncle and closest advisor
John Fordham	Bishop of Durham	Former Lord Privy Seal and Lord High Treasurer
Robert de Vere	Earl of Oxford & Justice of Chester	Commander of the King's army and close advisor
Robert Tresilian	Chief Justice	Favourite and legal advisor
Michael de la Pole	Earl of Suffolk and former Lord Chancellor	Favourite and close advisor
Nicholas Bembre	Lord Mayor of London	Favourite and close loyalist
Alexander Neville	Archbishop of York	Close loyalist and advisor
John de Beauchamp	1st Baron Beauchamp of Kidderminster	Favourite, major landowner Wales, Warwick, and Holt
Sir James Berners	Knight in Richard's court	Favourite, childhood friend, and close counsel
Sir Simon Burley	Lord of Cinque Ports	Favourite of Richard II
Sir John Montacute	3rd of Earl of Salisbury	Loyalist, friend to the King

On the dais, the King sat upon a large, high-backed chair with arms on the sides and a canopy overhead (see Figure 4). Both the chair and the canopy were adorned with the royal coat of arms of the House of Plantagenet. Both the Bishop and the Duke sat on high-backed chairs of plain wood without arms or a canopy. The table before them was little more than a wide board placed atop two trusses and covered with the finest white linens in the King's possession. In front of the dais stood two long, rectangular tables of similar construction: one to the right and one to the left of the dais, forming a U-shape. These tables, like the dais, were occupied only on one side for easier serving (see Figure 3). The guests at these tables were of the highest rank and the most important guests of the King. The remaining guests sat at shorter rectangular tables behind the nobleman or guest each was loyal to. The seats at the guest tables were typically long, wooden benches or stools without backs (see Figure 4 and 5).



Figure 3. Banquet for the Queen, circa 1470. Medievalists.net.



Figure 4. Dukes of York, Gloucester and Ireland dining with King Richard II, c. 1470-1480. ©The British Library Board. Royal 14 E. IV, f.265v.



Figure 5. Plate 11 Royal Banquet, John of Gaunt Feasting with the King of Portugal, c. 1386. ©The British Library Board. Royal 14 E. IV f.244v.

Around the great hall would be a variety of adornments. The walls were covered with fanciful tapestries from the Middle East, brought back from the Crusades. Likewise, the banners of the great lords (see Figure 4 and 5) and most notable guest would be displayed so that others would know who was represented at the banquet even if they didn't see them in person. Above the entrance to the hall would be perched a band of musicians that would provide music during the meal (see Figure 3, 4, and 5). Likewise, the herald and trumpeters were located there in order to be heard better throughout the hall.

The positioning of the dais was so that it faced the kitchen doors in order to watch the procession of food leaving the kitchen with pomp and circumstance. However, a decorative screen displaying some fanciful painting or relief carving depicting some great moment in history would block the kitchen doors themselves. Behind the dais, or somewhere in the hall, would be a large cupboard. When not in use for a banquet, the host's collection of plates, cups, and table equipment might be displayed there to show-off their value (see Figure 3 and 4). Since they would likely be in use during the banquet, the cupboard would be used as a serving station where extra pitchers of wine or water, utensils or linens, or even food might be placed during the meal (see Figure 3 and 4).

Depending on the time of year or occasion of the banquet, the hall might be decorated with trimmings of the season. If necessary, a great fire would be maintained in the hearths in order keep the hall warm. The floor would be covered with fresh straw in order to soften the stone floor for walking as well as to retain heat and catch any droppings from the table. This is an interesting detail that is often represented

inaccurately in paintings of the time that were to preserve the event for posterity (see Figure 3, 4, and 5). Great pains were taken in decorating the hall to ensure the comfort and pleasure of all in attendance.

With guest lists ranging in the thousands and the average castle feast hall being able to seat a few hundred to perhaps a thousand comfortably, it was unlikely that all of the invitees were able to squeeze into the main hall. Many of the lower ranking guests—the squires and lower vassals—were relegated to outer chambers of the main hall and to tents on the sprawling grounds.



Picture 1. Ewer, brass and engraved, circa 15th Century, © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

After the King took his seat, a ewer (see Picture 1) of warm water—often scented with flower petals or herbs—was brought to his table along with a bowl and fresh white linen. The ewer and cloth were then presented at the King’s table by a squire of noble birth and considerable rank (see Figure 3) as it would be inappropriate for a commoner or servant to approach the King (Cosman 26). The King placed his hands over the bowl and

the warm water was poured over his hands to cleanse them. His hands would be dried with the linen and the process then repeated for the Bishop, the Duke, and the rest of the guests in order of rank at the two primary tables. The remaining guests were expected to wash their hands at the bowls placed near the entrance of the hall. The process of hand washing would be repeated before and after each course in order to keep the hands clean to prevent soiling the table linens and clothes as well as from passing potential sicknesses as the Black Death had been rampant less than forty years prior.

Along with the fine table linens and hand cloths, the King and his highest ranking guests would also be provided a napkin for wiping their face and hands during the meal since wiping one's face and hands on the table cloth or sleeve was considered a major faux pas and would likely get a guest ejected from the feast. Proper etiquette was a must considering much of what was eaten was handled with the fingers except for soups, stews, and puddings, which were eaten with a spoon. Forks did not become widely popular until the 15th century, since those that used them were likened to animals, as it was with a large pitchfork that most animals were thrown their food. In some instances, it might be acceptable to skewer a piece of meat with a serrated or pronged end of a knife for placing it on the trencher, but since it might come in contact with other people's food, the guest should not put it in the mouth.

Good table manners were of vital importance during a medieval banquet. The belief was that the outward actions of a person reflected the inner character of that person. Since every meal was begun with the giving of thanks to God for the meal, the conduct of each person at table was a reflection of their piety. If a man acted in bad form, it might be implied that he was a heathen in the presence of God. "This being so, good

manners were important not simply because they contributed to the harmony of the occasion, but because they expressed the spiritual grace of the person who displayed them" (Henisch 190).

An important aspect about dining utensils is that many hosts, kings included, rarely had enough utensils to provide the masses of guests they would feed. This was true for knives, spoons, goblets, and plates (or trenchers). It was entirely appropriate, and expected, for the time for a guest to bring his own eating utensils; this wasn't a problem considering most who travelled away from home routinely carried with them their own cutlery (Hammond 103). For those hosts that did provide utensils, guests would often be required to share with their tablemates. Here again, rank played a role in determining not only where the guest sat but also with whom and how many other people he had to share his wine goblet and knife with. The dais was another matter since each person at the King's table would have their own utensils and would not have to share goblets.

Another important piece of equipment on the table was the saltcellar (see Picture 2). As salt was used on nearly everything, especially to help maintain or enhance flavor, a decorative saltcellar was a prized commodity. Many saltcellars were handed down as family heirlooms (as were the linens and objects occupying the cupboard). Saltcellars were never discarded or thrown away. Since they would typically be made of some precious metal, their value was usually quite high and would be melted down if the need for extra cash arose.



Picture 2. Saltcellar, Brass Gilt, Neptune kneeling on a dolphin, circa 1560, © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Picture 3. Burghley Nef, nautilus shell with gilt silver mounts and pearls, circa 1528. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Additionally, the King's "nef" (see Picture 3) was another interesting article of equipment. The nef was an ornately sculpted carryall for utensils, napkins, and even a saltcellar for the express use of the King. Records state that Richard's nef was cast in the shape of a naval ship and was said to have "eight tiny men holding up the banners of

France" crowded onto the ship's forecastle (Henisch 164). In fact, it was so admired that often a great show of pomp and ritual was made for bringing the King's nef to table.

Since the host rarely had enough plates to go around and those he did have were used primarily for presenting and serving dishes on, each guest was provided a trencher. Trenchers were typically made up of four pieces of dense, square bread about one inch thick each and were placed together to form a larger square. Soda breads, beer breads, or others that became dense and highly absorbent were used in order to prevent the linens beneath from getting stained. Once again, social position and rank dictated the freshness of the bread used for the trencher. The King and his highest ranking guests would be given bread fresh from that morning; the next group would get day old bread, and so on down the line.

At the end of each course, those trenchers that didn't get eaten by the guest would be swept away into the alms bucket for either distribution to the poor, the local monastery, servants, or even the animals of the household. In fact, the distribution of the scraps leftover from a banquet such as this was a serious task. A special almoner would be assigned to oversee where the scraps went—nothing was ever just thrown out. Giving these scraps (or alms) to the poor or the clergy was considered an act of good will and a demonstration of piety. To be considered pious meant that the host was most likely in good favor with God and could be counted on to bring that strength to a fight.

With the tables set, guests present, and hands washed, the trumpets would sound indicating the beginning of the meal. From the kitchens and cellars would march forth a seemingly endless parade of servers with such a variety of dishes that it was nearly impossible to try them all. The smells and appearances were a feast for the nose and eyes

well before the flavor registered on the tongue. The King would be served first followed by his highest guests. The food and wine each tested for quality, flavor, and poisoning. As a demonstration of loyalty and willingness to serve the King, the stewards serving the meal were all of noble birth ranking from squire to landholding Lord (Cosman 26).

The carver (meat steward), panter (bread steward), and butler (wine steward) were all roles filled by the highest nobility in the King's realm. The position of carver was to be filled by one of the highest and most trusted of the King's noblemen as his was considered the most important and nerve-wracking job in the room. The carver must be able to slice the meat specifically to the desires of the guest as well as trim fat, remove bones, and even pair the appropriate sauce with it (Henisch 200). As a the master-knife-wielder, the carver would also be expected to serve the cut of meat to the guest on the knife itself (Henisch 197), even to the King, thus giving a good reason why the position should be filled by a trusted noble (Henisch 179).

Probably the only aspect more important than the guest list and who was to fill what roles during the banquet was the menu itself. As much as each banner hanging in the hall represented the King's influence, the food on the tables demonstrated his wealth. Feeding thousands meant there had to be plenty of food to go around and indicated that the host could afford to obtain massive quantities of birds, livestock, game, fruits, spices, and wine or ales. Consider the details and work that had to be done to put on a banquet of such immense proportions. For Richard's 1387 feast, 16 oxen, 120 sheep, 12 bores, nearly 3,000 birds (including swans, pigeons, and herons), nearly 500 rabbits, 11,000 eggs, 12 bushels of apples and "enough" herring (both salted and fresh) were on the shopping list (see Table 3.2). This only accounts for some of the ingredients and does not

take into account the number of man-hours it took to gather and prepare all of the food. Records indicate that for many banquets of large size, ingredients were collected as far as a year out. The animals would be kept alive and fed in order to fatten them up for slaughter. This kept the animal fresh and guaranteed a good "harvest."

Most of the ingredients used were native to England; however, a real display of eccentricity and wealth would be to include ingredients from the continent. Figs, dates, and olives from the Mediterranean; spices like cumin, cardamom, aniseed, nutmeg, saffron, and cinnamon from the Middle and Far East; as well as wines or cheeses from foreign lands were all delicacies that would cost a fortune but make a splendid display of wealth.

Table 3.2 Ingredients list for Richard II's banquet September 23, 1387. (Pegge)

GAME	FOUL	OTHER
XIIII oxen lying in salte (14 Salted Oxen)	LX disson pullayn for Gely (60 Poultry for jelly)	CXX galons melke (120 gallons of Milk)
II oxen ffreyssh (2 Fresh Oxen)	CXLIV to roste (144 poultry to roast)	XII galons Creme (12 gallons of Cream)
CXX heds of shepe fresh (120 Sheep's Heads)	C dd peions (1200 Pigeons)	XL galons of Cruddes (40 gallons of Curd)
CXX carcas of shepe fressh (120 Sheep carcasses)	X dosen Curlews (120 Curlew)	III bushels of Appelles (3 bushells of Apples)
XII Bores (12 Boar)	CXLIV dosen Brewes (144 Whimbrel)	XI thousand eggs (11,000 Eggs)
XIIII Calvys (14 Calves)	XII Cranes (12 Cranes)	CCC maribones (300 Marrowbones)
CXL pigges (140 Pigs)	Wild fowle ynogh (Enough Wildfowl)	Of larde and grece, ynogh (Enough Lard & Grease)
LXXXIV tod of salt veneson (84lb Of Salt Venison)	L Swannes (50 Swan)	
III does of ffressh venison (3 Fresh Doe)	CCx gees (210 Geese)	
VI kiddes (6 Goat)	L capons of hie grece (50 Fat Capons)	
XCVI dd Rabettes (96 Rabbits)	XCVI dussen other capons (96 Other Capons)	
CD coppull Coyngges (400 Rabbits)	DCCXX Hennes (720 Hens)	
	IIII Fesauntes (4 Pheasant)	
	V herons and Bitores (5 Heron & Bittern)	

Table 3.3 Menu served for Richard II's banquet September 23, 1387. (Pegge)

FIRST COURSE	SECOND COURSE	THIRD COURSE
Veneson with Frumenty (Venison with a thick, sweet porridge of wheat)	A pottage called Gele (A Stew called Jelly)	Potage. Bruete of Almonds (Sweet Stew Of Almonds, Honey & Eggs)
A pottage called viaundbruse (A Stew Of Soft Meat)	A pottage de blandesore (A White Soup)	Stwde lumbarde (Sweet Syrup Of Honey, Dates & Wine)
Hedes of Bores (Boars Heads)	Pigges Roasted (Roast Pigs)	Venyson roasted (Roast Venison)
Grete Flessh (Great Flesh (Roast Oxen))	Cranes roasted (Roast Cranes)	Chekenes Roasted (Roast Chickens)
Swannes Roasted (Roast Swan)	Fesauntes roasted (Roast Pheasants)	Rabettes Roasted (Roast Rabbits)
Pigges roasted (Roast Pigs)	Hérons roasted (Roast Herons)	Partrich Roasted (Roast Partridge)
Crustarde lumbarde in paste (Sweet Pastry Custards Of Wine, Dates & Honey)	Chekens endored (Chickens Glazed)	Peions roasted (Roast Pigeons)
And a Sotelte (A Subtlety)	Breme (Bream)	Quailes roasted (Roast Quail)
	Tartes (Tarts)	Larkes roasted (Roasted Larks)
	Broke braune (Jellied Brawn Of A Deer)	Payne puff (Pan Puff)
	Conyngges Roasted (Roast Rabbits)	A dissh of Gely (A Dish Of Jelly)
	And a sotelte (A Subtlety)	Longe Frutours (Long Fritters)
		And a sotelte (A Subtlety)

During each course, there would be much revelry and entertainment. Musicians, either in the perch above the kitchen door or minstrels wandering the room, would play and sing, often passing their instrument to a guest so that they might join in the fun. Likewise, acrobats, fools, dwarves, jesters, jugglers, and other entertainers would be

employed to the delight and pleasure of the guests (Cosman 31-33, Hammond 143).

Among some of the more large-scale entertainments would be swordsmen, actors putting on a play, pageants, or even recreating epic battles honoring the heroes who had fought for the glory of their country. In many instances, the lords, knights, and even the King might take part in these play acting's or recreations (Hammond 147).

Great spectacles were expected but rarely anticipated. An example includes a pageant put on by Charles V of France in 1378 for his Christmas guests. Stagehands wheeled into the hall a large boat and a tower upon which actors representing Saracens and Christian knights reenacted multiple crusaders' conquest of Jerusalem, including Peter the Hermit, Godfrey of Bouillon, and Richard the Lionheart (Henisch 234). The more grandiose the spectacle, the more awe was had for the host.

Popular spectacles that hosts (as well as their well paid chefs) delighted in providing for their guest were subtleties. These were typically large edible sculptures of great design and ornamentation. They were often made of sugar or marzipan but were not limited to these materials. Often meat, fruits, vegetables, and other edibles were used as well as the hides and feathers of the animals served for dinner were used to decorate them. Often, the guests of the banquet might be presented with a marzipan recreation of their coat of arms complete with color and minute detail. These subtleties were an important display of creativity and ingenuity on both the part of the chef and the host (Hammond 142).

Between courses, another important and impressive ritual likely took place—oaths of fealty or vows of great deeds (Hammond 148). In 1306, Edward I, Richard's great-grandfather, held a banquet, later to be called the Feast of Swans, where he

knighted his son and 266 others who all took vows of loyalty. This tradition would be continued at banquets whereby two swans decorated with gold and silk would be brought forth and knights would vow their allegiance, or some other great deed, to the King (Hammond 148). Considering the events of the time, it is fair to assume that some sort of ritual resembling the "vows before birds" (Hammond 148)—especially peacocks—took place, ensuring the loyalty and support of the guests present to aide Richard in his coming fight against the Lords Appellant.

Along with the oaths offered by the knights present, it is likely that Richard rewarded those oaths with some sort of gift. These would be no mere tokens as parting gifts; typically, these gifts were some sort of payment typically in lands or goods or even the hand of a wealthy noblewoman. The reward was equivalent to the man's rank and position in the King's court.

A new knight might be presented with either the money or material to furnish him with the clothes and equipment of his rank. He might also be given a horse or two and a salary to maintain his new possessions and position. A man already holding a title might be given a higher title or land either at home or abroad that he was to oversee and command. For those who may have a title and no land, the King might grant the nobleman the hand of another nobleman's daughter; her dowry being the land she would inherit from her father would then pass to the landless knight making him a baron or viscount based on the title of the woman's father. In any respect, the acquisition of land or title was seen as a most generous gift. With land and title came power, influence, and wealth; each of which was greatly sought after in the Middle Ages.

After the meal had concluded, the hall would be cleared for music, dancing, and more revelry. Wafers and hippocras (spiced wine) would be served to aide the digestion as well as small cakes and cheeses for those that might still need something sweet to cap off their meal (Hammond 113-14). For those select guests of the host that lingered for “drynkyngs,” a special offering of food left over from the banquet might be offered called “reresoper” even though it was frowned upon by the Church as unnecessary and extravagant (Henisch 17). The reresoper might entail anything from an assortment of leftovers from the night before to simple bread, cheese, and sop wine. Sop wine was the spiced, diluted wine left from the meal that one would dunk their bread into. Interestingly, while breakfast was rarely ever eaten except among laborers and children, sop wine and bread were often taken before morning devotions and since it wasn't considered a full meal it did not break the evening fast.

CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS

In addition to the day-to-day routines, events, and duties of the royal house, banquets like Richard II's 1387 event were vast semiotic systems designed to ultimately communicate the King's profile. To understand the composition, consider the individual components of the banquet: massive quantities of ingredients and an extensive menu; exotic delicacies from foreign lands; opulent utensils, table linens, and serving equipment; expert and eccentric entertainment; inordinate numbers and an impressive array of guests. Each of these signs was carefully chosen to compose together a profile intended to impress and manipulate each attendant.

Rather than try to discuss each of the individual signs present during the banquet, I will focus on a select few. In order to demonstrate their semiotic significance, I will discuss them in terms of their representative forms of capital as viewed pragmatically by the varying observer groups. Figure 6 presents a graphic representation of the lens at work.

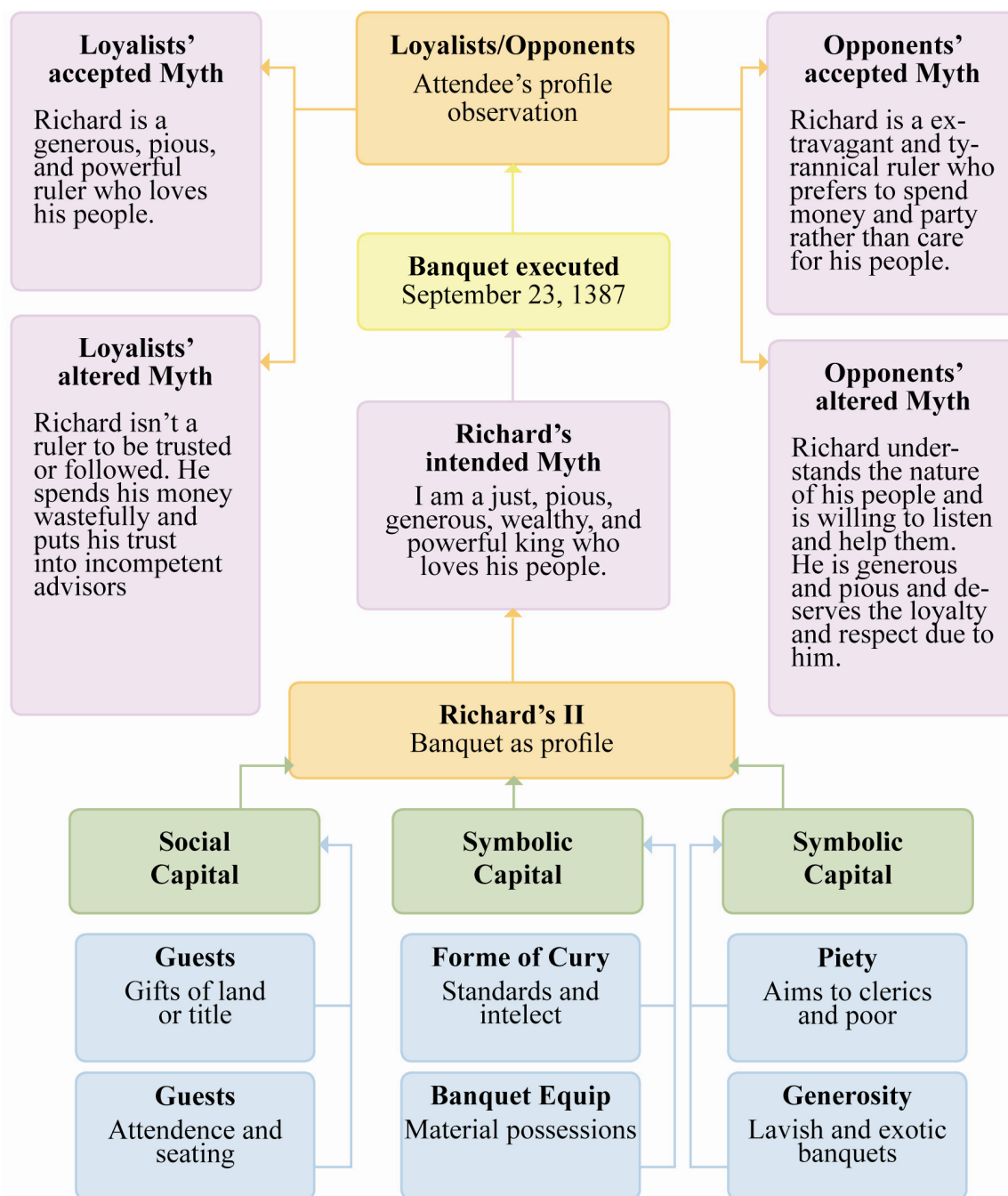


Figure 6. The Semiotic Mechanism detailing Richard II's profile.

Guests and Social Capital

The entire event as a whole was a major networking event designed to build interpersonal relationships between the King and his subjects and brought together loyal supporters as well as a few dissidents that opposed his rule. The loyal guests that attended this banquet demonstrated to him that they could be counted on and trusted when the time came to back him in a fight. Those that made public vows or oaths of fealty likely walked away with some sort of payment for their loyalty. Perhaps a new knight was dubbed or a Baron was elevated to Earl and gained new lands. Maybe a Viscount was able to marry off a daughter to a wealthy Duke at the King's blessing.

In semiotic terms, an example representamen is a gift of land or title to a nobleman. For those on the receiving end, this sort of political favor represents an object that could potentially reap economic benefits in the long-term but, in the immediate, those favors would signal the King's generosity and therefore secure loyalties to the King. Even the seemingly small act of being seated nearer to his Highness than others might elevate the prominence of some noblemen whether they were of pure noble blood or not. Being seen in the close company of the King potentially lent as much credibility to a person as holding large tracts of land or wealth.

The game of politics often includes appeasing one's political opponents to maintain one's power or position. Given this fact and the political climate of the era, invitations were extended to the King's opponents in Parliament to attend the banquet; however, whether or not they chose to attend is something a matter of historical debate. For those that chose to attend, they may have done so simply out of respect for the position of the King; a subordinate can respect the office and not respect the person

holding the office. Although, some may have attended out of sheer curiosity to see who else would show up and vow their allegiance. Not attending was a sign of disrespect to the host, especially if a good reason for not attending wasn't provided. Those that chose not to attend did so in order to send a clear declaration that they did not agree with the King or his policies.

In the same regard, the King sent his own nonverbal message to those that did attend through the management of the seating chart. Where the host chose to seat each nobleman said just as much as the nobleman's attendance. Consider this: if the Duke of Gloucester or the Earl of Warwick—both original members of the Lords Appellant—chose to attend, seating them further away than any of the King's favourites might be seen as an insult to their nobility and influence. In other words, if Sir Thomas of Woodstock (the Duke of Gloucester and youngest son of King Edward III) was sat further away from the King than Sir James Berners (a Knight of humble beginnings, low nobility, and a non-landowner), Sir Thomas might be perceived as being of little influence or consequence in the eyes of the King and other lords, even though Sir Thomas' noble birth-right was more established than Sir James'.

Banquet Equipment and Cultural Capital

Richard II was renown for his amazing, if not outlandish, banquets and went to great measures to staff his kitchens with the finest chefs in England and Europe. He was so enamored with fine foods that he commissioned a book of his favorite recipes. *The Forme of Cury* was presented to him in 1390 and contained not only his favorite meals but also the protocols for hosting and the manners of guests attending a banquet. This

book would later become the standard for proper service and etiquette at table and signified an attention to detail that was meant to impress and intimidate.

In this particular semiotic example, two signs stand out: the book itself as well as its contents. The subject of the contents represents the concept of appropriate service, behavior, and menu choices for a noble banquet. The knowledge it contains indicates a standard of breeding and education that underscores characteristics of generosity, wealth, and even piety that a nobleman might want to display. Likewise, the book itself is a physical manifestation of the forethought and intelligence Richard would have displayed in preserving history and setting standards of conduct. However, *The Forme of Cury* is not the only physical object working to compose Richard II's profile.

Consider the pragmatism of the physical objects present during the banquet such as the linens, utensils, the nef, saltcellars, goblets, and serving dishes. For the purposes of analysis, these material possessions act as specific signs of cultural capital. During the Middle Ages, household items such as the family linens and banquet equipment were seen as family heirlooms. Their design and opulence demonstrated not only wealth but also exquisite taste that came with superior breeding and education. Each piece of equipment was of such quality or number that those present wouldn't be able to help but admire them and speculate as to their worth. The fact that a guest might even consider their value could lead to a few possible conclusions.

One conclusion is a sort of impressed thinking about the fact that the King could afford such an extravagance. Fine linens from were admired not only for the materials chosen to weave them but also for any pattern or detail work woven into the fabric. Richard's nef was described to have been large enough to hold his napkins, knife, spoon,

a plate, goblet, and even his saltcellar. The detailed sculpted men holding the eight banners of France on its forecastle was surely enough to impress even his most staunch opponent.

After being briefly impressed, his opponents might take a more negative attitude toward the King's wasteful spending on such an ornate object. Considering its value, the money spent to commission or acquire it might have been enough to feed a village for a month. Any linens or tapestries from the Middle East in the King's possession might also be viewed as an extravagance when peasants were starving in the streets. Considering the fact that the purpose of holding the banquet was to garner support for Richard against the Lords Appellant and their restrictions on his treasury demonstrates their distaste for his spending habits.

Generosity and Piety as Symbolic Capital

Having been chosen by God to hold the office of Sovereign of England, Richard commanded a certain level of symbolic capital. Presenting himself as pious and generous helped him appear as being not only a man of God but of the people as well. Perhaps being King wasn't enough for some people to support him as a man but the respect his title commanded earned him at least some small amount of respect among some. These characteristics would add another level of symbolic capital to his profile and potentially strengthen his profile among his opponents. Given the religious zeal of the time, piety and generosity seemed to go hand in hand.

It was customary to invoke the blessings of heaven for each meal since the food set before them was considered to be a gift from God: "Every living, moving creature will be food for you. Just as I gave you green plants before, so now you have everything"

(Genesis C9 v3). However, being thankful was not enough to demonstrate piety. Showing great generosity helped reinforce this idea.

"Plenty of food and ale had to be supplied because it was important for the lord to appear open-handed and generous" (Hammond 112). The fact that the King would lay down such a generous feast reflected the bounty provided by God. This open-handed demonstration would potentially demonstrate to the guest that the lord was willing to offer assistance when asked. Giving food scraps as a form of alms to the local monastery or clerics was viewed as a way of contributing one's share to the Church. To that end, the dedication and emulation of God during the meal and his charity of food alms to the poor and clerics following the meal was a testament to his piety.

Feeding a mass of people in this way also reflected the story of Jesus feeding 5000 people with only 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish (Matthew c14 v13-21). Even the distribution of the scraps to the poor or the guests' horses added to the count of people that would be fed from the bounty of a banquet. The emulation of the generosity of God or Jesus would have been viewed as being righteous or pious. Even to go so far as to treat his guests' horses with equal respect and comfort added to his generous and pious nature. All God's creatures were welcome to what Richard offered.

If the amounts of food and numbers of people fed aren't enough to illustrate the King's generosity, examining the financials may be more convincing. Financial records still exist from the Exchequer's of England and serve as excellent resources for tracking what was purchased and consumed for banquets such as this. Laborious reviews and searches through these texts can help piece together medieval banquets. While the total cost of the feast may never be known, we can make estimates based on those texts. A

conservative estimate of 1 British Pound per attendee would put the cost of the banquet at 10,000 Pounds in 1387. Adjusting for inflation and currency exchanges, today that would equate to about 6.5 million pounds or 10.2 million dollars. That is just over \$1000 per person today. This may seem generous to Richard's supporters but given the already stated opinion of the Lords Appellant, this might have been a bit expensive even by today's standards.

Once the signs have been compiled and evaluated, Richard's profile, in this case the banquet, would be composed and planned. Proper culling, editing, and selection, that profile would be adjusted until every detail worked together to communicate the kind of message Richard would want made about his character. When the message was perfected, the banquet was presented and the guests made their own observations and interpretations.

Myths

Combined, these selected signs represent the different forms of capital that would have been necessary to compose a strong profile for the King. However, how that profile was interpreted dictated the accepted myths about him. Through this banquet, Richard represented himself as a strong and pious ruler who was willing to provide for his subjects barring no expense. This is the myth he created around himself. History has shown that Richard II, while intelligent and attractive, was lavish and not very good with his money. In fact, Richard II is recorded in history as a tyrannical ruler who was overthrown by his own cousin, Henry IV. This fact alone makes the myth of his own splendor and magnanimity questionable.

However, his loyal followers may have believed the myth he tried to portray. As the beneficiaries who reaped the most reward from his lavish lifestyle, those identified as his "favourites" must surely have believed this myth. Based on the scene presented in the previous chapter, it can be assumed a loyalist to the King would believe in the following myth of Richard II: The King is an influential and wealthy monarch who rules with a generous and pious hand. He understands the plight of Englishmen and is willing to do all in his power to protect the realm and advance England's prosperity and future. The fact that his favourites were later defeated in battle, and either executed or run out of England should be testimony enough of the folly of their belief in this myth.

Contrastingly, those opposed to the King, especially the Lords Appellant, might believe this profile: Richard II is an immature child who over taxes his people and spends his finances wastefully without care or regard for the welfare of his realm. His disrespect toward the traditions and policies of his forefathers flies in the face of God and borders on treason.

His opponents might have balked at the sheer number of people at the banquet that indicated a level of spending that could have been used to fund a campaign in France rather than imposing heavy taxes for the same purpose. Considering the eventual turn of events that would later lead to Richard's downfall, ousting, imprisonment, and death, one might argue that a belief in this myth drove those that opposed him to seek change. Perhaps, the divine right of God intervened to shed light on the truth of Richard's tyranny rather than illuminate the myth he intended for himself.

As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, I have chosen a small sampling of the signs available to present the profile of Richard II, as it would have been composed

through this banquet. This analysis can be applied to any of the signs present during the course of the banquet. In that regard, any of the signs employed for the profile composition from the moment the banquet was conceived until well after it was over can be examined. The signs are not limited to only those that can be physically seen; as I have stated, even those invitees who did not attend were signs in themselves. I could have just as easily applied this lens to examine a specific subset of signs present such as fabric-based signs (i.e., table linens, wall tapestries, banners, and clothing). The fact that the lens I have constructed here can be applied to any aspect of the banquet is what gives significance and value to this analysis.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

I experienced many challenges in creating my theoretical lens and in applying it to a medieval banquet. These challenges in turn led to limitations in my approach and my research findings and conclusions. In identifying these challenges, I will explore the care needed to synthesize multiple (and sometimes competing) theories into a single useful lens, as well as to work with ancient historical archival sources of complex (and sometimes uncertain) provenance.

One of the foremost obstacles to using historical sources such as the ones I have chosen is the lack of consensus among historians. For example, there are marked discrepancies in the many biographies of Richard II about his character, appearance, intellect, and ruling style. Several references disagree about the date of his birth, his death, and when he ascended the throne. Given the nature of the men around him on whom he relied for counsel and the inclinations of those who opposed him and his counselors, these become important details when trying to evaluate his profile. For those loyal to the King, the records may show a vastly different person than to those original records kept by his opponents.

The variety of languages in which medieval sources are written is also a problem. While I was excited to locate firsthand accounts of history such as financial records kept by the King's Exchequer, I was disheartened when I received them to find that they were written in Franco-Norman Latin Shorthand. Even if I were able to read Latin, the blend of

Franco-Norman language in the Latin would have compounded the difficulty. However, the fact that the records were also written in shorthand abbreviations, made the text nearly useless to me. I was fortunate to find many antique references among the digital archives of research institutions but those databases are extraordinarily difficult to read since many are poorly constructed and do not detail specific information researchers use to identify the location and translations of text within a text.

In addition to learning to negotiate the vagaries of ancient texts, as a rhetorician but not a specialist in several of the areas that touched upon my research, I had to educate myself on subjects like medieval chivalry and the study of foodways in the social sciences. As these are not specialties of mine, my research and understanding was slowed until I could grasp them and recognize their influence on my topic. This meant having to make some generalizations and assumptions about history that might not be widely accepted. Given the variety of sources, and given the paucity of information about some areas, I was compelled to pick and choose among details, creating a strategic fiction of what almost certainly happened at the feast.

The theories I use also pose interesting obstacles since they are not immediately associated with the definitions or applications I have assigned them. As semiotics and pragmatics are typically associated with the fields of linguistic and language theory, I first had to make the assertion that language is more than written or spoken words. In this thesis, I use language theory to analyze material artifacts as sign systems.

To this end, I assert that material artifacts such as clothing, technology, and architecture as well as non-material ideals such as religious beliefs, morals, and education are each elements of language. Each of these elements can be represented by some sort of

sign system and can acquire value based on the category of capital—cultural, social, symbolic, or even economic—it is associated with. Given my assertion, the potential uses for the semiotic lens I have created here cross the boundaries between disciplines of study. As I have demonstrated, this lens can be employed to examine historical events and the creation of profiles of historic Figures. This lens allows an examiner to view events from not only an observer's point of view but also from the composer's as well. The focus of this lens goes beyond the narrow object of research in this thesis. Because material-and non-material-artifacts can be identified throughout history, those artifacts can act as sign systems or forms of language relevant to their time and place in history. As those artifacts move through time and across space, their meaning and value can change with the given context they appear in. This is demonstrative of the evolution of language as it is identified and studied by those in the linguistic fields.

Given the changing climate of technology and global interaction of cultures, the traditionally humanistic rhetorical studies are becoming more relevant to fields beyond the humanities. The lens I have created demonstrates the importance of the humanities and social sciences working together to build a more complete understanding of how our world works. Many scholars of ancient and medieval history, such as Aristotle, Cicero, and Augustine, understood the interplay between disciplines and were teachers of various subjects rather than experts in just one. Peirce was a scholar of mathematics, logic, philosophy, semiotics, and linguistics. His cross-disciplinary studies allowed him to develop the theory and practice of pragmatics. Bourdieu considered himself a sociologist; Barthes began as a literary critic but later identified himself as a linguist and semiotician, and his ideas veered into post-structural anthropology.

In short, I have worked my way toward the ways in which scholars in rhetoric, semiotics, material culture studies, anthropology, and sociology have begun to explore intersections among the different disciplines. I'm thinking, for example, of Mark Gottdiener's *Postmodern Semiotics: Material and the Forms of Postmodern Life*; S. H. Riggins's *The Socialness of Things: Essays in the Socio-Semiotics of Objects*; Carl Knappett's "Meaning in Miniature: Semiotic Networks in Material Culture"; Elizabeth Lowry's "Gendered Haunts: The Rhetorical and Material Culture of the Late Nineteenth-Century Spirit Cabinet"; and Ian Hodder's "The Narrative and Rhetoric of Material Culture Sequences." Rhetorical studies can only be enriched by combining theories in the ways these authors have done, and that I have attempted to do here, extending the reach of rhetoric into research ordinarily reserved for the social sciences.

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Plate 11 Royal Banquet, John of Gaunt Feasting with the King of Portugal. 1386.

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