

Conductor's Comments
Wednesday, February 6, 2019

Definitions:

1. harpier: a demon spirit
2. hedgepig: a young hedgehog
3. Toad, that under cold stone, Days and nights has thirty-one, Swelter'd venom sleeping got, Boil thou first i' the charmed pot. (4.1.6-9)
i.e., after thirty-one days of sweating poison under the cold stone, the toad is ready to be put into the pot.
4. Fillet of a fenny snake: It can mean "fenny snake" which is a snake from the fens of England, or some people debate that it isn't actually a snake, but is a type of fruit called arum, and it is sometimes called "snake's meat".
5. In the cauldron boil and bake: throw it into the witches' stew.
6. Eye of newt: While it seems obvious the spell is full of animal parts, in fact, those who practice herbalism -- who, in Shakespeare's time, would have been called witches -- often wrote their "spells" or recipes in what could be called coded language. For example, "Adder's Tongue" is an old name for the plant dogstooth violet. And "Eye of Newt" is, depending upon which herbalist you consult, a daylily or mustard seed.
7. Blindworm's sting: A small but deadly snake with tiny eyes
8. Maw and gulf of salt-sea shark: the mouth (maw) and throat (gulf) of a shark glutted with prey (ravin'd) that the witches specifically require.
9. Root of hemlock: This is one of the most famous poisonous plants in history — it's the flora responsible for killing Socrates. All parts of the plant contain the relatively simple alkaloid coniine which causes stomach pains, vomiting and progressive paralysis of the central nervous system.
10. Liver of blaspheming Jew: One of William Shakespeare's latest and greatest plays, *Macbeth*, contains an unmistakably anti-Semitic reference that serves to reinforce contemporary gruesome witchy stereotypes. Specifically, in preparation for a visit by Macbeth, the three witches, while stirring their cauldron for “a charm of powerful trouble” (Shakespeare 121; 4.1.18), chant their incantations and enumerate their potion's ingredients, which include “Liver of blaspheming Jew” (Shakespeare 121; 4.1.26). In and of itself, this statement unambiguously disparages Jews as being blasphemous, arguably the worst profanity that one could possibly levy upon another human being during that era. In so doing, Shakespeare mirrors contemporary anti-Semitic attitudes. By swearing against a Jew, Shakespeare's writing evokes a bigoted, snarky tone that is highly suggestive of the ubiquitous prejudice against Jews that erupted during the Inquisition and Protestant Reformation eras.
11. Gall of goat: 200 gall-bladders of goat were studied for histology and histochemistry. The lining epithelium is tall columnar with striated border. The glands are mucous and serous, and the secretion is a polysaccharide-protein complex.

12. Slips of yew: The yew tree was planted frequently in graveyards and the wood is poisonous; thus, it has a twofold association with death.
13. Nose of Turk and Tartar's lips: Tartary was a word used by Europeans from the Middle Ages until the 20th century to describe an area of northern and central Asia which was inhabited mostly by Turkic, Mongol peoples, and also by some Cossacks of Russia. People from the Mongol Empire were referred to as "Tartars" or "Tatars."
14. Finger of birth-strangled babe: birth-strangled i.e., killed right after birth and before baptism, thus making the baby damned like the unbaptized Turk, Tartar and Jew. This was a common prejudicial belief in the Shakespearean era.
15. Finger of birth-strangled babe, Ditch-delivered by a drab: means that they somehow got hold of a finger from the body of a baby who was born in a ditch to an impoverished unwed mother who was probably a prostitute. Rather than care for the child, the mother strangled it at birth. So, the witches didn't kill the child; they just scavenged its corpse.
16. Gruel thick and slab: usually thin, "loblolly" is thick gruel, usually oat or corn meal.
17. Tiger's chaudron: tiger's entrails
18. Jaakko Mäntyjärvi: As a composer, Jaakko Mäntyjärvi describes himself as an eclectic traditionalist: eclectic in that he adopts influences from a number of styles and periods, fusing them into his own idiom; traditionalist in that his musical language is based on a traditional approach and uses the resources of modern music only sparingly. Because he is himself active in making music, his music is very practically oriented; he is a choral singer, and thus most of his works are for choir.

Mäntyjärvi has been active as an amateur and semi-professional musician, mainly as a choral singer with a number of Finnish choirs, including the Savonlinna Opera Festival Choir, the professional Sibelius Academy Vocal Ensemble and the Tapiola Chamber Choir. His major choral works include *Four Shakespeare Songs* (1984). His major commissions include commissions from Chanticleer (2001) and the King's Singers (2002).
19. William Shakespeare: (bapt. 26 April 1564 – 23 April 1616) was an English poet, playwright and actor, widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's greatest dramatist. He is often called England's national poet and the "Bard of Avon". His extant works, including collaborations, consist of approximately 39 plays, 154 sonnets, two long narrative poems, and a few other verses, some of uncertain authorship. His plays have been translated into every major living language and are performed more often than those of any other playwright.
20. St. George Chamber Singers: dedicated choral artists, committed to excellence in vocal chamber music. Members are held to high standards regarding attendance, individual preparation for weekly rehearsals and performance of challenging repertoire.