IMMORTAL LONGINGS: TOWARDS A POETICS OF PRESERVATION ON THE EARLY MODERN STAGE

Jennifer Park

A dissertation submitted to the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of English and Comparative Literature.

Chapel Hill
2017

Approved by:

Mary Floyd-Wilson

David J. Baker

Reid Barbour

Megan Matchinske

Jessica Wolfe

ABSTRACT

Jennifer Park: Immortal Longings: Towards a Poetics of Preservation on the Early Modern Stage
(Under the direction of Mary Floyd-Wilson)

"Continually we bear about us," John Webster asserts through Bosola, "A rotten and dead body." In a late fifteenth-century copy of the popular medieval pharmacopia, the *Livre des simples médecines*, the entry for *momie*—or mummy, a corpse drug often in the form of a powder made from embalmed bodies—is illustrated by "an image of an open tomb displaying its grisly contents: a blackened skeletal corpse with its abdomen sliced open, its head thrust back and the hands coyly covering the genitals."[1] Ideas of decay terrified the early moderns, but preservation was no less troubling. Caught up in the powder of embalmed bodies and the search for the philosopher's stone were worries over the inevitable decline of all physical matter. My dissertation, theoretically and physiologically attuned to such displays, locates some of the richest metaphorical manifestations of immortality and/or corruption on stage, in performance.

Drawing on Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*, as well as advancements in medicine and natural philosophy in the seventeenth century, "Immortal Longings" examines how early modern dramatic works conceptualize material experiments in preservation: sugar melted in Cleopatra's (dis)candying, mummy evaluated in the Duchess of Malfi's circulation, milk curdled in Lady Macbeth's "unsex"-ing, and alchemical solvents recreated from the alchemist's

[1] Michael Camille, "The corpse in the garden: mumia in medieval herbal illustrations," *Micrologus* 7 (1999), 298.

menstrues. Theatre is especially resonant because it enables this recursive flexibility: it is a "laboratory" space that provides the chance to see matter revitalized, transformation enacted, and stasis secured. By connecting vitality in the material with the ephemerality of performance, performative preservation provides early moderns with a fertile site for experimenting with change and flexibility in permanence. "Immortal Longings" seeks to intervene in Renaissance debates over the viability and righteousness of extending human life; it asks us to look for the first time at the poetic interplay between preservation and alteration, permanence and vitality, drawing inferences between and across categories and opening up the possibility that constructs of life and time may very much be open to human intervention, conceivably in the Renaissance and beyond.

For my family

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This preservative project was only possible by way of the extraordinary individuals in my life that preserved and revitalized my *corpus mens spiritus*. I am, foremost, grateful to Mary Floyd-Wilson, David J. Baker, Reid Barbour, Megan Matchinske, and Jessica Wolfe: I could not have dreamt up a more outstanding and perfect committee and group of mentors. Mary's unwavering encouragement, generous feedback, and kind support are evidence of how invaluable terrific advising and mentorship are to the fruition of a promising research project. Reid, Jess, Megan, and David continue to blow me away with their unfaltering enthusiasm for my work and my potential as a scholar, and I am grateful for their warm generosity and provocative insight every step of the way. My project owes everything to these amazing scholars and mentors. Their belief in me as a scholar and an educator has been instrumental in the formation of my belief in myself.

So, too, my time in the program has been enriched by my brilliant and kind friends and colleagues in the MEMS and early modern community, who helped to ground me when I first began and beyond. For this, I extend special thanks to Nathan Stogdill, Kit Curtin, and Robert Erle Barham for their friendship and guidance throughout the formative years of my time in the program; to Rebecca Shores and Elena Casey for their invaluable friendship and support during times both difficult and celebratory, whom I am so happy to have met during my time at UNC. I am indebted, also, to the wonderful friendship and mentorship of Gitanjali Shahani who has

introduced me to the brilliance and kindness of my fellow early modernists as I enter into the field professionally. Tommy Nixon deserves my warmest gratitude for his amazing support of and help with my research; he is a paradigm for the remarkably generous research librarians that make intensive, scholarly research in the humanities possible at all.

My project was made possible by the generous funding of dissertation funding, research fellowships, travel grants, and grants-in-aid from the Program in Medieval and Early Modern Studies at UNC Chapel Hill, the UNC Graduate School, and the Folger Shakespeare Library which enabled me to dedicate time to research and writing and to travel to archives in Washington, D.C., Providence, New Haven, London, Oxford, Glasgow, and Edinburgh. I am grateful to the staff at UNC's Wilson Library, the Folger, Beinecke, John Carter Brown, British, Bodleian, and Wellcome Libraries for their help, as well as at the National Library of Scotland and the special collections at the University of Glasgow and the University of St. Andrews.

This dissertation is dedicated to my family: to my parents, Chung and Anthony, who have invested and continue to invest everything to ensure that their children will have the remarkable opportunities for education that they believed in when they first immigrated to the United States; to my sisters, Caroline and Cynthia, whom I love dearly and who have kept me going all these years with our gnoming and nomming.

This project has witnessed the traumas of becoming unpreserved, and the triumph of finding new life. I owe a debt of gratitude to Emily and Charleen for all of their support and guidance. Above all, I am and always will be deeply grateful to Care and to Dan for their daily support and the daily renewal of love, life, and laughter that has lifted me up in these final years.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: MATERIALS OF PERMANENCE AND PRESERVATIVE PERFORMANCE

I begin with stones and corpses, the nonliving and the dead, as divergent models for preservation. By pitting two dramatic episodes against each other, I introduce the context and the stakes for my exploration of the poetics of preservation on the early modern stage. The first is Shakespeare's famous statue scene from *The Winter's Tale*, in which the "statue" of Hermione stirs and comes to life; the second is the simultaneous staging of the corpse and the ghost of the Lady in Thomas Middleton's *The Lady's Tragedy*, each in their own right momentous.[1] If we take the definition of preservation to mean, primarily, "The action of preserving from damage, decay, or destruction; the fact of being preserved,"[2] these two performative moments depict attempts to embody that state.

In the first, the statue of Hermione represents the embodiment of a lasting permanence that has withstood, and is seen on the other side of, the gap of Time that Shakespeare literalizes on stage. Indeed the very inclusion of the character of Time, an anomaly among Shakespeare's dramatic works, is a testament to the miracle of preservation we are intended to witness by the play's end. Initially, the statue of Hermione, as a seemingly fixed work of art—Hermione

---

[1] *The Lady's Tragedy*, attributed to Thomas Middleton, is also known as *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*. *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, ed. Anne Lancashire (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978). William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, ed. Mario DiGangi (Boston; New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008).

[2] "preservation, n." OED Online. Oxford University Press, September 2016. Web. 12 November 2016.

preserved in stone—appears to serve as a fixed "emblem" of the play's "tragic events."[3] But of course Hermione's statue is not "static";[4] rather, it stirs into life. The transformation that occurs would seem the inverse of preservation, to see Hermione preserved in a seeming immutable form, then restored to life. The episode, drawing from the tradition of metamorphic literature from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, demonstrates what Leonard Barkan calls the "flux between stoniness and the life that may emerge from or dissolve into stone."[5] At the heart of the matter is the "*animae*" with which living statues are imbued, which are "at once their livingness (i.e., their breath) and their souls."[6] The miracle of Hermione's preservation, then, is not only the preservation of her form, but that of her life.

In the example of Middleton's Lady, the Lady inhabits, remarkably, the form of her corpse, on stage, *as well as* the form of her ghost, also on stage. Middleton bifurcates the Lady beyond her death into her body and her spirit, respectively her material and her spiritual remains. The paradox of the lifeless body and the bodiless soul both simultaneously on stage demonstrates the contentions about the preservation of the Lady's existence beyond her mortality. Indeed the primary intention of the Lady's ghost in appearing is to "[lay] claim to…her own dead body"—to contest the preservation of her corpse so as to "stop the Tyrant from using her corpse as his

---

[3] James Knapp, *Image Ethics in Shakespeare and Spenser* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 274.

[4] Knapp, *Image Ethics*, 274.

[5] Leonard Barkan, "'Living Sculptures': Ovid, Michelangelo, and the *Winter's Tale*," *English Literary History* 48.4 (1981): 639-667, 643.

[6] Barkan, "'Living Sculptures,'" 642. I am further interested in the dialogue between this idea of *anima* and what Jessica Wolfe outlines about "*Enargia*" and its "key qualities of 'motion' and 'life'" to "approximat[e] the marvelous lifelikeness of machinery." See Jessica Wolfe, *Humanism, Machinery, and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 175.

plaything and to ensure its return to its grave."[7] That the Lady persists in two forms troubles the dynamics of the preservation of the self, between bodily matter and (immaterial?) vitality.

The examples of Hermione and the Lady illustrate the performative paradox of preservation on the early modern stage. The statue/person of Hermione herself presents a living contradiction in her staging: she is on the one hand a statue, on the other, the same Hermione, now aged. Either way, she has been preserved, but to two completely differing ends. That distinction rests in the quality of the living—the existence of life, of vitality, which marks that crucial difference in the nature of Hermione's preservation—in what it means to "preserve" Hermione. Similarly, the duality of the Lady's staging—as preserved and cosmeticized corpse and as embodied ghost—speaks to the tenuousness of preservation as a fixed state. These two examples thus articulate the problem of preservation for the early modern stage. In the cathartic moment in *The Winter's Tale*, of presumed stone becoming flesh, what we have is a moment that can definitively be called performance, or theatre; the stirring statue that marks the boundary of the statue/human divide in Hermione, a moment of ontological tension made possible by a staged act(ion), a performed poetic—the performance of preservation on the early modern stage.

How were preservative problematics experimented with on stage? And how did these preservative problems speak to dramatists' anxieties about the permanence of their work and their craft? My dissertation, *Immortal Longings*, examines how early modern dramatists experimented with a new poetics of preservation on the early modern stage, accounting not only for the texts, but, additionally, the bodies and matter that constituted dramatic performance. I argue that by considering the literal embodiment of preservative metaphors and the ephemerality

---

[7] Sarah E. Johnson, *Staging Women and the Soul-Body Dynamic in Early Modern England* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 106.

of a time-bound medium, dramatists revitalized ancient theories of materiality to rework ideas of permanence and immortality for the stage. In dialogue with contemporary concerns in science and medicine, the ensuing new models of lastingness, at once enhanced and complexified by theatrical production and re-production, enabled early modern dramatists to create in their dramatic work self-reflexive studies of their own preservation.

"Eternal Lines": Poetry and Immortality

I move from persons affixed in statues to verse affixed in stone. For early modern Christian writers, poetry offered a kind of access to immortality. George Herbert maps his verse onto monuments, constructing his *Temple* onto the forming structure of the architecture of the church. Quite literally, in "Church Monuments," Herbert refers to the materials of permanence that make up lasting monuments, like "Jeat, and Marble put for signes" (l. 12). Gerald Hammond notes that Herbert's church consists of "pieces of wood, stone, and glass" which make up "a building of immense strength."[8] The permanence of the monument is encompassed in the "strength…derived from resistance of materials."[9] David Weil Baker refers to the "putative ability of monuments to serve as enduring records of the achievements of individuals"; this idea was one that Ben Jonson subscribed to, "the claim to have built an enduring monument" as "a traditional topos of poetry."[10] These tropes of poetry as monument were echoed by various classical authors; Ovid, in his *Metamorphoses* claims he has "built a monument that neither the

---

[8] Gerald Hammond, *Fleeting Things: English Poets and Poems, 1616-1660* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 265.

[9] Hammond, *Fleeting Things*, 265.

[10] David Weil Baker, "'Master of the Monuments': Memory and Erasure in Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*," *ELR* 31.2 (2001): 266-287, 267-268.

wrath of Jove, nor fire nor iron nor devouring age will be able to destroy" as does Horace who describes having built a "monument more enduring than bronze" in the third book of his *Odes*.[11]

Herbert's "The Altar" epitomizes the trope of verse as monument, printed onto the image of an engraved altar. The text is framed by stone columns, and this architectural framing of the poem brings to mind inscriptions written in stone—the permanence of writing epitomized. To literalize the analogy further, the text itself forms the shape of an altar. The written words, therefore, construct their own monument. Juxtaposing the text—itself a veritable monument—against an engraved image of a monument—upon which the text is imprinted—demonstrates how the written verse evokes both poetry imagined as monument and monument reconfigured as writing surface.

But in sonnet 17, Shakespeare expresses that his verse "is but a tomb / Which hides your life and shows not half your parts" (ll. 3-4). The frustration with verse is expanded into the harder, "permanent" materials of presumed lastingness that, too, were prone to decay over time, if slower. In fact, monumentalism falls short of its promise of permanence. Thus, the "immortal longings" of poetry must exceed monumentalism. "Not marble, nor the gilded monuments / Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme," Shakespeare claims, "But you shall shine more bright in these contents / Than unswept stone besmear'd with sluttish time" (ll. 1-4). Shakespeare continues to bemoans the fallibility of these stone materials in sonnet 65, "Since brass, nor stone, nor earth," nor yet "boundless sea, / But sad mortality o'er-sways their power" (ll. 1-2). Significantly, for all their permanence, stone is not immune to "sad mortality," and thus Shakespeare expresses the hopelessness "When rocks impregnable are not so stout, / Nor gates

[11] Baker, David W., "'Master of the Monuments,'" 268. ('Iamque opus exegi, quod nec Iovis ira, nec ignis / Nec poterit ferrum nec edax abolere vetustas') ('exegi monumentum aere perennius')

of steel so strong, but Time decays" (ll.7-8). In such a world, Shakespeare finds hope "That in black ink my love may still shine bright" (l. 14).

If black ink, print, and writing are where Shakespeare finds promise of longevity beyond the materials of permanence that, it turns out, are "not so stout," it is perhaps fitting that he connects print to procreation. Unlike "those whom Nature hath not *made for store* [emphasis mine]," whom Shakespeare condemns to "barrenly perish" (ll. 1-2), the object of his sonnet 16 is he "whom she [Nature] best endow'd," and in so doing "She carved thee for her seal, and meant thereby / Thou shouldst print more, not let that copy die" (ll. 9-14). But with copies, and print, and indeed writing, of his verse, Shakespeare cannot escape the threat of the ephemerality of matter. Thus, it is in the verse and dramatic materiality of *Hamlet* that Shakespeare problematizes the legacy of text by way of the materials upon which text is affixed. It is in Hamlet's metaphor of the table-book, and its literal appearance on stage, that Shakespeare juxtaposes permanence and ephemerality in the process of writing, challenging the very notion of permanence in writing. The table-book provides a crucial image of memory:

> Remember thee?
> Yea, from the table of my memory
> I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
> All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past
> That youth and observation copied there,
> And thy commandment all alone shall live
> Within the book and volume of my brain,
> Unmixed with baser matter. (1.5.98-105)

Hamlet's reference to the table book serves as an analogy for memory that speaks to anxieties about permanence. The early modern table-book was a type of erasable notebook, important for the "Renaissance art of memory," but paradoxically serving as an "antithetical model of the

mind: a model of the most unreliable of traces and of human forgetfulness."[12] The table-book allows for the textual act of erasing and re-writing, the seeming antithesis, therefore, of the permanence of writing set in stone. The table-book, or tablet, therefore "implies forgetfulness as much as remembrance,"[13] and therefore models the tenuous line between that which is preserved and that which is lost. Indeed the tablet encompasses a range of meanings that complicate its relationship to permanence and preservation. According to one definition, the tablet is a "smooth stiff sheet for writing on…originally made of clay or wax-covered wood, later of ivory," but it is alternately a "small, flat, and comparatively thin piece of stone, metal, wood, ivory, or other *hard material* [emphasis mine, durability], artificially shaped for some purpose," more specifically a "small slab, usually of stone or metal, bearing or intended to bear an inscription or carving; *esp.* one affixed to a wall as a memorial" (*OED*). Here we see that the tablet had its associations with memorializing and permanence in writing, but also of erasure and ephemerality and the imperfections of writing as a mode of preservation.

I discuss the table-book and the materiality of writing not to focus on the materials of writing themselves, although that they continue to be of significant import to early modern studies and the history of the book, but rather to emphasize how the anxieties surrounding the fleetingness of mortality and the desire to overcome that mortality—the desire to preserve—was embedded in the inevitable decline of all physical matter. Verse, though in writing prone to the same material anxieties, at best offered an ideal towards which to aspire. In his oft-quoted sonnet 18, Shakespeare finds his model in the "eternal lines" of verse, to contrast against the

---

[12] Peter Stallybrass, Roger Chartier, John Franklin Mowery, and Heather Wolfe, "Hamlet's Tables and the Technologies of Writing in Renaissance England," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 55.4 (2004): 379-419, 412.

[13] Stallybrass, et al., "Hamlet's Tables," 414.

fleetingness of, say, “a summer’s day” (l. 1). “Thy eternal summer shall not fade,” he insists, “when in eternal lines to time thou growest: / So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, / So long lives this and this gives life to thee” (ll. 9, 12-14). Shakespeare gestures to this ideal in the “eternal lines” that preserve the auditor’s “eternal summer”: “So long lives this”—his poem —“this gives life to thee.” But the final couplet additionally belies the same anxieties about mortality that temper the immortal ideal. The last two lines link the “immortality” of Shakespeare’s to human mortality: “*So long as men can breathe or eyes can see*,” he qualifies, “So long lives this and this gives life to thee.”

If even Shakespeare’s immortal ideal for verse, “eternal lines,” are subject to the time-bound prison of human mortality, it would seem an impossibility to preserve “eternal lines” in the time-bound medium of dramatic work. This is where I aim to intervene. I argue that dramatic work enabled a space for early modern dramatists to experiment further with models of preservation given the constraints of materiality, mortality, and ephemerality that dramatic performance and production provided. Or perhaps dramatic work forced dramatists to look elsewhere for models of preservation that could overcome those constraints.

Poets, of course, were already experimenting with new models of preservative metaphors to contemplate the various permutations of what it meant to preserve or to continue. Particularly significant for my study are the ways in which these models of preservation were models predicated on organic, or living, matter. In Herbert’s “The Flower,” thus, in contrast to his other poems framed by architecture and structure, looks to the life of plants as a metaphor for renewed continuation, one that overturns the decay of time. “Who would have thought my shrivel’d heart / Could have recover’d greennesse?” he marvels,

It was gone
Quite under ground; as flowers depart
To see their mother-root, when they have blown;
Where they together
All the hard weather,
Dead to the world, keep house unknown. (ll. 8-14)

In Herbert's floral metaphor, it is the marvel of "recover'd greennesse" out of seeming deadness that provides a model of spiritual hope and preservation. This preservative episode is one of renewal, that not simply defies mortality but incorporates its inevitability into a renewing and preservative cycle: "in age I bud again," Herbert expresses, "After so many deaths I live and write" (ll. 36-37). The cycle of renewal Herbert uses as metaphor is one that requires, rather than is inhibited by, life.

This forms the basis for tracing the vitality I argue is central to the preservative models I examine in dramatic work. If a solution to mortality is reproduction, then, as in what have been called Shakespeare's procreation sonnets,

> From fairest creatures we desire increase
> That thereby beauty's rose might never die,
> But as the riper should by time decease,
> His tender heir might bear his memory. (Sonnet 1, ll. 1-4).

The requirement for "never dying" is procreation, the only "solution" to mortality: "So thou… / Unlook'd on diest, unless thou get a son" (Sonnet 7, ll. 13-14). To this end, then, dramatists' exploration of the renewal of vitality as preservative ideal uses the performative and productive renewal of theatre. Through the mortal but renewable bodies of performance and re-production, verse, perhaps, can find "a mightier way" to "Make war upon this bloody tyrant, Time… / And fortify yourself in your decay / With means more blessed than *my barren rhyme*" [emphasis mine] (Sonnet 16, ll. 1-4). Wendy Wall argues that "poetic immortalization" might have been

"imagined as distillation in early modern terms," and that distillation "seems a metaphor for reproduction."[14] However, distillation as a process of heating and cooling aims "to vaporize and concentrate the properties of a given entity."[15] Perhaps rightly, then, distillation preserves the vital essence of a particular living thing. But the process of distillation involves stripping away the materiality of the thing itself, which—though it lends itself well to metaphors of immortality, removed from the time-bound decay of physical matter—is counter to the process of reproduction which, as we will see, requires matter rather than removes it.

Immortal Longings in Embodiment

"I have / Immortal Longings in me," exclaims Cleopatra as she nears the moment of her death in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. The poetics of preservation on the early modern stage, while sharing the "immortal longings" of verse, diverges from verse by experimenting with immortal possibilities beyond the text. Drama, theater, and performance are inherently time-bound media, and thus the more static, preservative models for poetry's "eternal lines" must work differently when it comes to performance.

Performing plays meant dealing with bodies, time, and change. Richard Schechner began to "craft a definition of theatre" in 1965, according to which theatre was a "tangle between permanence (drama) and ephemerality (performance)," and in which the ephemerality was privileged "in the claim that theatre can have 'no originals.'"[16] If the early moderns understood poetry to have a life of its own, and to serve as monuments of memory long after poets have died

---

[14] Wendy Wall, "Distillation: Transformations in and out of the Kitchen," in *Renaissance Food from Rabelais to Shakespeare: Culinary Readings and Culinary Histories* (Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 89-104, 90.

[15] Wall, "Distillation," 90.

[16] Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2011), 94.

and their bodies decomposed—as evidenced in for example Shakespeare's sonnets and many other poems—the preservative ends of theatre, or theatre's claim to immortality, was all the more complex given its inherent ephemerality. A medium thus dependent upon bodies would embody the same anxieties that concerned bodies: mortality, change, organic growth and decay, death. This dissertation, while engaging with the material insofar as matter embodies the time-bound, focuses not merely on the material itself, but on how matter demonstrates change: growth, sustenance, generation, decay, restoration.

Furthermore, I look at how matter and metaphor enabled early modern dramatists to play with the implications of material that was simultaneously being experimented with in other forums, in science and medicine. Examined in this way, matter and text in my project are not observed as frozen "in time," nor as having time frozen within them, but rather functions of temporality in themselves. I am especially interested in living (and dead) organic matter and the sustenance of vitality in living bodies for these purposes. It is thus that the scientific and medical examination of matter contributed to larger questions of theatre's preservation. Theatre thus becomes a laboratory, in which, as Joseph Roach expresses, "To perform…means to bring forth, to make manifest, and to transmit…also…, though often more secretly, to reinvent."[17] In early modern theatre, any idea of performance as bringing forth, which resonates with birth, making manifest, transmitting, and reinventing would derive from early modern ideas about the porous nature of bodies, which were constantly in flux. The challenge that bodies inherently posed to the idea of preservation was the question of how to measure lastingness in pliable, and alterable, living matter.

---

[17] Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), xi.

It is all the more appropriate, then, that early modern playwrights metaphorized theatre through the trope of plays as feasts, given that the major requirement for the sustained vitality of bodies was nourishment and diet. Plays were conceptualized as consumable experiences, as in Thomas Carew's verse "to the Reader of Mr. Davenant's play":

> It hath been said of old, that plays are feasts,
> Poets the cooks, and the spectators guests;
> The actors, waiters: from this simile,
> Some have deriv'd an unsafe liberty
> To use their judgments as their tastes, which chuse,
> Without controul, this dish, and that refuse.

By making the comparison—plays to feasts, poets to cooks—Carew here draws the parallel between dramatic literature and cooking/receipt culture. Both are characterized (even defined) by the combination of a constant and a variable: a textual component that theoretically stays constant (though in practice, of course, this is far from the case), and the real-time performance or action that must necessarily be variable because impossible to reproduce perfectly. Chris Meads examines the poet-as-cook analogy in early modern prologues, and brings attention to the mouth as one part that seems to connect the otherwise disparate parts of the metaphor. The mouth thus "eats" and "talks" and is "also that which speaks the lines created by the writer"; additionally, the mouth "tastes," and "the metaphor of taste, as in both delight for the palate and the critical judgement of an audience" recurs in seventeenth century prologues to plays.[18] Playwrights were responsible for "feeding" their audiences, and audiences came to performances to feast upon them, an interpretation of the lasting impact of dramatic work upon its viewers.

---

[18] Chris Meads, "Narrative and Dramatic Sauces: Reflections upon Creativity, Cookery, and Culinary Metaphor in Some Early Seventeenth-Century Dramatic Prologues," in *Renaissance Food from Rabelais to Shakespeare: Culinary Readings and Culinary Histories*, ed. Joan Fitzpatrick (Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 145-166, 145.

The culinary metaphor of plays as feasts in the early modern period corresponds to the evolving definition of "to preserve" in the English language. Though the idea of preservation began as a protection *from*, the influx of culinary items, knowledge, and receipts in the sixteenth century contributed to expanding preservation to the culinary—to food preservation. Crucially, food preservation signified the extension of shelf-life, the prolonging of vitality or lastingness in organic items particularly prone to ephemerality or decay, which extended to medicine (food, too, was medicine) and its promises to extend the vitality of the human body. By developing the meaning of preservation from protection, say, of life, to *extension* of life, the culinary or gastronomic also enfolded into preservative anxieties the concerns about the endpoint of that extension. After all, food and flesh still had a shelf-life.

To explore how early modern dramatists engaged with the period's preservative concerns, I juxtapose literary tropes of permanence with scientific/medical models of vitality and the "wisdom of the ancients." If the early moderns were seeking ways to preserve themselves, they also sought knowledge about preservation and permanence from ancient or premodern sources, seeing their own period as a time that has lost that knowledge. De Villanova Arnaldus expresses, for example, that

> I finde that men in time past were of longer life, and of more prosperous health, then they are now a dayes. Which thing as it greeued me, so in manner it forced me, to seeke the cause of this sodaine and strange alteration. For why? it is written, that *Adam* liued 930. yeare. The *Sibils* of *Cumane* liued 300. yeares: And *Galen* that famous doctour, a 140. yeares, but now a daies, alas, if a man aproch to 40. or 60. yeares men repute him happy & fortunat. But yet how many com therto?[19]

[19] de Villanova Arnaldus, *Regimen sanitatis Salerni. This Booke teaching all people to gouerne them in health, is translated out of the Latine tongue into English, by Thomas Paynell* (London, 1597), A3r.

The desire for some form of immortality stemmed both from a desire for progress in scientific and medical knowledge to extend the bounds of natural mortality as well as from nostalgia for a Golden Age that was past but wherein humans had, without that progress, a more extensive or expansive grasp of what was possible in the realm of attaining immortality. Physicians like Sir Thomas Browne, for example, would turn to experiments in medicine and natural philosophy which, according to Reid Barbour, could "confirm the mysteries of resurrection and immortality," forms of "simple experimentation—with mercury, alchemy, and silkworms."[20]

Given these concerns, I turn additionally to the term ephemera which, according to the *OED*, refers to "An insect that (in its imago or winged form) lives only for a day," which later translates to "one who or something which has a transitory existence." But even earlier, "ephemera" was used pathologically to refer to a fever, "Lasting only for a day," or "An ephemeral fever," which I argue can be placed in rich dialogue with the culinary and gastronomic definitions of preservation through the trope of plays as feasts.[21] The early notion in our English language history that an ephemera meant a fever has fascinating implications for the ways plays and masques were perceived—masques in particular were compared to "but a dream" or a vision. Dreams and visions in the early modern period were often a function of, or associated with, a kind of alternate mental state often produced by something like a fever—often dangerous, as demonstrated by Macbeth's own "heat-oppressed brain." By association, if plays and masques could be seen as offshoots of the effects of a fever, as by-products of *ephemera*, literally, they represent the danger of theatre for audiences. That threat on the audience, that an audience is

---

[20] Reid Barbour, *Sir Thomas Browne: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 251.

[21] "ephemera, n.2." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, September 2016. Web. 12 November 2016.

ultimately changed because of the ephemera they were witness to, in itself suggests a kind of lastingness, a kind of permanence. The causes and effects of dreams and visions were often, in the early modern imagination, bodily, physiological. So too, performance itself required bodies, and it was the necessity of bodily involvement that led to the danger of bodily conversion or transformation. And so, in a sense, the poetics of early modern theatre called upon the physiological and the material for its existence and its perpetuation, primarily through the growing, changing body and its renewal.

Thus the poetics of early modern theatre reveal a process of not only consumption and recreation, but of lastingness and immortality through re-production, channeled through these new models of vitality *in* preservation and what it meant in the early modern period. In other words, the "immortal longings" early modern playwrights mediated required a model of preservation that encompassed both vitality and everlastingness. To examine early modern anxieties about bodies and mortality, preservation and alteration, decay and reproduction in drama, I chose to focus primarily on dramatic work written during the time of transition from Elizabeth I, the virgin queen, to James I/VI, the Scottish king in the early seventeenth century. During this period, dramatic work flourished in unprecedented ways. This flourishing additionally coincided with advancements in science and medicine and knowledge about the human body—in particular, fields related to women's health, women's knowledge, and women's bodies—that were in dialogue with issues of religious contention and transition(s), anxieties about the crown, and reproductive legacies that, I argue, are all informed by the gendered and racial ramifications of this transition. During a period thus fraught with preservative anxieties, the early modern stage, therefore, offered a rich if troubling space to explore a generative poetics

of preservation, one that accounted for the ephemeral and renewable nature of performance, derived from models of nourishment, sustenance, and reproduction, to establish preservation itself as an organic and dynamic process that required change as it preserved.

Performative Preservation and Preservative Performance: Four Chapters

I return, thus, to the statuesque/stirring Hermione placed alongside Middleton's dead/immaterial Lady, both of whom embody a transitional moment. To what effect can we consider—and compare—what these two preservative and performative figures put to question? In the chapters that follow, I explore the goals of performative preservation and preservative performance through their various permutations to help articulate how we might approach early modern drama as both cause and effect of the culture's larger investment in preservation. The following chapters articulate how dramatic works of the period integrate concerns about the sustenance of the body, or of living matter, with concerns about the generation of new or renewed matter, much in the way they integrate ancient knowledge with the new. In terms of structure, I have ordered the chapters to align loosely with the generative progression of the human life cycle, beginning to some extent outside of the body with the act of eating and ending to some extent within the body through the process of procreating, although these categories hardly, if ever, remain distinct. Thus, in the most reductive terms, I begin in chapter one with preserved food, moving to the ingestion thereof in chapter two, to the physiological and reproductive ramifications of ingestion in chapter three, and cycling back to the production of new life in chapter four; in simplest terms, I outline the preservative problem of each chapter below:

CHAPTER 1—CULINARY/COSMETIC PRESERVATION

CHAPTER 2—CANNIBALISTIC/CIRCULATORY PRESERVATION

CHAPTER 3—PHYSIOLOGICAL/PSYCHOSOMATIC PRESERVATION

CHAPTER 4—REPRODUCTIVE/PARTHENOGENETIC PRESERVATION

Within each chapter, additionally, the stages in the cycle of eating and procreating, and their premodern origins, are palimpsested against a geographically determined organizing principle, whereby from chapter to chapter I move geographically from global to local, from the vantage point of early modern English lived experience—from Egypt, to Italy and the continent, to Scotland, to local London—to examine the corresponding anxieties about preservation, alteration, and alterity that arise. The common denominator across all chapters is the female body, and in each chapter I set out to explore how the woman's body, staged in performance, articulates, or further complicates, an anxiety about preservation in dialogue with the chapter's corresponding premodern theories and macrocosmic/microcosmic concern. In particular, I want to examine the female body as a site where early modern literary and medical concerns about vitality, preservation, alterity, geography, consumption, legacy, and immortality converge—a site of documentary evidence that needs to be examined in its construction from a myriad of texts and in its resistance to, or gesture beyond, the written.[22]

Taking Shakespeare's unique use of the term "discandying" as a starting point, I examine in chapter one, "Discandying Cleopatra: Preserving Cleopatra's Infinite Variety in *Antony and Cleopatra,*" Shakespeare's preoccupation with food preservation in the play, which extends and

[22] My interest in the female body as a site of documentary evidence for legacy-making responds to the imperative Megan Matchinske calls for in thinking about the ways in which "written history is akin to inheritance," and how while early modern women were removed from matters of inheritance, yet "those aspects of historical transfer that seemed most removed from female involvement (inheritance but also succession) depended on female bodies and matrilines for their legitimacy." Megan Matchinske, *Women Writing History in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 2.

complicates a tradition interested in preservation more broadly construed, a tradition represented and embodied by the figure of Cleopatra as a medical, gynaecological, and alchemical authority. Believed into the early modern period to be the author of an apparent *Book of Cleopatra*, Cleopatra as a figure comes to be intimately associated with preservation and the promise of immortality. Shakespeare's investment in culinary preservation, a list that includes salting, brining, and candying, introduces the anxiety of becoming unpreserved, epitomized in the term "discandy," used most critically in a speech by Cleopatra about the dissolution of her memory. Shakespeare experiments with new models of materiality and physiology, developed out of culinary practices, not merely to construct Egyptian exoticism but rather to couch the exotic Egyptian queen in English domestic culture, creating an uneasy tension between the domestic and the exotic within the figure of the foreign woman. Drawing from both ancient tradition and contemporary domestic practices, Shakespeare additionally produces through Cleopatra a female figure of and for consumption: a veritable mummy to be consumed. Cleopatra demonstrates that far from being a process toward permanence, preservation is both dynamic and organic, requiring the potency of the "foreign" integrated with the domestic to rethink the nature of memory and identity and what it means to persevere in the face of discandying.

If Shakespeare's Cleopatra theorizes Egyptian mummy as a state of preservation, John Webster's description of the Duchess of Malfi as a "salvatory of green mummy" bespeaks the threat of mummy as pharmakon. I begin chapter two, "Lingering Vitality: Mummy as Pharmakon and Strategies of (Mis)Reading Preservation in John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*," with Bosola's comparison of the Duchess to a drug derived from embalmed corpses which were prized for the vitality they were believed to contain. I examine mummy as a "preservative"

substance—juxtaposing the lingering vitality it promised upon ingestion and the threat of its nomadic dispersal and circulation—alongside early modern debates about the "semi-animate" corpse in northern and southern Europe in relation to Webster's tragedy. If the semi-animate corpse exemplified early modern anxieties about what constituted life, mummy deepens the complexity of those anxieties as an ingestible substance that promised to transfer vitality to the consumer. Correspondingly, the Duchess's description as green mummy speaks to her status as a perceived preservative, capable of transferring her life-giving or life-restoring qualities to those who seek to consume her. Her fertile body becomes the point of contention for her brothers, who believe the Duchess to be of most value to them dead—and consumable—than alive and capable of producing new life. I examine the Duchess-as-mummy, whose aims to dictate the terms of her own circulation (and consumption) enable her to resist categorization precisely because she rests at the intersection of the living and the dead in circulation: the fertile woman and the life-giving corpse drug. By experimenting with life and vitality in and from human substances—the living body of the Duchess, the imagined drug from her corpse, the Duchess's breath and voice, her children as the products of her fertility—Webster works through fraught theories of early modern animation, with implications for the performative life of dramatic work and the bodies and voices that give it life.

In contrast to Webster's Duchess who represents the vitality retained in the semi-animate corpse, it is the abortive instability of the reproductive, feminized body in decay that forms the initial concern in chapter three, "Abortive Legacies: Curdled Milk in the Breast and Preserving the Body Politic in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*." By attending to the early modern perception of women's milk as white blood, or twice-concocted blood, I bring attention to the physiological

implications of imagining Lady Macbeth's milk as curdled, a process by which milk—and blood—clots and coagulates to form solids in liquids. Lady Macbeth's curdled, nonviable breastmilk and her role as Scottish lactating mother not only inform Shakespeare's preoccupation with purging in Macbeth, but additionally links the play's rhetoric of purgation to the contemporaneous anxiety surrounding James I's unification of England and Scotland—imagined as united blood purged of "unnatural stoppings and corruptions"—and the prophecy of the weird sisters as a corruption of the early modern metaphor of the divine "milk" of the Word of God. Shakespeare effectively constructs a system of knowledge-making predicated on the rejection or corruption of matter, nourishment, and selfhood during a significant and contentious moment in early modern British history when James I, the Scottish king, came to the English throne. The threat of curdled milk, of being clogged, and the physiological failures of digestion provide the link between the various interpretive permutations of "dis-seat"/"dis-eate"/"disease" that editors have puzzled over in one of Macbeth's final speeches. The curdled milk at the heart of the Macbeths' degeneration blurs the boundaries between supernatural occurrence and a physiologically-induced psychosis that links the metaphors of performance as feast and as vision or dream, implicating the audience in the Macbeths' clogged illnesses of body and mind and the longevity of their resulting psychosomatic effects.

I move from the threat of degeneration in *Macbeth* to the threat of the generative power of women's blood in chapter four, "Jonson's Menstrues: Reproductive Fluids, Alchemical Solvents, and Preservative Anxieties in Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*." In his *The Alchemist*, Jonson grapples with early modern anxieties about female reproductive potential in his alchemical use of "menstrues." While he satirizes alchemy's masculinist, parthenogenetic idea of

creation, nonetheless the play's alchemical barrenness belies Jonson's own anxieties about matter, form, and the preservation of his poetic legacy. Jonson draws on alchemists' use of feminine productivity and reproductivity, manifest most powerfully in women's menstrual blood, through the use of "menstrues," a term referring primarily to the female reproductive fluid but which in the sixteenth century began to be used to refer to neutralized alchemical solvents, stripped of their generative potential. By placing (alchemical) menstrues in vials and vessels, alchemists attempted to replicate the female womb artificially in order to generate or realize the various alchemical end products: the transmutation or maturing of metals into gold, the production of the elixir or the philosopher's stone, and the creation a living homunculus, or little man, perhaps the transmutative goal that most literally replicated human procreation. My argument in this chapter provides another angle to Jonson's anxieties about male poetic legacy and what scholars have termed "womb envy": not only is Jonson among those early modern male writers who thought of their poetic creation in terms of birth, but moreover, Jonson's idea of poetic birth takes into consideration the significance and implications of women's menstrual blood—what it could do, what it provided, and its fraught status during the early modern period as generative matter and, problematically, sometime seed. What results is Jonson's complication of an otherwise masculine, parthenogenetic idea of poetic (re)production, wherein he simultaneously appropriates and limits the generative qualities of menstrua to reconcile his theory of creative and performative generation with his anxiety about poetic preservation.

By connecting vitality in the material with the ephemerality of performance, *Immortal Longings* seeks to intervene in Renaissance debates over the viability and righteousness of extending human life; it asks us to look for the first time at the poetic interplay between

preservation and alteration, permanence and vitality, drawing inferences between and across categories and opening up the possibility that constructs of life and time may very much be open to human intervention.

CHAPTER 1: DISCANDYING CLEOPATRA: PRESERVING CLEOPATRA'S INFINITE VARIETY IN SHAKESPEARE'S *ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA*[1]

In one of the most enigmatic of her speeches, Shakespeare's Cleopatra invokes the "discandying of this pelleted storm" (3.13.67).[2] In the next act, Antony describes the hearts of his followers that "discandy" and "melt their sweets" on Caesar (4.12.22). The term "discandy" evokes a particularly visceral image of the reverse process of candying, a process involving the melting of sugar to form a hardened, "candied" shell. And yet the term that describes such a powerful, and accessible, image—discandying—is unique to Shakespeare, and unique to the play.[3] The question is, why might Shakespeare have used discandying only in *Antony and Cleopatra*? And why does it appear twice in a play about Egypt?

Recent postcolonial readings of *Antony and Cleopatra*'s depiction of Egypt have emphasized the "'Otherness' of Egypt."[4] Readings of otherness have tended to view the play as a

---

[1] This chapter previously appeared as an article in *Studies in Philology*. The original citation is as follows: Jennifer Park, "Discandying Cleopatra: Preserving Cleopatra's Infinite Variety in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*," *Studies in Philology* 113.3 (Summer 2016): 595-633.

[2] William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. David Bevington (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005). All subsequent quotations from *Antony and Cleopatra* are from this edition and will be cited within the text by act, scene, and line number.

[3] The most recent entry in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) lists in the definition that future uses of the term are "Freq. with allusion to Shakespeare's use." (*OED Online*, s.v. "discandy, v.," June 2014, Oxford University Press, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/53657?redirectedFrom=discandy [accessed July 18, 2014]).

[4] Mary Thomas Crane, "Roman World, Egyptian Earth: Cognitive Difference and Empire in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*," *Comparative Drama* 43.1 (2009): 1-17; 1. See also Ania Loomba, "The Theatre and the Space of the Other in *Anthony and Cleopatra*," in *Shakespeare's Late Tragedies: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Susanne L. Wofford (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1996), 235–48. Loomba discusses the various imperialist and racial implications of the Rome/Egypt dichotomy in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* for England, tracing the history of Western perceptions of the East and the conflation of Egyptians with Moors, Turks, and gypsies, all identified by darker skin.

warning about the exotic as excess, even while acknowledging the blurring of the proposed Rome/Egypt dichotomy. Gluttonous surfeiting, lavish banquets and feasting, as in the feast described by Enobarbus, are all depicted as a quality of Egypt's exoticism—the "'orientalism' of Cleopatra's court—with its luxury, decadence, splendour, sensuality, appetite" which John Gillies sees as a "systematic inversion of the legendary Roman values of temperance, manliness, courage, and *piatas*."[5] Mary Thomas Crane notes how this is also reflected in the "cognitive orientation" of the Romans in the play, who perceive their world as "composed largely of hard, opaque, human-fashioned materials" and divided into "almost obsessively named—and conquered—cities and nations."[6] This speaks to what I see as the traditional privileging of monumentalism in the history of the West, drawing from classical tropes of memorial and permanence that figure into what I have argued elsewhere are the masculinely-coded and externally-directed "markers of identity" that were "historical, genealogical, and patriarchal."[7] Crane contrasts the hard, surface "world" of the Romans with the Egyptian "earth," perceived as "yielding, encompassing, generative, and resistant to human division and mastery," reading the latter as a kind of "nostalgia for a declining theory of the material world, the pre-seventeenth-century cosmos of elements and humors" conducive to a "saturation of meaning" in the connection between subject and world that Gillies argues "shapes Shakespeare's representation

---

[5] John Gillies, *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 118.

[6] Crane, "Roman World, Egyptian Earth," 2. See also Jyotsna Singh, "Renaissance Anti-theatricality, Antifeminism, and Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*," *Renaissance Drama* 20 (1989): 99–121. Singh reads the Rome/Egypt dichotomy in conjunction with a male/ female binary, in which Cleopatra's "infinite variety" is the antithesis of the Roman model of stability and masculinity.

[7] See my, "Navigating Past, Potential, and Paradise: The Gendered Epistemologies of Discovery and Creation in Francis Godwin's *Man in the Moone* and Margaret Cavendish's *BlazingWorld*," *Gendering Time and Space in Early Modern England*, ed. Katherine R. Larson and Alysia Kolentsis, *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* 35.1 (Winter 2012): 113-138; 121.

of marginal, outlandish, barbarous, and exotic non-European cultures, in need of control by the rational and self-controlled West."[8]

My argument here diverges from and complicates this exoticism and provides a clearer and closer look at how exactly the blurring between the two occurs. If Shakespeare's "relatively positive description of Egypt" demonstrates a nostalgia for a declining sixteenth-century theory of the material world, as Crane suggests, my sense is that Shakespeare experiments with new models of materiality and physiology, developed out of culinary practices, to demonstrate just how the porousness of the boundaries between the Romans and Egyptians, the West and the "other," manifested. I argue that Shakespeare's primary purpose is not merely to construct Egyptian exoticism, but rather to couch the exotic Egyptian queen in English domestic culture as a commentary on Roman and English consumption, creating an uneasy tension between the domestic and the exotic within the figure of the foreign woman.[9]

She is at once "Salt Cleopatra" and "sweet queen." Even her description as "wrinkled deep in time" can be construed as a gustatory descriptor given to Shakespeare's Cleopatra that references preservation practices that kept things from immediate decay and heightened flavors from salty to sweet. The play which has been held to be a commentary on Egypt is deeply informed by the notion of food preservation—a list that includes salting, pickling, brining, and

---

[8] Crane, "Roman World, Egyptian Earth," 2–3; and Gillies, *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference*, 4.

[9] For an extensive look at the phenomenon of Cleopatra's foreignness and the history of the speculation about her race, see Francesca T. Royster, *Becoming Cleopatra: The Shifting Image of an Icon* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Carol Chillington Rutter, *Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare's Stage* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Imtiaz Habib, *Shakespeare and Race: Postcolonial Praxis in the Early Modern Period* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000); Sally-Ann Ashton, *Cleopatra and Egypt* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008); and Gillies, *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference*. Royster and Rutter interrogate the social constructions and performances of Cleopatra's race. Habib provides context for the history of Graeco-Egyptian interrelations and the formation of a mixed Graeco-Egyptian race to speculate about Cleopatra's likely mixed-race heritage, which Ashton, an Egyptologist, confirms. Gillies discusses Shakespeare's exoticizing of Cleopatra in the context of differing historical accounts of Cleopatra's ethnicity—ethnically Greek in Plutarch's account rather than "dangerously" Egyptian, or exotic, in Virgil's account.

candying. The Romans see their legacy played out in the fantasy of conquering Egypt, with Cleopatra as a stand-in for her nation as well, incorporating its qualities. In suggesting the irony in the Roman veneer of a stoic, monumental, marble solidity indicative of republican ideals of duty and self-sacrifice, the play demonstrates Roman republicanism masking as a front for a culture obsessed with destructive consumption; at the same time that they repudiate Egypt as the site of such excessive consumption, the Romans themselves are the ones who consume/seek to consume. As the Romans seek to indulge in foreign foods and foreign customs, Roman conquerors, like Antony and Caesar before him, seek to consume Cleopatra as a temptation to the sexual appetite that mirrored the tantalizing Egyptian appeal to gluttony and feasting. But Egypt's and Cleopatra's own preservative elements make them resistant, in some ways, to that incorporation. Egypt rather has longer standing associations with preservation due to the nature of its space and time—the regional climate and Egypt's identification as the oldest civilization, producing preserved bodies, dry complexions, but also fecundity and generation.

Furthermore, Shakespeare's preoccupation with food preservation in this play extends and complicates an ancient tradition interested in preservation more broadly construed, a tradition represented and embodied by the figure of Cleopatra as medical, gynaecological, and alchemical authority. Believed into the early modern period to be author of an apparent *Book of Cleopatra*, Cleopatra as a figure comes to be intimately associated with preservation and the promise of immortality. Shakespeare, I argue, re-imagines the figure of Cleopatra as an epitome of an early modern preservative culture alongside her long history in medical and scientific tradition as a mistress of preservation. Shakespeare uses his construction of Cleopatra to show how the English sought and desired to incorporate some of her qualities—her place in history

and her promise of longevity—but they sought these qualities, fascinatingly, through kitchen and domestic work. His Cleopatra provides a model and an embodiment of preservation that withstands or subverts Roman ideas of permanence, with Antony, too, adopting the image of discandying in the threat of his own unpreserving. Cleopatra demonstrates that far from being a process towards permanence, preservation is a dynamic and organic one, requiring the potency of the "foreign" integrated with the domestic to rethink the nature of memory and identity and what it means to persevere in the face of discandying.

Cleopatra's Ancient Medical Authority

Overlooked in studies of circulating receipts in a growing early modern domestic culture is the remarkable example of a receipt tradition attributed to Cleopatra. Early modern records indicate that there was an apparent Book of Cleopatra of which the English were aware—a source of medical knowledge that no longer exists except in the various curious references to it from authors and writers spanning all the way back to ancient Greek and Roman authorities. Cleopatra's was a preservative legacy that was as real as it was complex and elusive; the Book of Cleopatra held information about preserving and touted the concept of preservation as the domain of "Cleopatra's" expertise.

The figure of Cleopatra closer to her time was closely associated with medicine, cosmetics, gynaecology, and alchemy, and the construction of her medical authority is comprised of not one but three significant traditions of medical thought. The earliest are Greek medical writings, most famously Galen's, where are preserved cosmetic recipes that bear Cleopatra's name and are extracted from a book called *Cosmetics*. In the late antique Latin and medieval Latin traditions, Cleopatra is held to be an authority on gynaecology, with her name used as

author or authority of two gynecological works: the *Gynaecia*, containing gynaecological treatments, and the *Pessaria*, containing receipts for vaginal suppositories.[10] During this time, Albertus Magnus wrote his *Boke of Secrets* in which Cleopatra's recipes figure, and thirteenth-century Thomas of Cantimpré's primary work, *On the Nature of Things*, contained a section on the human body, physiology, and gynecology based on Cleopatra alongside figures like Galen and Avicenna. Thirdly, we have the Arabic medical tradition, in which there are indications that Cleopatra is remembered as a "writer on *aphrodisiaca*,"[11] with expertise in recipes for aphrodisiacs. The Arabic medical author known in the West as Costa ben Luca (820-912 C.E.) referred to a book on aphrodisiacs by Cleopatra, and appears to be the original source from which a number of early modern authors received the receipt for the renewal of love, desire, and the ability for sexual intercourse:

> I remember a great nobleman of this country who complained of being in a ligature that prevented him from having intercourse with women. ...[I brought] him the Book of Cleopatra, the one she devoted to enhancing women's beauty, and [read] the passage where it says that one so ligated should take raven's gall mixed with sesame oil and apply it by smearing it all over the body. Upon hearing that, he had confidence in the words of the book and did it, and as soon as he was delivered [from the ligature] his desire for intercourse increased.[12]

In addition to the medical traditions, the preservative authority of Cleopatra also draws upon an ancient alchemical tradition. Cleopatra the alchemist is one of the great figures in ancient alchemy; a work called the *Dialogue of Cleopatra and the Philosophers*, in part attributed to Cleopatra, would, as Stanton Linden notes, influence "much of the alchemical imagery and

---

[10] Steven Muir and Laurence Totelin, "Medicine and Disease," in *A Cultural History of Women in Antiquity*, ed. Janet H. Tulloch (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 102.

[11] Muir and Totelin, "Medicine and Disease," 102.

[12] Quoted in Catherine Rider, *Magic and Impotence in the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 50.

rhetoric of the Renaissance."[13] In antiquity, gynaecology had a large influence on alchemical imagery, and medical work in cosmetics, gynaecological treatises, and sex manuals had a great deal of overlap. When we define these areas of expertise as characterized by a concern with preservation, we more easily see the connections between them: subsequently Cleopatra becomes an authority in the preservation of beauty and health, as an expert in cosmetics; the preservation of reproduction and life, as an expert in gynaecology and alchemy; and the preservation of eroticism and sexual appeal, as an expert in aphrodisiaca.

Cleopatra's reputation thus exceeds her. In their discussion of ancient women in medicine, Steven Muir and Laurence Totelin describe a woman in the position of a medical authority as "a model or example whose legendary reputation lives on in the stories and practices of later generations."[14] Cleopatra's name attributed to these medical recipes was a "particularly good choice" given the queen Cleopatra's fame for beauty and luxury and her connection with Egypt, which was "famous for its production of scented oils and ointments."[15] Attributing Queen Cleopatra *as* medical authority in this realm was so convincing that medical writers and compilers of receipts of the earlier periods believed the Queen of Egypt had legitimately been active in the field of cosmetology, inspiring them to include recipes in later collections such as "an unguent of Queen Cleopatra" in Aetius's sixth century *Medical Collection*, and a recipe for brightening the face attributed to a royal Cleopatra in the medical writings of Metrodora.[16]

---

[13] Stanton Linden, *The Alchemy Reader: From Hermes Trismegistus to Isaac Newton* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 44.

[14] Muir and Totelin, "Medicine and Disease," 84.

[15] Muir and Totelin, "Medicine and Disease," 102.

[16] Muir and Totelin, "Medicine and Disease," 102.

Additionally, that Queen Cleopatra was famous for her love affairs and skill in seduction lent credence to Costa ben Luca's reference to Cleopatra's book on aphrodisiacs.[17]

Thus beyond Cleopatra's fame in western culture as an Egyptian queen, there is evidence that early moderns associated her name with this rich culture of preservation dating back to antiquity. During Shakespeare's own time, and continuing further into the seventeenth century, the Book of Cleopatra appears in a range of early modern sources. Writers and texts that refer to Cleopatra and her Book as sources of ancient expertise include Albertus Magnus and his *Boke of Secretes* (1599), Robert Allott's *Wits Theater of the Little World* (1599), Edward Jorden's *A briefe discourse of a disease called the suffocation of the mother* (1603), Thomas Bonham's *The chyrugians closet* (1630), and Thomas Moffet's work on insects. From the sheer range of specialties covered by these texts—in secrets, compilations of beneficial reading material, surgery and medicine, and in natural philosophy and the natural sciences—we find that "Cleopatra's" work was found to be pertinent in multiple fields of expertise and held to be legitimate and efficacious. Even in the late seventeenth century, Swiss physician Johannes Jacob Wecker's work, published in English translation in 1660 as *Eighteen Books of the Secrets of Art & Nature, Being The Summe and Substance of Naturall Philosophy* and described in the preface as "an Encyclipaedia of Arts and Sciences," lists Cleopatra as *author*.[18]

It was thus that receipts advertised as secrets belonging to Cleopatra were sold and made accessible to the early modern English. The Book of Cleopatra makes its appearance in these early modern texts in the form of firsthand receipts as well as secondhand references. "Cleopatra

---

[17] Muir and Totelin, "Medicine and Disease,"103.

[18] Johann Jacob Wecker, *Eighteen Books of the Secrets of Art & Nature, Being The Summe and Substance of Naturall Philosophy* (London, 1660), A2r.

writ a booke of the preseruation of womens beauty," Robert Allott begins his section on Beauty in his edited prose commonplace book, *Wits Theater of the Little World* (1599).[19] This is confirmed by the appearance of receipts for preserving beauty in other early modern texts; the English translation of Albertus Magnus's *Boke of Secretes* (1599) states:

> And it is saide in the booke of Cleopatrr [sic]. If a woman haue not anie delectation with her husband take the marrowe of a wolfe, of his left foote, and beare it, and she will loue no man but him. And it is saide, when the lefte hippe or hance of a male Ostrich is taken and boiled, or seethed with Oile, and after the begining or grounde of haires are anointed with it they grow neuer againe.[20]

Here are two descriptive receipts, marked by their beginning "And it is saide [in the Book of Cleopatra]," the first of which reads as a recipe for a renewal of love between a woman and her husband, the second for the permanent stopping of hair growth, both apparently taken from this book of Cleopatra. Another cosmetically-minded receipt, this time for hair growth, appears in Thomas Bonham's *The chyrugian's closet* (1630), in which Cleopatra is credited in the "Alphabeticall Catalogue of the Authors of this Worke." Bonham provides two brief receipts attributed to her in this "chyrugian's" compendium, listed in standard medical receipt format. The first, after listing ingredients for an unguent, reads:

> Rx. Cort: arundinis, & Spuma nitri, ana {ounce} ss. picis liquida, q. s. f. vng. *. To restore hayre in an inueterate Alopecia [or baldness]. It will be [B] very profitable daily to shaue the place, and to rub it with a lin|nen cloath, and then to anoint it, by which meanes the hayre will grow with more speed. Cleopatra.[21]

The second, after listing ingredients for another unguent and abbreviated instructions for preparation, notes simply: "Rx. Brassicae aridae, q.s. stampe it cum aq: q.s. vnto the forme of an

---

[19] Robert Allott, *Wits Theater of the Little World* (London, 1599), 75v.

[20] Albertus Magnus, *Boke of Secretes* (London, 1599), G4r-v.

[21] Thomas Bonham, *The chyrugian's closet* (London, 1630), 283.

vng: *. To preserue haire from falling. Cleopatra. [C].”[22] Both entries, purporting to aid hair growth or preserve hair from falling, end with the attribution “Cleopatra” to identify the source of the receipts. A related recipe from the book of Cleopatra makes a perhaps unexpected appearance in Thomas Muffet’s work on insects, which was completed in manuscript form in the 1590s and posthumously published and appended in English translation to Edward Topsell’s work on beasts (1658). Muffet accounts in his section “On the use of Flies” yet another receipt for the cure for baldness:

> For Galen out of Saranus, Ascle|piades, Cleopatra, and others, hath taken many Medicines against the disease called Alopecia or the Foxes evill; and he useth them either by themselves or mingled with other things. For so it is written in Cleopatra's Book de Ornatu. Take five grains of the heads of Flies, beat and rub them on the head affected with this disease, and it will certainly cure it.[23]

Here again we find a descriptive receipt for the renewal of hair growth, described as a kind of cure. Additionally, here we receive another title for Cleopatra’s book: the “Book de Ornatu,” or book of ornamentation, as in beauty and cosmetology.

In addition to Cleopatra’s hair remedies, Cleopatra’s curative knowledge appears again in the form of more occult expertise. Edward Jorden mentions the book of Cleopatra as a source for a receipt used as an example of “fasten[ing] some cure vpon” those who claim to be bewitched, in his treatise on the “suffocation of the mother,” in which he furthers his argument that witchcraft can be explained away by natural causes:

> So that if we cannot moderate these perturbations of the minde, by reason and perswasions, or by alluring their mindes another way, we may politikely confirme them in their fantasies, that wee may the better fasten some cure vpon them: as *Constantinus*

[22] Bonham, *The chyrugian’s closet*, 283.

[23] Thomas Muffet, *The Theater of Insects: or, Lesser living Creatures, as, Bees, Flies, Caterpillars, Spidrs, Worms, &c. a most Elaborate Work* (London, 1658), 945.

> *Affricanus* (if it be his booke which is inserted among *Galens* workes, *De incantatione, adiuratione &c.*) affirmeth, and practized with good successe, vpon one who was *impotens ad Venerem*, & thought himselfe bewitched therewith, by reading vnto him a foolish medicine out of *Cleopatra*, made with a crowes gall, and oyle: whereof the patient tooke so great conceit, that vpon the vse of it he presently recouered his strength and abilitie againe.[24]

Cleopatra's name appears to stand in for her book, from which this "medicine" is taken. A similar receipt is echoed in Johannes Jacob Wecker's book of secrets, in a section on "Secrets of Generation and Venery [pursuit of sexual pleasure]." This recipe, "For those that are bewitched," reads: "The Pye eaten will recover those that are bewitched, as some think: also the fume of a dead mans tooth, and if the whole body be annointed with a Crows gall, and oyl of Sesama, that will do it also. *Ex Cleopatra*."[25] This receipt is reiterated in his later section on "Secrets against Conjuration." Regarding recipes for "What must be done when Men are hindered that they cannot lye with their Wives," Wecker includes:

> There is one reports that a Noble Man of his Countrey [this may well be Costa ben Luca, as per the reference earlier] swore that he enchanted a Man that he should never lye with his Wife, and that he was restored by a certain dexterity, whereby he confirmed the perswasion of another, bringing to him the Book of Cleopatra, which he had written concerning the ugliness of Women, and he read the place where it was prescribed that one that was so charmed should have his whole body annointed with the gall of a Crow, mingled with Oyl of Sesamam; and that the remedy was certain.[26]

Wecker directly references the Book of Cleopatra as a material text—"bringing to him the Book of Cleopatra"—and as the source of the aforementioned receipt. These early modern examples, from both early modern medical experts and non-experts, show us how knowledge from the

---

[24] Edward Jorden, *A Briefe Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother* (London, 1603), 24v.

[25] Wecker, *Eighteen Books of the Secrets of Art & Nature*, 104.

[26] Wecker, *Eighteen Books*, 281.

Book of Cleopatra came to be circulated and the figure of Cleopatra perpetuated as an authority on preservation.

From these fragments of evidence we piece together an idea of who Cleopatra represented for the early moderns rather than a biography of a specific individual. The author who apparently wrote the Book of Cleopatra and any other medical treatises and recipes was not, or not necessarily, the Cleopatra we have inherited as arguably our most famous Cleopatra—Cleopatra VII, former Queen of Egypt, Shakespeare's Cleopatra. However, this seems not to have mattered much in the transmission and preservation of the figure of Cleopatra and her book of expertise. Classics historian Laurence Totelin has convincingly read Cleopatra in early Greek medical writings as an example of what she terms a "royal veneer," famous or well-known names that writers attributed to recipes for the purpose of giving them a kind of authority. As such, Muir and Totelin argue, it is better to refer to such female figures as "authorities," rather than "authors of" these recipes.[27] Where Muir and Totelin refer to Cleopatra in these medical writings as a pseudonym, I think it fruitful for our purposes to consider the resulting composite Cleopatra of the medical traditions alongside the figure of Queen Cleopatra in the historical tradition as, together, a figuration. It seems to me that the definition of figuration—the action or process of forming into a figure, or the resulting form or shape, contour, outline—may most accurately describe what "Cleopatra" ends up being, or meaning, into the early modern period and beyond. From early on, the potency of the figure of Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, allowed it to subsume the other Cleopatras who have come and gone and contributed something to the study of preservation, whether that be Cleopatra the gynaecologist or Cleopatra the alchemist.

---

[27] Muir and Totelin, "Medicine and Disease," 100.

I want to pause here for a moment to consider the two Cleopatra figures—the medical authority and the historical Queen of Egypt—separately in order to point out the two threads of memory-making that are at play here and that are being woven together to create the composite Cleopatra figuration. The one is Cleopatra the Queen, in the historical tradition, constructed by "historical" (if embellished) narrative upon narrative throughout the centuries, as in her treatment as powerful ruler, gypsy, and seductress in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. The other, lesser known, and the one I highlight here, is this medical or receipt tradition, constructed by the numerous fragments of evidence that attribute various medical and preservative expertise to "Cleopatra." The Book of Cleopatra proves a tradition, forgotten or overlooked, of a Cleopatra memorialized through receipts as opposed to narrative. Furthermore, as I argue, the preservation of Cleopatra's memory in the form of these receipts and fragments of medical knowledge constructs her cultural significance for Shakespeare in ways that her memory in narrative alone does not. Shakespeare thus, in inheriting these traditions, adds to them another, one that draws from his contemporary cultural milieu: a new English tradition of food preservation. By doing so, Shakespeare uses the culinary, as a newly developing addition to the definition of preservation, to bridge the gap between a cultural memory constructed by the tradition of Cleopatra's medical receipts and a historical memory of Cleopatra constructed by the narrative of her life and loves. In doing so, Shakespeare contributes to the memory-making efforts of preserving Cleopatra, drawing from a tradition of Cleopatra as preservative expert and exploring her in the realm of contemporary culinary preservation.

Ancient Legacy and Early Modern Domestic Practices

What did it mean to preserve? The idea of preserving, in the English language, first applied to the vulnerable human body in the Middle Ages. The first known use of the verb, " to preserve," appears John Gower's 1393 Confessio Amantis, according to the *OED*, in which Gower states, "forto kepe and to preserve The bodi fro siknesses alle." Gower's example is listed for the primary definition of "to preserve": "To protect or save from (injury, sickness, or any undesirable eventuality)."[28] As the use of the word evolved, later definitions still focused, at first, on the human body as the object of preservation; to preserve meant "To keep alive; to keep from perishing," and, in medicine "to prevent (a disease or its development, a complication); to palliate or keep from worsening." By 1427, the definition extended beyond the human body, defining "to preserve" more abstractly as "to keep in its original or existing state; to make lasting; to maintain or keep alive (a memory, name, etc.)."

It is not until the sixteenth century that we see the definition of "to preserve" expanded to include the culinary. The *OED* records 1563 as the first use of "to preserve" as "to prepare (fruit, meat, etc.) by boiling with sugar, salting, or pickling so as to prevent decomposition or fermentation." This corresponds with the sudden influx of food preservation recipes that entered en masse into sixteenth-century receipt-culture, in tandem with what Jennifer Stead calls a "spectacular increase of activity in food preservation" in the sixteenth-century,[29] both derived from and developing on receipts cultivated throughout the centuries. Accordingly, with the culinary entering into the primary definitions of "to preserve" in the English language, culinary

---

[28] *OED Online*, s.v. "preserve, v.," June 2014, Oxford University Press, http://www.oed .com/view/Entry/150728?rskey=CXAVsN&result=2&isAdvanced=false (accessed July 18, 2014).

[29] Jennifer Stead, "Necessities and Luxuries: Food Preservation from the Elizabethan to the Georgian Era," in *"Waste Not, Want Not": Food Preservation from Early Times to the Present Day*, ed. C. Anne Wilson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 66.

preservation, as we see, would influence the culture's understanding of preservation as a concept. In time, the material processes of culinary preservation would serve as the primary metaphor for the idea of preservation more broadly construed; by the end of the seventeenth century Vincent Alsop would describe his religious concerns using the terms of culinary preservation:

> I would fain know how the Church was Conserved in the Early, purer times of Christ, and his Apostles? They had not recourse to the Ladies Closet open'd, They understood nothing of the Modern curious Arts of Conserving, candying, and preserving Religion in Ceremonious Syrrups; and yet Religion kept sweet, and Good.[30]

Shakespeare's Cleopatra thus appears at a time when ideas of preservation, and advancements in preservation in the early modern English kitchen, were evolving side-by-side. Correspondingly, conserving and candying and pickling began to serve as metaphors for preservation derived from advancements in food preservation in English domestic culture.

Thus, when Shakespeare uses the term "discandy," he does so intentionally at a moment in history during which culinary ingredients and culinary processes begin to define preservation. To fully emphasize the significance of Shakespeare's use of the term, I must begin by noting here that "discandy" is a term, and a concept, that is entirely Shakespeare's invention. Furthermore, the word "discandy" only appears in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*; not only is it absent in all of his other works, but thus far it does not appear in any other work in the history of the English language. "Discandy" was one of Shakespeare's new words, developed out of a culinary image, derived from "candy" in its noun form (i.e., in "sugar-candy," another name for sugar), turning it into its verb form (candying as a preservative process using sugar-candy), and finally

---

[30] Vincent Alsop, *Melius inquirendum, or, A sober inquirie into the reasonings of the Serious inquirie wherein the inquirers cavils against the principles, his calumnies against the preachings and practises of the non-conformists are examined, and refelled, and St. Augustine, the synod of Dort and the Articles of the Church of England in the Quinquarticular points, vindicated* (1678), 211.

attaching the prefix "dis-" to coin "discandy" as the reverse of "to candy."[31] Candying, more specifically, was a process by which fruits, roots, and flowers were preserved using sugar; the candying process involved "boiling with sugar, which crystallizes and forms a crust."[32]

Early modern women were becoming increasingly familiar with candying as a culinary process, alongside recipes for preserving and conserving intended for the early modern English housewife. These were domesticated into the rapidly growing genre of the receipt book, both in private manuscript form kept within the familial household and in printed form, as recipe books and domestic manuals, for public consumption. One example of the latter was the anonymous *A Closet for Ladies and Gentlevvomen, Or, The Art of preseruing, Conseruing, and Candying. With the manner howe to make diuers kinds of Syrups: and all kind of banqueting stuffes. Also diuers soueraigne Medicines and Salues, for sundry Diseases* (1608), roughly contemporaneous with the writing of *Antony and Cleopatra*. From the title alone, we can gather several things: 1) that the anonymous manual was meant for "Ladies and Gentlewomen" implies that the following arts and receipts were considered the domain of the early modern woman; 2) the arts of preserving, conserving, and candying were grouped together—and I will speak of them as a grouping as the culinary preservative arts; and 3) the making of syrups, banqueting stuffs, and medicines, as diverse and various as they seem, were all related to the preservative arts.

Within the domestic manual itself, the clean categories the title suggests did not exist, of course; rather, in broadly construed categories, such as "An especiall note of Confectionary," "Here beginneth Banqueting conceits, as Marmalades, Quodiniackes, and such like," and

---

[31] Terttu Nevalainen, "Shakespeare's New Words," in *Reading Shakespeare's Dramatic Language: A Guide*, ed. Sylvia Adamson (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2001), 237–55.

[32] *OED Online*, s.v. "candy, v.," June 2014, Oxford University Press, http://www.oed .com/view/Entry/27013?rskey=KRMTH9&result=4&isAdvanced=false (accessed July 18, 2014).

"Cordial Waters," recipes ranging from preserving gooseberries to making syrup of violets to "A medicine for Rupture in old or yong" were collected without strict organization. Only an occasional note at the bottom of a page, indicating "Heere endeth the Preseruatiues," indicated any division of categories, but these, too, were misleading because the preserves, for example, didn't always end as stated.[33] That preservative recipes appeared throughout the book shows how central the concept of preservation was to the cookery and kitchen experimentation of the early modern domestic household. Among recipes for preservation, those for candying boasted titles that were especially telling about what candying in particular promised for the early modern woman interested in preserving. One such receipt is titled, "To Candy Rose leaues as naturally as if they grew vpon the Tree"; the directions state:

> Take of the fayrest Rose leaues, red or dammaske, and on a Sun-shine day sprinkle them with Rose water, and lay them one by one vpon faire paper, then take some double refined suger, and beat it very fine, and put it in a fine lawne searce, when you haue layd abroad all the Rose leaues in the hottest of the sunne, searce suger thinly all ouer them, then anon the Sun will candy the suger, then turne the leaues, and searce suger on the other side, and turne them often in the Sun, sometimes sprinkling Rose water, & sometimes searsing suger on them, vntill they be ynough, and come to your liking: and being thus done, you may keepe them.[34]

The mimetic function of the recipe, to candy the leaves "as naturally as if they grew vpon the Tree," demonstrates the desire to preserve items as they are in nature, to "keepe them" in their natural state. This is echoed in another recipe, labeled "To Candy all manner of flowers in their naturall colours," which involved taking "the flowers with the staulkes, and wash them ouer with a little Rose water, wherein Gum-arabecke is dissolued, then take fine searsed suger, and dust

---

[33] Anonymous, *A Closet for Ladies and Gentlevvomen, Or, The Art of preseruing, Conseruing, and Candying. With the manner howe to make diuers kinds of Syrups: and all kind of banqueting stuffes. Also diuers soueraigne Medicines and Salues, for sundry Diseases* (1608), 15.

[34] *Closet for Ladies*, 17-18.

ouer them, and set them a drying on the bottome of a siue in an ouen, and they will glister as if it were Suger-candy."[35] Other candying receipts continue to specify that the aim is to "keepe them all the yeare."[36] These receipts make explicit the purpose and benefit of candying: they enabled early modern women to preserve things as close as possible to how they "naturally" were in their living, or last present, state—in a sense, freezing them in time. These preservative aims of candying, alongside culinary preservation more broadly as prolonging shelf-life, will prove crucial for Shakespeare's climactic moment of discandying in the play.

But additionally, early modern English domestic practices were not isolated; rather, perhaps unexpectedly, these preservation processes were informed by foreign influence. By the time candying as a process reached early modern England, the English were already familiar with candied products via the exotic candied goods that were imported into Europe. Early modern domestic practices, practiced in the safety of the private household, were not quite so safely domestic, as Shakespeare was well aware. The underlying threat of the exotic would play out in Shakespeare's depiction of Cleopatra as both a foreign queen of a foreign land and early modern expert of domestic preservation culture.

Cleopatra is Shakespeare's only female protagonist of color. Her "tawny front" is a marker of difference, and that difference represented the encroachment of the foreign and "other" upon the safety of the early modern English domestic space. The prominent early modern European fear of miscegenation was complicated by the concept of empire which promoted the idea of alteration in the bodies, tastes, and beliefs of "imperial consumers": "You are what you

---

[35] *Closet for Ladies*, 18-19.

[36] *Closet for Ladies*, 20.

eat, what you consume, what you own."[37] This mantra—that you are what you eat—was the basis for the Galenic dietetic framework of the humors according to which one's make-up was constructed by what one ate and drank. Bodies were composed of and maintained by local diet, "the stuff that came off the land where the body itself lived and that was prepared as it was traditionally prepared."[38] The distinction of a local diet developed out of custom, the idea that "I cannot be hurt by the use of things that I have been long accustomed to," as Montaigne expressed in his essay "Of Experience."[39] Because bodies were accustomed to local fare, dietary "exoticism" put the domestic body at risk. At the same time, the colonizing impulse of the Age of Discovery spurred a sense of urgency among competing European nations to claim undiscovered regions of the world, and, for practical reasons, these European nations began experimenting with food preservation out of necessity to accommodate ships with food that would be able to last months and even years during the long journeys abroad.[40] Travel thus became the impetus for new advancements in food preservation. These voyages abroad not only brought back to Europe new and exotic foodstuffs, newly "discovered" flora and fauna of foreign regions, but also unprecedented quantities of preservative ingredients, like "the increased supply of sugar from Caribbean islands and North Africa," resulting in a "veritable explosion of new methods" of preservation.[41]

---

[37] Mary Baine Campbell, "Maculophobia: Blackness, Whiteness and Cosmetics in Early Imperial Britain," in *Multicultural Europe and Cultural Exchange in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. James P. Helfers ([Turnhout]: Brepols, 2005), 121.

[38] Steven Shapin, "'You are what you eat': Historical Changes in Ideas about Food and Identity," *Historical Research* 87 no. 237 (2014): 380.

[39] Quoted in Shapin, "'You are what you eat,'" 380.

[40] Stead, "Necessities and Luxuries," 66.

[41] Stead, "Necessities and Luxuries," 66.

The context, thus, for the Roman anxiety about Cleopatra as morsel and Egypt as a place of excess in Shakespeare's play is the concern of early modern European colonists who were "anxious about the possible effects of exposure to an exotic environment, and especially to an exotic diet, on their own constitutions."[42] If foreign foods presented a threat to the European body, but travel was necessary for the European colonialist project, how much more significant the developing preservation techniques that would allow European colonists to bring with them what they could of their own local foodstuffs, preserved? At the heart of the threat of an exotic diet was the belief that foods had the capability of changing one's bodily constitution, even, and especially, to the point of altering one's racial or ethnic identity.

Shakespeare produces a composite figure in Cleopatra that combines her regional boundary-crossing, between the domestic and the exotic, with her historical boundary-crossing, between the ancient and the contemporary. The tradition of a Cleopatra associated with preservation and domestic practices was inherited through a receipt-culture that was not isolated to the influx of receipt books that comprised much of domestic culture of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but was rather a continuation of a culture of receipts that had been cultivated through a long tradition of recording, compiling, transmitting, and experimenting with a range of medical, alchemical, and occult knowledge. The evolution of ancient medical knowledge into domestic culture continued to be in play as early moderns developed their own household practices. Receipts made for a richly complicated textual culture, and the genre of receipt books was more open-ended than we might think today. The receipt-culture that lay at the

[42] Shapin, "'You are what you eat,'" 383. Shapin notes that by formulating distinctions between local and foreign fare, the "language of Galenic dietetics" contributed to forming collective dietary identities within groups: "what foods suited the English, the Scots, the Welsh, the French and the Spanish? In England, what suited people from the west country and what suited Essex man?" Shapin, "'You are what you eat,'" 382.

heart of early modern domestic culture included books of secrets, domestic manuals, health treatises, and commonplace books. Texts that contained receipts mixed recipes for medicine, baking pies, making ink, creating beautifying cosmetics, and protecting from curses and recasting magical spells, often all within the space of a single volume. Households would have had manuscript recipes in their homes, as well as published books of secrets, surgical receipts, and home remedies, all of which often cited other books and receipts, including some Italian and French. Accordingly, the early modern woman was expected to cultivate an expertise in a variety of domestic concerns. A knowledge of plants, simples, and general physic in addition to experience in constructing face washes, dressing venison, and baking almond cakes, were all required for the purposes of proper and thorough domestic household management. But where the early modern housewife—or queen or duchess—may have *developed* an expertise in culinary, medical, and pharmacological knowledge, by way of the hands-on nature of acquiring such experimental and experiential knowledge in the kitchen, the figure of Cleopatra bypasses the developmental stage as already a figure of medical authority. With Cleopatra we get a female figure whose relationship to medicine and to receipt-culture throughout the centuries was strikingly different from that of women in Shakespeare's time, and I argue that Shakespeare's Cleopatra demonstrates how "Cleopatra's" ancient legacy interacts with Shakespeare's modern day practices and current concerns to produce a solution for preservation in the very act of becoming unpreserved.

Preserving and Unpreserving Shakespeare's Cleopatra

To examine how Shakespeare integrates the ancient and the early modern, the domestic and exotic, in his construction of a preservative Cleopatra, I begin with how Cleopatra constructs

her own self as a body of difference within the play. In one of her most celebratory narcissistic moments, Cleopatra imagines herself through Antony's eyes as the "serpent of old Nile...That am with Phoebus' amorous pinches black / And wrinkled deep in time" (1.5.26, 29-30). In this description Cleopatra directs her audience's attention to the particularities of her physical and bodily presence on stage, forcing us to acknowledge or recognize her as a body of difference. By calling herself the "serpent of old Nile," she claims her Egyptian heritage; by describing herself as "pinche[d]" black by the sun, she recognizes the blackness or darkness of her skin tone; by characterizing her body as wrinkled "deep in time," she marks herself both as an older, aged woman but also gestures to her association with a kind of eternal timelessness. Cleopatra's tripartite description of herself—as Egyptian, black, and aged—consists entirely of qualities of marginalization in early modern England; at the same time, these qualities that would serve to marginalize her in Shakespeare's time combine to construct a powerful identity we have come to know as the exotic, foreign queen of Egypt. Cleopatra's emphasis on these marginalized qualities forces us to think about the physicality of her body. By bringing our attention to her Egyptian-ness, in addition to her being "wrinkled deep in time," Cleopatra celebrates her body as wrinkled, preserved flesh that was thought to be quintessentially Egyptian. Cleopatra's wrinkled, Egyptian body draws on early modern medical thought, in which the physical body was primarily understood through the influence of the four humors: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. The prevailing early modern humoral theory of health maintained that the body, its composition and its functions, were governed by the four humors—blood, phlegm, yellow bile, black bile—which were differentiated by levels of heat and moisture. Because of its susceptibility to changes in heat and moisture, the humoral body was constantly prone to the influence of external factors,

and the influence of climate and environment and region affected and altered the humors within the body in ways that had gendered and racial ramifications. The early moderns believed that the heat of the sun was responsible for darkening the skin of the Egyptians—thus we get the visual of Cleopatra's "tawny front"—as well as the cause for the drying out of the body's humors.

Shakespeare's description of Cleopatra, as a body already primed for preservation, thus derives from the idea that her Egyptian environment could preserve. In contrast, Antony is described as being more susceptible to change; for example, Antony's stay in Alexandria, as Caesar complains, effeminizes him:

> he...fishes, drinks, and wastes
> The lamps of night in revel; is not more manlike
> Than Cleopatra, nor the queen of Ptolemy
> More womanly than he. (1.4.4-7)

According to early modern assumptions about humoral differences between bodies from northern and southern regions, Antony's effeminization would have been seen as the result of the bodily changes he undergoes upon his extended stay in Alexandria. Antony's northern, Roman body, being colder and more moist, is more susceptible to influence from the southern climates. Cleopatra's southern Egyptian qualities, on the other hand, are more durable. While according to humoral theory Cleopatra's complexion should be "soft and impressionable" as a woman, as an Egyptian she takes on the hotter and drier qualities typically considered to be masculine. The durability of Cleopatra's southern qualities has much to do with the effect of the Egyptian environment upon the body; those who lived in Egypt were believed to have drier, darker skin due to the hot and dry environment, which preserved human bodies for longer than did colder

and wetter climates, like England, which, instead, "preserve[d] internal moisture."[43] In this way, the bodies of Egyptians were thought to be embalmed by the environment in a way that northern bodies were not. Cleopatra's Egyptian qualities that mimic preservation contribute to what scholars have noted as her "ageless antiquity"; southerners like Cleopatra were seen to be "descendants of the oldest civilizations," and their natural qualities were correlated "with those of the elderly."[44] Its dryness made the southern complexion "less vulnerable to decay or physical change," giving it the quality of being well-preserved.

But Cleopatra's appeal to preservation goes beyond her environment. Indeed, beyond her regional, Egyptian physicality is the abstraction of her role as ancient authority and early modern English preservative expert. As we will see, these work in tandem to create a Cleopatra that proves a preservative and altering threat from within and without. Even before Cleopatra's self-description, Shakespeare situates himself alongside the ancient traditions of Cleopatra early in the play and gestures to his emphasis on the culinary as a mediating, preserving presence that bridges space and time, region and history.

In Act 1, scene 2, Shakespeare stages a scene in which Cleopatra's servants interact with a soothsayer who claims "In nature's infinite book of secrecy / A little I can read" (1.2.8-9). When Cleopatra's servant Alexas then tells Charmian to "Show him your hand," the scene is interrupted by the entrance of Enobarbus who suddenly interjects, "Bring in the banquet quickly" (1.2.9-10). Charmian continues as if to ignore the interjection and requests the soothsayer to

---

[43] Mary Floyd-Wilson, "Transmigrations, Crossing Regional and Gender Boundaries in *Antony and Cleopatra*," in *Enacting Gender on the English Renaissance Stage*, ed. Viviana Comensoli and Anne Russell (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 74.

[44] Floyd-Wilson, "Transmigrations," 75.

"give me good fortune" (1.2.12). In the exchange that follows, the soothsayer presents the following bits of foresight: in the first, he tells Charmian that "You shall be yet far fairer than you are," which Iras interprets as "you shall paint when you are old" (1.2.15, 17); in the second, he tells her that "You shall be more beloving than beloved" (1.2.21); in the third, he tells her that "You shall outlive the lady whom you serve" (1.2.29); and finally to Charmian's question about how many children she will have, the soothsayer responds that "If every of your wishes had a womb, and fertile every wish, a million" (1.2.35-36). What is striking about the soothsayer's main points is that they address, respectively, books of secrets, painting—or cosmetics—and beauty, love, prolonged life, and the womb and fertility, all of which correspond to how Cleopatra has been remembered through her apparent medical expertise in cosmetics, aphrodisiacs, gynecology (and alchemy) and, altogether, the secrets of preservation and the renewal of life.[45]

The soothsayer is dismissed by a disgruntled Charmian: "Out, fool!" (1.2.37), but she then invites him to tell Iras her fortune. At this point, Enobarbus interrupts yet again, saying that his and all of their fortunes will be going drunk to bed; we can assume that he has started on the banqueting festivities he requested in his earlier interjection. Iras and Charmian then attempt to soothsay themselves; Iras observes "There's a palm presages chastity, if nothing else," to which Charmian replies "E'en as the o'erflowing Nilus presageth famine" (1.2.43-44). Charmian's reference to famine is telling at this moment. Times of famine were the primary reason for the

[45] The soothsayer is also introduced into the scene by Alexas, who, as Cyrus Hoy has pointed out, was likely a reference to Alexis of Piemont, whose book of secrets was published widely—in England alone published (in English translation) in 1558, 1560, 1562, 1569, 1595, and into the seventeenth century. Hoy makes this connection in his notes to Thomas Dekker's *Satiromastix*, in which "Alexis's secrets" appear in relation to Antony and Cleopatra in an otherwise bizarre reference in the play: "Come, busse thy little Anthony now, / now, my cleane Cleopatria ; so, so, goe thy waies, / Alexis secrets." Cyrus Hoy, *Introductions, notes, and commentaries to texts in The dramatic works of Thomas Dekker* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 256.

need to preserve foods. In times of glut, surplus foods would be preserved in order to prolong their shelf-life for times of need. Charmian's remark about the famine marks the end of any further "productive" soothsaying.

Both of Enobarbus's interjections occur just as the soothsayer has been asked to give his knowledge, silencing the soothsayer both times until he is requested to speak again. Thus, Shakespeare inserts references at specific moments that are related to his interest in food preservation, interrupting or dismissing the soothsayer's knowledge of secrets or dismissing soothsaying altogether. In addition, throughout this scene, as requested by Enobarbus, we have the backdrop of the banquet on stage, which at this time was not necessarily synonymous with a feast as we might think today, but rather typically meant the final, dessert course that would have consisted in large part of preserved food items, preserved fruits and sweets and other confections. It is thus that in this rather strange scene quite near the beginning of the play, Shakespeare introduces the cultural memory of Cleopatra's medical receipt tradition and also introduces his own intervention through Enobarbus's and Charmian's passing mentions: his investment in a culinary form of preservation and how that changes his audience's notion of a preservative Cleopatra.

Just as Charmian enigmatically concludes, "the o'erflowing Nilus presageth famine," the idea of a preservative Cleopatra is significant for early modern concerns with famine, and the juxtaposition of excessive fecundity with famine sets the stage for the dietary contrast between Cleopatra/Egypt and Rome that Antony faces. Antony's, and the Romans', relationship to the culinary begins as an image of famine, as a point of anti-excess. Caesar produces a memory of Antony that distinguishes him from Egyptian food culture and fecundity, arguing that on the

contrary Antony had previously thrived in circumstances where food was scarce. Bemoaning Antony's carousings in Alexandria, Caesar pleads to an absent Antony to "Leave thy lascivious wassails," remembering fondly when

> at thy heel
> Did famine follow, whom thou fought'st against,
> Though daintily brought up, with patience more
> Than savages could suffer. Thou didst drink
> The stale of horses and the gilded puddle
> Which beasts would cough at. Thy palate then did deign
> The roughest berry on the rudest hedge.
> Yea, like the stag when snow the pasture sheets,
> The barks of trees thou browsed. On the Alps
> It is reported thou didst eat strange flesh,
> Which some did die to look on. (1.4.56-78)

Caesar finds admirable the Roman Antony who was forced to eat food that had not been preserved but was rather what uncivilized "savages" might eat: the "stale of horses," "barks of trees," and "strange flesh" (unpreserved). Caesar here depicts an environment that contrasts not only with Antony's own dainty upbringing but also Egypt's environment. Caesar, in a masculine discourse, implies that the preservation of Antony's life depended not on the bounty produced by food preservation but on deprivation and a diet characterized as barbarous.

However, as Antony's exposure to Egypt begins to alter him, the introduction of culinary metaphors in the play enter into his domestic interactions in contrast to the realm of his public or political affairs. Pompey, when considering the optimistic state of his own affairs compared to Caesar's and Antony's, snidely dismisses any real threat they pose to him, remarking that "Mark Antony / In Egypt sits at dinner, and will make / No wars without doors" (2.1.11-13). Similarly, in a conversation between Lepidus and Enobarbus, as they anticipate a tense meeting between their leaders Caesar and Antony, respectively, Lepidus is reluctant that they should meet with

warring personal agendas and tells Enobarbus "'Tis not a time for private stomaching" (2.2.9), casting the culinary as, again, a private domain.

Yet in the meeting between the two leaders, Lepidus opens by asking both to "Touch you the sourest points with sweetest terms." Dietary knowledge promoted balance between different categories of food, pairing opposite "humoral" qualities of foods together; thus vinegar was often paired with sugar or salt, and other substances like honey or other spices were often added to combinations of foods in ways that would seem extravagant or incongruous to us today. The experience of "private stomaching," then, speaks to knowledge of the balance required for the health of consumers. After Antony and Caesar make peace through the agreed marriage between Caesar's sister Octavia and Antony, bonding the two men as brothers, Maecenas comments that "We have cause to be glad that matters are so well digested," but follows immediately by noting that Enobarbus "stayed well by't in Egypt" (2.2.186-87). The matters well digested between Antony and Caesar are immediately juxtaposed against the excessive Egyptian feast: "Eight wild boars roasted whole at a breakfast, and but twelve persons there" (2.2.190-91). Enobarbus's subsequent visually and sensorially rich description of Cleopatra's entrance into Antony's life via the river Cydnus—full of burnished gold, tissue, and the "strange invisible perfume" which made the winds lovesick and hit "the sense / Of the adjacent wharfs" (2.2.222-23)—is missing only the sensory satisfaction of taste, which yet is promised; Antony "goes to the feast, / And for his ordinary pays his heart / For what his eyes eat only" (2.2.234-236). That which "his eyes eat only" is, of course, Cleopatra, and for the rest of the play, Cleopatra is described as a thing for culinary consumption. In her own self-description Cleopatra announces, "I was a morsel for a monarch." Pompey later echoes this, calling Cleopatra Antony's "fine Egyptian cookery," upon

whom “Julius Caesar / Grew fat with feasting there” (2.6.63-65). So too Enobarbus calls her Antony’s “Egyptian dish” (2.7.124). However, Cleopatra’s culinary portrayal serves not to limit her to the role of an object of desire and for consumption, but rather to frame her as a master/ mistress of preservation.

While the descriptors that portray Cleopatra’s appeal to the appetite have always been linked to her reputation as the lustful queen, taking the gustatory—and cannibalistic—metaphors of appetite literally helps us to understand the material ways the early modern English may have imagined the threat of the foreign and how Cleopatra’s mastery of preservation becomes a source of power over those who seek to consume her. Cleopatra’s culinary power is best exemplified by Enobarbus’s and Pompey’s descriptions of her in which they reflect--from a more objective standpoint--on the culinary appeal she provides to those around her. In Enobarbus’s earlier speech, he rejects Maecenas’s conclusion that Antony will “leave her [Cleopatra] utterly,” upon taking Octavia as his wife; rather, this is an impossibility precisely because of the allure of Cleopatra’s appeal:

> Never. He will not.
> Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
> Her infinite variety. Other women cloy
> The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry
> Where most she satisfies. (2.3.244-48)

The significance of Cleopatra’s exoticism and appeal is its longevity, as Enobarbus so powerfully describes. Hers is an appetizing appeal that the passing of time does not diminish: “Age cannot wither her.” Nor, too, does familiarity and prolonged exposure to Cleopatra; custom cannot “stale / Her infinite variety.” Her age does not take away from her “flavor,” as it were; rather than becoming stale, she continues to provide temptation to the appetite. So too is Cleopatra pitted

against the idea of cloying; where other women would have such an effect of "overload[ing] with food, so as to cause loathing; to surfeit or satiate (with over-feeding, or," particularly in this case, "with sameness of food),"[46] Cleopatra rather continues to renew the appetite rather than weary it. The appetite that she provokes is one that is long-lasting, fed by an eternal freshness, and can never be satisfied; her appeal is eternal because it is constantly renewed—she provides an "infinite variety," always new although eternal, always making hungry.

Thus we begin to see the contours of a state of preservation as a constant renewal. Shakespeare's use of "stale" here, against which to pit Cleopatra as its opposite, is a striking and intentional verbal echo of the "stale" of horses drunk by the famine-afflicted Antony that Caesar so admired. The shocking moment of drinking horses' stale was Antony's response to the ravages of famine; having no access to fresh food, nor to preserved items, his only option was to scavenge for whatever nutrition he could find, which included horses' urine. In contrast, we are presented with a Cleopatra who is decidedly the opposite of "stale," not only in its form as the horse's urine that became a necessity during a time of famine, but also in its myriad senses of having "lost its freshness, novelty, or interest."[47] Cleopatra represents, rather, a different option to the problem of famine in a form that resists the staleness prone to the passing of time: through culinary preservation, Cleopatra's embodiment reconciles the paradox between longevity and eternal freshness.

Shakespeare grounds this concept, of an infinite variety that constantly makes hungry in a powerful image—Pompey's wonderfully strange descriptor, "Salt Cleopatra." Pompey here

---

[46] *OED Online*, s.v. "cloy, v.1," December 2014, Oxford University Press, http://www .oed.com/view/Entry/34772 (accessed December 10, 2014).

[47] *OED Online*, s.v. "stale, adj.1," June 2014, Oxford University Press, http://www.oed .com/view/Entry/188800? rskey=ePEknt&result=8&isAdvanced=false (accessed July 18, 2014).

elaborates Cleopatra's preservative-inspired draw as he encourages Cleopatra's bewitchment of Antony as a means of distracting him from war:

> But all the charms of love,
> Salt Cleopatra, soften thy waned lip!
> Let witchcraft join with beauty, lust with both.
> Tie up the libertine in a field of feasts,
> Keep his brain fuming. Epicurean cooks
> Sharpen with cloyless sauce his appetite,
> That sleep and feeding may prorogue his honor
> Even till a Lethe'd dullness-- (2.120-27)

The remarkable depiction of a gastronomically alluring Cleopatra centers on that powerful image of a "Salt Cleopatra." David Bevington convincingly suggests that the use of salt as a descriptor here refers to "salted or preserved meat," which was "more appetizingly reconstituted."[48] We can almost taste such a Cleopatra, and it is that salt that plays a role in the culinary witchcraft that we imagine with flavorful foods. The resulting experience is aesthetic, sensory, and sensuous, in which witchcraft joins with beauty joins with lust. Pompey's investment in Cleopatra's culinary magnetism is for her power over Antony; "Tie up the libertine" he exclaims, "in a field of feasts, / Keep his brain fuming." The fuming brain was an image and an experience that suggested for early moderns a complicated threat to the preservation of the body and health. Some fumes were thought to be sweet and nourishing for the brain, but more often a fuming brain suggested a level of intoxication brought about by the reaction of certain foods in the stomach. Cleopatra's effect on Antony's fuming brain, Shakespeare suggests, derives from an insatiability; his appetite is "sharpen[ed] with cloyless sauce," again emphasizing Cleopatra's cloylessness, which works to postpone Antony's distraction from his military duties, but also to

[48] David Bevington, ed., Antony and Cleopatra (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2005), 121.

extend him in time toward the process of a kind of preservation and prolonging of his current state, at the center of which is Salt Cleopatra.

Cleopatra as "Salt Cleopatra," reconstituted into a food item preserved and flavored in England's most celebrated way, is not only more "appetizingly reconstituted" and flavorful, but Shakespeare presents her as an example of the intersection of domestic process and exotic matter, a flesh product successfully preserved by virtue of the imported ingredients that worked more effectively to preserve flesh to last longer. Advancements in salt preservation won England renown for the "quality of their cured and salted meats and fish" among other countries. Thus what would become a major staple of English cuisine depended on the foreign import of Bay salt. Cleopatra, as "Salt" Cleopatra, reconstituted into a food item preserved and flavored in England's most celebrated way, is not only more "appetizingly reconstituted" and flavorful, but Shakespeare presents her as an example of the intersection of domestic process and exotic matter, a flesh product successfully preserved by virtue of the imported ingredients that worked more effectively to preserve flesh to last longer. The appeal of Cleopatra to the Romans, and to Shakespeare's viewers, as salted meat was thus grounded in the desire to incorporate and appropriate her.

Not only was Salt Cleopatra a preserved food item herself, but Shakespeare depicts her as having mastery over those methods of preservation. Charmian reminds Cleopatra of a trick she once played on Antony, when she had her diver "hang a salt fish upon his hook, which he / With fervency drew up" (2.5.17-18). "Salt" here has fittingly been glossed as "preserved," and refers quite literally to salted fish which were among the first food items to undergo mass preservation. As herself a salted morsel, Cleopatra, as Shakespeare implies, would have been aware of the

parallel between herself and the salted fish, a traditionally Egyptian product and export, and her awareness informs her mastery, and manipulation, of Antony, who "with fervency" draws up both the salted fish and Cleopatra herself.

It is thus that we begin to see evidence of Cleopatra's mastery of culinary preservative methods as a form of knowledge of the behavior of flesh towards preservation. Immediately following, Cleopatra threatens to punish a messenger by whipping him and having him "stewed in brine, / Smarting in ling'ring pickle!" (2.5.66–7). He had just delivered the unfortunate news that Antony has remarried, and Cleopatra's response is to strike him and threaten to subject him to food preservation processes as a form of torture and the execution of her area of expertise. Brining and pickling were forms of salt-based preservation known as wet-salting, according to which fish or meats could be stewed and preserved in brine in jars or wooden barrels until use.[49] It was additionally perceived to be an Egyptian burial practice by the early moderns; in his 1606 treatise against interment, William Birnie notes among various cultural funeral preparations that "the Greke and Romane did burne their dead, in rogo, as they styled their funerall fire; the Indean with Got-seame did besmeare, the Schithean swallied, the Egiptian pickled with bryme."[50] That Cleopatra calls upon brining and pickling for a whipped servant constructs not only an uneasy parallel between the human body and food that is likely to spoil, but conjures up the visceral harm that flesh is prone to and the idea that preservation can involve a kind of violence. The explicit conflation of food and bodies here only reinforces the play's nod to a

---

[49] C. Anne Wilson, ed. *"Waste Not, Want Not": Food Preservation from Early Times to the Present Day* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 16–17.

[50] William Birnie, *The blame of kirk-buriall, tending to persvvade cemiteriall ciuilitie First preached, then penned, and now at last propyned to the Lords inheritance in the Presbyterie of Lanerk, by M. William Birnie the Lord his minister in that ilk, as a pledge of his zeale, and care of that reformation,* 1606

system of not-so-metaphorical cannibalism, in which Cleopatra clearly understands herself to be implicated, and which for early modern audiences would not have been so incredible as it is today. Notably, Cleopatra's command here literalizes the process of preserving flesh, and her choice of brining and picking integrates the two conflicting domains of the exotic and the domestic—as Egyptian burial practice and as early modern English culinary preservation—to produce a punishment that takes advantage of the vulnerability of flesh.

What Cleopatra realizes as a master of preservation is that preservation occurs through the interaction of incorruptible substances with vulnerable, or corruptible, substances—that in fact incorruptible substances form the primary ingredient needed for preservation to occur. The workings of incorruptible substances on corruptible flesh foods followed the logic of humoral physiology. According to humoral theory, all creatures and plants had their own inherent complexions, and when used for food, their humoral properties would transfer to our bodies which would assimilate those qualities. For example, a food that was "choleric," or hot and dry, would transfer hot and dry qualities to the individual who consumed it. Foods in the vulnerable or corruptible category, which required these incorruptible substances for preservation, were called "flesh" foods, making "flesh" a marker of vulnerability. Flesh foods included meats and fish as well as fruits and were foods that were particularly prone to putrefaction with time and heat. Cleopatra's use—and abuse—of food preservation in violent ways work to showcase flesh as prone and vulnerable. Early modern dietary authors were concerned about the corruptibility of flesh foods, and it took other substances that were qualitatively "hot" themselves to resist

corruption. These incorruptible substances would prevent putrefaction by preventing unnatural heat—the cause of putrefaction—and moisture that would spoil food.[51]

Cleopatra's earlier threat resonates with preservation practices and her knowledge of such incorruptible ingredients that included other substances which were thought to have preservative powers by virtue. The same messenger in danger of being pickled had moments before been threatened by Cleopatra; even before he speaks, she threatens that if he does so, "The gold I give thee will I melt and pour / Down thy ill-uttering throat" (2.5.34–5). Gold and pearls, incorruptible substances, were similarly used for preservative purposes, ground into foods or drink as "life-preserving fluids" such as drinkable gold, or "aurum potabile."[52] Pliny the Elder wrote of the legend that Cleopatra dissolved a pearl in vinegar and drank the result;[53] the gold Cleopatra threatens to melt and pour down the messenger's throat recalls the idea of drinkable gold as a life-preserving fluid. The unfortunate messenger thus serves as a kind of marionette for Cleopatra with which to experiment and showcase her mastery of preservation practices. But the sinister nature of the melted gold poured down his throat, in addition to his potential salt-preservation in brine, combine to demonstrate Cleopatra's understanding of the paradoxical valences between the vulnerability of flesh to pain and violence—human flesh as human—and the protection that preservation provides—human flesh as food.

---

[51] Ken Albala, *Eating Right in the Renaissance*, (Berkeley: U of California P, 2002), 159.

[52] Albala, *Eating Right*, 103 and 159.

[53] Pliny the Elder was said to have written an account of Cleopatra wherein she consumes a drink composed of a pearl dissolved in vinegar in order to win a bet with Antony. See Prudence J. Jones on the history and criticism on this story in "Cleopatra's Cocktail," *Classical World* 103, no. 2 (Winter 2010): 207–20. For more on vinegars with a gloss on the aforementioned "cocktail," see also Stefano Mazza and Yoshikatsu Murooka, "Vinegars Through the Ages," in *Vinegars of the World*, ed. Lisa Solieri and Paolo Giudici (Milan: Springer-Verlag Italia, 2009), 17–39, esp. 18. Mazza and Murooka speculate that the Egyptians were probably the first to discover and use vinegar and explain the effect of climate in regions such as Egypt on the production of vinegar: "the hot, dry climate of the desert encouraged a quick fermentation, rapidly turning grape juice into an indeterminate alcoholic-acidic beverage."

This is best exemplified in Cleopatra's anxiety about discandying. If Cleopatra's manipulation of preservation demonstrates her intimate knowledge of the vulnerabilities of flesh and the powers of preservation, her intimate dialogue with Antony reveals her self-awareness of the threat of unpreserving. Antony, following Cleopatra's retreat during a sea battle with Caesar, is brought to a fury at seeing Cleopatra entertain Thidias, whom Caesar has sent to persuade her to join with him: "To flatter Caesar," Antony pushes, "would you mingle eyes / With one that ties his points?" Antony continues, "Cold-hearted toward me?" to which Cleopatra replies:

> Ah, dear, if I be so,
> From my cold heart let heaven engender hail,
> And poison it in the source, and the first stone
> Drop in my neck; as it determines, so
> Dissolve my life! The next Caesarion smite,
> Till by degrees the memory of my womb,
> Together with my brave Egyptians all,
> By the discandying of this pelleted storm
> Lie graveless till the flies and gnats of Nile
> Have buried them for prey! (3.13.157-69)

It is important to note here how the image "discandying" in Cleopatra's speech is integrated into a larger imagined process that parallels texts from earlier traditions of Cleopatra. Placing Cleopatra's speech side-by-side with the *Dialogue of Cleopatra and the Philosophers*, considered among one of the earliest alchemical texts, we can see the ways in which her speech draws on much of the *Dialogue*'s imagery. In the *Dialogue*, the philosophers tell Cleopatra:

> In thee is concealed a strange and terrible mystery. Enlighten us, casting your light upon the elements. ...tell us how the blessed waters visit the corpses lying in Hades fettered and afflicted in darkness and how the medicine of Life reaches them and rouses them as if wakened by their possessors from sleep; and how the new waters...penetrate them at the beginning of their prostration and how a cloud supports them and how the cloud supporting the waters rises from the sea.[54]

[54] Quoted in Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 45.

To this, Cleopatra responds:

> The waters, when they come, awake the bodies and the spirits which are imprisoned and weak. For they again undergo oppression and are enclosed in Hades, and yet in a little while they grow and rise up...For I tell this to you who are wise:...plants, elements, and stones...are nourished in the fire and the embryo grows little by little nourished in its mother's womb, and when the appointed month approaches is not restrained from issuing forth. ...The waves and surges one after another in Hades wound them in the tomb where they lie. When the tomb is opened they issue from Hades as the babe from the womb.[55]

Stanton Linden notes that much of the imagery reflects "the vaporization and condensation of the liquids undergoing distillation."[56] Relatedly, the imagery of death and resurrection are references to the production of the philosopher's stone, one of the primary end goals of alchemy, and Cleopatra's statement above is "a very early instance of use of the analogy between the birth of a child and preparation of the philosopher's stone."[57] The alchemical imagery of the Dialogue mixes meteorological, gynaecological, and death imagery in order to produce an analogy for the production of the Philosopher's Stone, which was also referred to as "Medicine" or "Elixir," one of the purposes of which was "healing the human body of its diseases and extending longevity."[58] The figure of Cleopatra the alchemist was, Linden notes, "one of very few ancient female adepts who possessed the secret of the philosopher's stone."[59]

Shakespeare's Cleopatra notably combines the same sets of imagery—meteorologic, gynaecology, and death/resurrection—in professing a verbal commitment to the constancy of her love for Antony. The intermingling of different kinds of imagery explains and perhaps clarifies

---

[55] Quoted in Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 45.

[56] Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 45.

[57] Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 45.

[58] Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 16.

[59] Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 44.

some of the enigmatic nature of the speech and its convoluted syntax which has been difficult to interpret, but Shakespeare uses it towards the production of a renewal of love between Antony and Cleopatra. In the play, Cleopatra uses this as a kind of self-imposed curse if she fails to love Antony and directs her use of the imagery toward death and an image of anti-preservation. If she is cold-hearted toward Antony, "From my cold heart let heaven engender hail" which poisons her at the source and leads to the dissolving of her life, the smiting of her next child, and the process, "by degrees," of a kind of de-preserving of the "memory of her womb" and her "brave Egyptians all." The memory of her womb and her Egyptians, all of which comprise the bodily manifestations of the memory of Cleopatra, are, in this curse, left "graveless till the flies and gnats of Nile / Have buried them for prey"--an image of the decay and decomposition that accompanies death--as the result of the "discandying of this pelleted storm." While the image of discandying has usually been read as but another synonym for a dissolution, political or otherwise,[60] the image's significance derives from its culinary reference; when Cleopatra calls upon the act of "discandying," she also persuades her audience to reconceptualize this entire process—of the hail and "pelleted storm"—as complicit in a culinary transformation. The "pelleted storm," for example, Bevington has glossed as culinary: "as a compressed meat ball,"

[60] Peter A. Parolin notes that critics have often seen *Antony and Cleopatra* as a play about dissolution; see his "'A Cloyless Sauce': The Pleasurable Politics of Food in *Antony and Cleopatra*," in *Antony and Cleopatra: New Critical Essays*, ed. Sara Munson Deats (London: Routledge, 2005), 213–29. A few scholars have examined discandying in the context of melting imagery. C. H. Hobday associates the specific imagery of melting sweets primarily with dogs in early modern dining areas who would lick sweetmeats and drop them "in a semi-melting condition all over the place." In his reading of the use of "dis-candy" in *Antony and Cleopatra*, Hobday focuses on the cluster of images that relate dogs, sugar, and flattery as evidence of melting and sweets as images of flattery and dog-like fawning. While I do see, particularly in Antony's use of "discandy," the relationship to flattery in the way Hobday suggests, I argue that this is not enough in exploring the implications of Shakespeare's invention of this word. I suggest there is more going on here, particularly in locating the process of discandying in the context of food preservation. See Hobday, "Why The Sweets Melted: A Study in Shakespeare's Imagery," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 16 (1965): 3–17. Floyd-Wilson also takes a look at the melting imagery of "dis- candy," noting that "The discandying that Cleopatra envisions appears to mirror Antony's own dissolving state, with the exception that her melting is an imagined punishment for betrayal, couched in an invocation that preserves her authority. Antony, in contrast, when his followers desert him, associates 'discandying' with the ultimate surrender of one's self to another" ("Transmigrations," 83–84).

which, I imagine, becomes almost a type of sweet meat that has been candied.[61] From the vantage point of an early modern audience who would have been familiar with candying as one such method of using sugar for preservation, the "discandying of this pelleted storm" would have had resonances with food, flesh, and mortality.

If candying promised a near-perfect state of preservation, Shakespeare's discandying dismantled that ideal. In Antony's echo of Cleopatra's discandying, he posits the two in contrast to each other—he is left unpreserved by an episode of discandying which, in turn, results in a candied Caesar:

> O sun, thy uprise I shall see no more.
> Fortune and Antony part here; even here
> Do we shake hands. All come to this? The hearts
> That spanieled me at heels, to whom I gave
> Their wishes, do discandy, melt their sweets
> On blossoming Caesar. (4.12.18–23)

Antony's supporters, the "hearts / That spanieled me at heels," undergo the process of discandying, losing their protected and preserved state. Instead, the hearts of his once-followers "melt their sweets" on Caesar, and in doing so, the process of discandying turns back into the process of candying, melting off of Antony onto Caesar upon whom the melted "sugar-candy" will harden once more to a protective and preserving candied shell. Caesar is figuratively being candied by these melted sweets, and like flowers that were candied, "blossoming" Caesar can be figuratively preserved and kept in a state that prolongs his current status, both politically and mortally. In other words, Antony imagines Caesar's preservation as a process of candying that will keep Caesar intact against time's decaying.

---

[61] Bevington, *Antony and Cleopatra*, 204.

The image of a candied Caesar is meant to demonstrate the merits of being preserved intact, and the parallel between the state of being candied and the state of being embalmed would not have been missed. Cleopatra, after all, would have been thought to be embalmed as an Egyptian by virtue of Egypt's hot and dry climate which produced, in a sense, already embalmed bodies that were well-preserved. Furthermore, the image of the embalmed, candied body necessarily invites association with the embalmed, mummified bodies of the Egyptians. Embalming, the preservation of the human body corpse, was famously an Egyptian death ritual, sometimes appropriated in Roman funeral rituals using Roman "variations" of "traditional Egyptian techniques."[62] In a historical reconstruction of his speech before his final defeat of Antony and Cleopatra, Octavian comments on the Egyptian practice of embalming "their own bodies to give them the semblance of immortality."[63] These bodies were often prepared with an aromatic substance generally called "balm," a soothing and healing ointment which would preserve the bodies in a candied-like state.[64] Cleopatra herself ends her life in the play with an exclamation of her death "As sweet as balm" (5.2.305), inviting the association of her death with the preferred state of being preserved, candied.[65] The image of candying as embalming thus

---

[62] Derek B. Counts, "Regum Externorum Consuetudine: The Nature and Function of Embalming in Rome," *Classical Antiquity* 15 (1996), 191. Counts seeks to explain evidence for embalming in Rome and to address some motives for and implications of the use of embalming in early Imperial Rome, where cremation was the dominant rite after death. Embalming was typically ridiculed as something less civilized people did to their dead.

[63] Dio, 50.24, trans. E. Carey, Loeb edition. Quoted in Counts, "Regum," 191.

[64] The *OED* lists this definition of balm as "An aromatic preparation for embalming the dead," used between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. "balm, n.1". *OED Online*. June 2011. Oxford UP.

[65] While I do not go further into embalming and funereal practices in early modern England here, I do want to note that embalming was practiced "among the middle and upper classes" as a "fairly common practice," and by the eighteenth century, embalming was practiced "by all except the lower classes." For more on embalming practices in England, see Jolene Zigarovich, "Preserved Remains: Embalming Practices in Eighteenth-Century England," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 33, no. 3 (2009): 65–104, esp. 67-8.

circles back to Cleopatra as herself an example of an Egyptian body whose potential was to be embalmed.

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that embalmed Egyptian bodies, as representative of preservation and immortality, were sought after by early modern Europeans. The protection of such bodies in their embalmed state fed into the early modern assumptions about the substances that derived from those bodies, substances such as mummy, or mumia. In early modern medical texts, there is frequent reference to the consumption of "mummy," sometimes described as a substance, dried fluid or powder made from mummified bodies. Mummy was thought to contain leftover traces of vital spirit and was originally thought to be taken or prepared from actual Egyptian mummies, thus having the power to preserve human bodies through a transference of life essences and an embalmed, preserved state in the process of ingestion.[66] The strong cannibalistic implications of Cleopatra's portrayal as something to be eaten, fed upon, lock into her connection to mummy, itself a form of sanctioned, medicinal cannibalism in which early modern England, and Europe-at-large, took part.[67] Mummy provided in practice what Shakespeare's portrayal of Cleopatra theorized—an Egyptian culinary morsel, exotic and foreign like Cleopatra, that the English literally incorporated into or onto their bodies in the hopes of preservation.

If Caesar could be imagined to be candied over, so, too, could Cleopatra—all the more given her depiction as a preserved morsel to be consumed—a veritable mummy to be ingested for what she promised. But even more so was Cleopatra's body quite literally a body that was

---

[66] Albala, *Eating Right in the Renaissance*, 69.

[67] For more on mummy as medicinal cannibalism, see Louise Noble, *Medicinal Cannibalism in Early Modern Literature and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

candied over; her status as a potentially candied, embalmed morsel intersects with her portrayal as a "painted" or cosmeticized woman, an intersection that also finds its way into the early modern English kitchen in the form of what I term culinary cosmetics. Both cuisine and cosmetics were part of a network of an early modern domestic, preservative culture that used many of the same incorruptible ingredients. Sugar in particularly, given its tempering qualities, was used in a vastly large number of cosmetic recipes. A candied Cleopatra was thus, in a sense, very literally sugared over.

Thus, in depicting Cleopatra as a preserved morsel to be tasted, Shakespeare is forcing us to consider quite literally the salts and sugars on her skin—to rethink the implications of Cleopatra's cosmeticization. In a discourse that was already racialized in the period, cosmetics and paints straddled the porous divide between preservation and alteration.[68] On the one hand, what cosmetics promised was the preservation of youth and beauty. On the other hand, it was thought that cosmetics, as part of a network of culinary production and consumption that included washes, salves, and ingestible items, had the potential to actually transform English bodies. As a part of culinary domestic culture, the production and use of cosmetics resonated with concerns about poisonous foods and the threat of foreign ingredients as detrimental to the English body. But the culinary and cosmetic practices that allowed for the preservation of foods and of bodies were predicated on the incorporation of those foreign ingredients into the English

---

[68] For more on cosmetics, race, and performance in early modern England, see Campbell, "Maculophobia"; Farah Karim-Cooper, *Cosmetics in Shakespearean and Renaissance Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2006); Kimberly Poitevin, "Inventing Whiteness: Cosmetics, Race, and Women in Early Modern England," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 11, no. 1 (2011), 59-89; Tanya Pollard, "'Polluted with Counterfeit Colours': Cosmetic Theater," *Drugs and Theater in Early Modern England* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2005); Edith Snook, "'The Beautifying Part of Physic': Women's Cosmetic Practices in Early Modern England," *Journal of Women's History* 20, no. 3 (2008), 10-33; Andrea Stevens, *Inventions of the Skin: The Painted Body in Early English Drama, 1400-1642* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2013).

kitchen for use in methods of preserving. The paradox of the use of cosmetics is indicated by the tensions between widespread private use among women of cosmetics and strong public objections to cosmetics which included the "ethnocentric fear of foreign ingredients and commodities of a cosmetic nature."[69]

Recipes for cosmetics and for food were found side-by-side in receipt books and miscellanies of the period, and cosmetic recipes often called for some of the same culinary ingredients as food recipes in domestic manuals like Hugh Platt's *Delightes for Ladies*, which was published in sixteen editions between 1602 and 1656, a testament to its popularity and widespread use among women in the early modern household. Most scholarship on domestic cosmetics use in early modern England has focused on face-painting and its adverse effects on women's bodies. However, for women cosmetic culture was primarily about preserving youth and life, or at least preserving the appearance thereof. When Charmian asks for her fortune and is told that she "shall yet be far fairer than you are" (1.2.16), she interprets, "He means in flesh," as preservation of youth or the return to a more youthful physical fairness (1.2.17). In response, Iras reinterprets the soothsayer to mean not a return to a youthful physical fairness, but rather to mean the inevitability of cosmetics use: "No, you shall paint when you are old," to which Charmian responds with an anxiety-ridden "Wrinkles forbid!" (1.2.30-1). Charmian's anxiety reveals the (early modern) female concern with the physical repercussions of age on the body in the form of wrinkles, decidedly contrary to Cleopatra's celebration of being wrinkled "deep in time," and the use of paints to hide evidence of age. Although such face-painting practices often stemmed from a fear of aging and a fear of mortality, many ingredients used in cosmetic recipes we know now

[69] Karim-Cooper, *Cosmetics in Shakespearean and Renaissance Drama*, 34.

to be detrimental to our bodies, like mercury and lead, and these ingredients covered up the body and face while contributing to their deterioration. Thus, while women were attempting to preserve their youth and fight off the effects of age, their use of cosmetics brought these deteriorating effects much more rapidly.[70]

Advertising for cosmetics, of course, claimed the opposite--that recipes would enable women to create cosmetics that could "retrace the steps of youth, and transforme the wrinkled hide of *Hecuba* into the tender skin of a tempting *Helena*"; in other words, what advertisers argued was that "wearing cosmetics will sustain life."[71] The idea that cosmetics could sustain or preserve life was verified by a more accepted and acceptable branch of cosmetics known as "beautifying physic," legitimized as a part of an early modern professional medical culture concerned with the preservation of health. As such, beautifying physic did not inspire the "vitriolic antifeminist attack" that face-paints did. The distinction between condemned face-paints and approved washes was voiced by various doctors and anti-cosmetics writers; one Spanish physician, in English translation in Thomas Tuke's 1616 tract against the use of paints, writes:

> Yet do I not altogether mislike, that honest women should wash themselves, and seeke to make their faces smooth, but that they should use the barly water, or the water of Lupines, or the juice of Lymons, and infinite other things, which Dioscorides prescribes as *cleanely*, and delicate to *clear the face*. [emphasis mine][72]

The rhetoric of washing, cleaning, and clearing, in addition to the focus on the use of culinary ingredients associated with transparency, legitimizes this cosmetic practice as concerned with the

---

[70] Karim-Cooper, *Cosmetics*, 45.

[71] From Thomas Jeamson, *Artificiall Embellishments (*quoted in Karim-Cooper, *Cosmetics*, 58).

[72] Thomas Tuke, *A discourse against painting and tincturing of women* (London, 1616), B3v-B4r.

virtuous care of personal hygiene. Edith Snook has brought attention to a large number of recipes recorded for beautifying physic rather than face-paints, including recipes for "face washes and ointments, beautifying concoctions that *transform* the skin rather than *cover* it [emphasis mine]."[73]

The distinction between transformation and covering is significant. In practice the distinction was rather ambiguous--cosmetics could, and did, both cover and transform. The key to cosmetic *transformation*, however, comes from what I term the *gastrohumoral* properties of the ingredients used. Sugar, for example, was "a thinge verye temperate and nourysshynge," easy on the stomach and capable of balancing other ingredients.[74] As such, sugar was used in various recipes for medicinal washes; a manuscript recipe for "An Excellent wash for the face" calls for the use of "a quarter of a pound of white suger candie pounded small."[75] The production of cosmetics was thus connected to kitchen physic and domestic medical preparations that included healing potions and medicinal syrups, various forms of medications for consuming and for applying. But distinctions between poisonous face-paints and healing medical treatments were much more porous in actuality; as Snook identifies, "paint could be a medicine and washes and pomatums could be paints."[76] Recipe books reflected the imprecision of these distinctions—certain cosmetics "both covered and transformed"[77]—and thus, cosmetics straddled a complexly porous boundary between poison and preservative.

---

[73] Snook, "'The Beautifying Part of Physic,'" 10.

[74] From Thomas Elyot's *Castel of Helth* (1547), an example of the kind of early modern domestic and medical manual that contained information about maintaining good health.

[75] Recipe in a seventeenth-century manuscript of cookery and medicinal recipes at the Folger Shakespeare Library. MS V.a.562.

[76] Snook, "'The Beautifying Part of Physic,'" 13.

[77] Snook, "'The Beautifying Part of Physic,'" 34.

As a part of culinary domestic culture, the production and use of cosmetics resonated with concerns about poisonous foods and the threat of foreign ingredients as detrimental to the English body. At the same time, cosmetics were used widely for their preservative—or transformative—potential for beauty and youth. Additionally, the conflation of food and bodies, and of food and cosmetics, prompts us to examine Cleopatra's candied appeal as both culinary and cosmetic—the culinary body as cosmeticized, and thus the cosmeticized body as culinary. Shakespeare's Cleopatra, rather than the ancient, abstracted author or authority on cosmetics, is materialized as a product, herself, of such cosmetic, or culinary, expertise. Her reference to candying and discandying brings attention to her cosmeticization, engaging us to ask how her candied cosmetics play into her threat or promise of exoticism.

Because the very application of cosmetics was inherently performative, early modern anxieties about cosmetics primarily concerned the dangerously porous boundaries between appearance, or performance, and reality, or truth. Mimetic representation for Shakespeare's contemporaries was dangerous because it encroached upon the real."[78] What made culinary cosmetics all the more dangerous was that the dangers of mimetic representation were also dangers of material alteration. If the environment and food affected one's racial identity, cosmetics inhabited a middle ground between external and internal influence on the body's humors; cosmetics were applied externally, on the surface of the skin, but its culinary properties worked to manipulate the body's inherent humoral composition in the way the same culinary ingredients did when ingested. In fact, even mummy was an ingredient for substances to be ingested and those to be applied as a kind of cosmetics, included in early modern English recipes

[78] Dympna Callaghan, *Shakespeare Without Women: Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 4.

the aims of which ranged from the preservation of dead flesh against putrefaction, the healing of wounds, longevity, and for beautifying the face when combined with sugar in a face wash.[79]

The paranoia about cosmetics, then, is in dialogue with dietary paranoia, and the danger of both was latent in the process of discandying. Antony's echo of Cleopatra's discandying serves to define discandy per Shakespeare's usage as "To melt or dissolve out of a candied or solid condition."[80] If the purposes of candying were to preserve things as they were, Cleopatra's call for a process of dis-candying would seem to be a troubling image indeed, one that she points out has ramifications for the undoing of an protective, embalmed state. Considering the sugared materiality of the discandying of Cleopatra's "pelleted storm" forces us to imagine a highly visceral process of un-preserving that reverses that of candying, a melting away of the once-melted and hardened, candied preserved state. The threat of discandying can be seen as a failure of preservation; for Antony, the process of discandying reflects his anxiety about depending upon external followers for the preservation of his fortune, his life, and thus his self. In Cleopatra's discandying speech, which is difficult to parse and enigmatic, what is clear is that the discandying registers as a curse.

The process of discandying that Cleopatra imagines connects to her exclamation "Dissolve my life!" Critics are right in noting that this process is one of dissolution; Cleopatra uses the word "discandy" as a type of violence—to destroy distinctions, to dissolve. But furthermore, discandying, by removing or melting away the candied, protective, and preservative shell, would leave the pelleted flesh food vulnerable to the threat of putrefaction and decay. This

---

[79] See Wellcome Library manuscripts MS.761, MS.762.

[80] *OED Online*, s.v. "† dis'candy, v.," November 2010, Oxford University Press (ac- cessed January 23, 2011).

is how Cleopatra ends: with the image of "the memory of my womb / Together with my brave Egyptians all, / …Lie graveless till the flies and gnats of Nile / Have buried them for prey!" Bevington's gloss is helpful here: the flies and gnats have buried them by eating them. The pelleted storm, imagined as candied meatballs, may be thought to be themselves discandying—the literally discandying of the pelleted storm. So, too, Cleopatra imagines the bodies of relation to her discandying. The memory of Cleopatra's womb—her progeny—as well as her Egyptians, her people, once embalmed by the preservative qualities of Egypt are by virtue of the "discandying of this pelleted storm" stripped of that protection, left to decay and decompose. Cleopatra voices the fear that discandying or being discandied leaves one prone to putrefaction and dissolution, resonating not only with the decay of dead bodies, but also with the failure to memorialize one's legacy.

At the same time, discandying is what allows Cleopatra as a morsel to exert power over her consumers. In a sense, what results through her discandying is the potential to leave another kind of legacy, perpetuating in a different way, preserving as an infinite variety. Cleopatra as preserved food and as preservative is the racial, foreign, exotic threat, and her threat of discandying ultimately voices both the danger and the promise she would pose as a foreign preservative, as potential mummy that could transfer her properties to those who ingested her. In melting gastronomically, she dissolves to become a part of her consumer, transferring her inherently racially and regionally "other" qualities, foreign, exotic, preservative and/or poisonous. In other words, as culinary she embodies the threat and promise of both transformation and preservation. Cleopatra's threats to discandy echo the melting process that

happens gastronomically in the body, making her body vulnerable not only to decay but also susceptible to a dissolution that, in the body, would alter the state of whoever consumed her.

In a sense, Shakespeare's portrayal of Cleopatra as a preserved food item can be read as an futile early modern English attempt at domesticating her. Cleopatra-qua-mummy provides the intersection of the culinary and the cosmetic, the fear of and desire for the exotic, and the desire at once for preservation and transformation. Her immense power over other bodies upon being consumed demonstrates Cleopatra's resistance to being appropriated in the ways the Romans and the English desire. She instead reveals early modern English domestication attempts as a denial of foreign influence and a simultaneous anxiety about its efficacy. It is thus that ultimately, and fittingly, Cleopatra does not die "graveless," as she feared, nor is she embalmed and preserved after death in an immortal candied state. Rather, she is to be "buried by her Antony" (5.2.352), and the threat she posed while living continues in her dying the same way she lived: in a liminal state between immortal preservation and instant decay in an inevitable process of (gastronomic) discandying; Cleopatra, to prevent the decay/dissolution of her memory, perseveres by altering her consumer. It is thus that she perseveres by altering her early modern consuming audience: Cleopatra's definition of preservation as a constant renewal thus provides a commentary on the preservative ends of performance for Shakespeare's viewers: "The quick comedians / Extemporally will stage us, and present / Our Alexandrian revels," she proclaims. Such extemporaneous, unpremeditated or studied staging, however, requires an understanding deeply engrained in collective cultural memory and the traditions of preservation Cleopatra represents. Although she bemoan the "squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness / I' the posture of a whore," it

is through her embeddedness in the cultures of preservation that her “Immortal longings” find fruition: in the “infinite variety” of her preservation and her performance.

CHAPTER 2: LINGERING VITALITY: MUMMY AS PHARMAKON AND STRATEGIES OF (MIS)READING PRESERVATION IN JOHN WEBSTER'S *THE DUCHESS OF MALFI*

"Continually we bear about us / A rotten and dead body" (2.1.59-60).[1] So states Bosola, accidental antagonist of John Webster's tragedy, *The Duchess of Malfi.* An informant who puts himself in the service of our central antagonists Ferdinand and the Cardinal, brothers to the Duchess of Malfi, Bosola often serves up such provocative commentary. Here, as he spies on the widowed Duchess for her brothers, who "would not have her marry again" (1.2.177), he articulates an anxiety about decay and death—

> in our own flesh, …we bear diseases
> Which have their true names only tane from beasts,
> As the most ulcerous wolf, and swinish measle;
> Though we are eaten up of lice, and worms,
> And though continually we bear about us
> A rotten and dead body, we delight
> To hide it in rich tissue: all our fear,
> Nay, all our terror, is, lest our physician
> Should put us in the ground to be made sweet. (2.1.55-64)

Bosola articulates a belief that living bodies are always already rotten and dead, prone to diseases and corruption, and the final "fear, / Nay all our terror," is "lest our physician / Should put us in

[1] John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, New Mermaids edition, ed. Brian Gibbons (London: A & C Black Publishers Ltd., 2001). All further quotations from *The Duchess of Malfi* will be cited by act, scene, and line number within the text.

the ground to be made sweet." But what does it mean to say that bodies, already rotten and dead, are put into the ground to be made sweet? Why this obsession in the play with dead flesh?

I argue that we can look to Webster's comparison of the Duchess to a "salvatory of green mummy" (4.2.123), a drug derived from embalmed corpses which were prized for the vitality they were believed to contain. I bring particular attention in this chapter to this early modern corpse drug *mummy*, a form of medicinal cannibalism derived from powdered or pulverized bodies and consumed for its preservative powers in early modern England and Europe. Mummy signifies powerfully for Webster, who references it twice in his earlier tragedy, *The White Devil*, graphic mentions of *mummia* as "unnatural and horrid physic" (1.1.17) which, while memorable, are usually glossed over simply as poison- or physic-related metaphor; a closer examination remains to be made into the material realities of mummy and its implications for Webster's tragedies. Scholars have read the richness of the play's characters, narrative, and action toward a variety of ends—as an anthropological and psychological study into incest and madness, as a window into macabre early modern conceptions of the corpse, as an exploration of the early modern demonic.[2] Examining the Duchess as mummy not only enables us to understand Bosola's meditation on consumable bodies, but offer a means to link a number of these critical discourses about *The Duchess* together, opening up a reading of the play that connects the Duchess's implication in a number of systems of circulation—a network that includes wax effigies, diamonds and jewels, and relics—to the tragic results of her brothers' incestuous obsessions with her body.

---

[2] Whigham gestures to "Correlations between incest and promiscuity" to build the case for a reading of the play in light of "anthropological notions of incest" in treatments of the Duchess and Ferdinand alongside "the experience of their mobile servants Antonio and Bosola" (167). Frank Whigham, "Sexual and Social Mobility in *The Duchess of Malfi*," *PMLA* 100.2 (1985): 167-186.

Mummy signifies the possibility that once dead, there remains a power of vitality that inheres in the body, an idea we have yet to fully recognize is at play in early modern texts. What I consider here is an overlooked material and symbolic substance, prompted by Bosola's characterization of the Duchess's body as a source of "green mummy" (4.2.123), to accomplish two significant goals. The first is to show how the concept of the "living" ingestible body complicates mortality in *The Duchess of Malfi*; the second is to show how that complication, through reading—and eating—mummy, enables Webster to experiment with the preservative promises of performance. I examine mummy as a "preservative" substance and *pharmakon*—juxtaposing the lingering vitality it promised upon ingestion and the threat of its nomadic dispersal and circulation—alongside Susan Zimmerman's examination of the debates about the "semi-animate" corpse in northern and southern Europe. If the semi-animate corpse exemplified early modern anxieties about what constituted life, and the role of anima in distinctions between the categories of the living, the non-living, and the dead, mummy deepens the complexity of those anxieties as an ingestible substance that promised to transfer vitality to the consumer. Accordingly, when Bosola's characterizes of the Duchess's body as a source of "green mummy," he refers to a substance that is key to understanding and reading how bodies, matter, and vitality trouble ideas of preservation for Webster, with implications for how the Duchess's brothers misread her preservative potential; while the Aragon brothers subscribe to the idea of (lingering) life (and their preservation) through containment in/of the Duchess's body, Webster ultimately depicts her preservative potential as having a life of its own beyond bodily matter. By experimenting with life and vitality in and from human substances—the living body of the Duchess, the imagined drug from her corpse, the Duchess's breath and voice, her children as the

products of her fertility—Webster, I argue, works through fraught theories of early modern animation, with implications for the performative life of dramatic work and the bodies and voices that give it life.

Mummy as Pharmakon

The term *mummy*, also spelled variously *mummia* or *mumia*, was derived from the Arabic word "mumiya," from the Arabic "mum," meaning "wax."[3] It was used as a reference to a black mineral pitch found in regions of Arabia. In the thirteenth century, Moslem physician and botanist Ibn al-Bay-tar used the term mummy, or *mumia*, to describe

> that which is called *bitumen Iudaicum*, and to mumia of the tombs, which is found in great quantities in Egypt, and which is the mixture which the ancient Greeks used formerly for embalming their dead, in order that their dead bodies might remain in the state in which they were buried and experience neither decay or change.[4]

From the bituminous substance used to embalm dead bodies, mummy gradually came to be defined by the human bodies themselves. According to Joseph Du Chesne, mummy was "nothing else but mans body, laid in the tombe imbalmed with Frankensence, Myrra, and Aloes. By which kinde of funerall the Sirians, Egiptians, Arabians, and Iewes, vsed in olde time to keepe their dead bodies from corrupting."[5] The evolution of the term *mummy* from a mineral pitch to the human bodies preserved with the pitch, however, retained its reference to the Middle East. As such, some of the most detailed descriptions of mummy often appeared in travel accounts under sections for Arabia and neighboring regions. The bituminous pitch was from Arabia or Egypt; the

---

[3] Richard Sugg, *Mummies, Cannibals and Vampires: The History of Corpse Medicine from the Renaissance to the Victorians* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 11.

[4] Quoted in Michael Camille, "The corpse in the garden: *mumia* in medieval herbal illustrations," *Micrologus* 7 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 305.

[5] Joseph Du Chesne, *A breefe aunswere of Iosephus Quercetanus Armeniacus, Doctor of Phisick...* (London, 1591), 33.

bodies "imbalmed with Frankensence, Myrra, and Aloes" were found among "the Sirians, Egiptians, Arabians, and Iewes." Locating these descriptions of mummy in both medical texts and travel accounts, it becomes clear that mummy was in many ways perceived to be a *foreign* substance. Mummy was consistently believed to be a substance that originated in the general area of the Middle East, used for its embalming and preserving capabilities for dead bodies, preventing them from "decay or change." Mummy appears as a substance that originates abroad in travel accounts, in botanicals and compendia of plant and animal life, and in medical treatises that kept up with advancements in medical knowledge, all of which consistently describe mummy as a foreign and exotic substance to be consumed domestically in early modern Europe. In his botanical *Theatrum botanicum* (1640), John Parkinson describes that "That which is called *Mumia*" is "of much and excellent use in all Countries of Europe," but that the substance is "the very body of a man and woman; (brought chiefly from *Egypt* or *Syria* adjoyning, and no other part of the world so good)" which is "Embalmed after the manner was used in those Countries onely."[6] Thus, as definitions of mummy evolved to refer to the embalmed body, the emphatic repetition in these descriptions was that the foreignness came from the human component of mummy—foreign bodies that were preserved using foreign processes of embalming.

What begins to emerge in descriptions of mummy is a set of categorical criteria that determines whether the substance is a "true" or "truer" type of mummy based on the foreign origins of the body or substance in contrast to "false" mummy. The distinction of what constitutes "true" mummy is thus determined in large part by region. In a section on "Of Arabia, and of the Auncient Religions, Rites, and Customes, thereof" in his *Purchas his pilgrimage*

---

[6] John Parkinson, *Theatrum botanicum: The theater of plants. Or, An herball...* (London, 1640), 1592-93.

(1613), Samuel Purchas writes that "Mummia was made of such as the sands had surprised and buried quicke," but makes the additional distinction that "the truer Mummia is made of embalmed bodies of men, as they vse to doe in Egypt, and other places."[7] What Purchas articulates is an early modern measure for evaluating mummy, bringing attention to the differences in what scholars of early modern mummy have often grouped together, as matter "procured from both ancient embalmed bodies, imported from the Middle East for the purpose, and local bodies, frequently the bodies of executed criminals sentenced to be anatomized and the bodies of those who were socially disenfranchised."[8] The matter that constituted mummy, it turns out, was believed to house significant differences between that derived from foreign, imported bodies and that of local, domestic bodies—notably, "embalmed Middle Eastern bodies" and "recently preserved European bodies." These differences determined the efficacy of mummy, a determination that could have fatal consequences. Scholar Louise Noble focuses here on a temporal distinction between older, embalmed corpses and "recently preserved" ones, but the temporal distinction maps onto the geographical distinction, a distinction I argue as more significant to mummy's efficacy, given the shifting geography of mummy as a mobile substance. Thus the primary markers of efficacy used for mummy are geographically-coded, and this geographical coding provided the primary means of *authentication* for mummy—the distinction between true and false, panacea and poison. This distinction would prove significant for Webster's rendering of the effect of the Duchess-as-mummy on her brother.

---

[7] Samuel Purchas, *Purchas his pilgrimage* (London, 1613), 467.

[8] Louise Noble, *Medicinal Cannibalism in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 2.

The budding problematic between "true" mummy and "false" mummy centered on the matter comprising the two. In his *Arcana microcosmi or, The hid secrets of man's body discovered in an anatomical duel between Aristotle and Galen concerning the parts thereof* (1652), Alexander Ross describes mummy as that which was "found in the Tombs of those Princes who had been imbalmed with rich spices," but that the mummy which is "found in ordinary graves, is not the true Mumia, but false, uselesse, or rather *pernicious for the body*, as *not being of the same materials* that the true Mumia was [emphasis mine]."[9] The danger, Ross outlines, is that such false mummy is harmful to the body because it differs in material substance to true mummy. Du Chesne, likewise, noted that "at this day we want that true and natiue mummia of the auncients," those original embalmed bodies taken from Egypt and surrounding regions, and voices the danger that "the Phisitions and Apothicaries in steede of it, vse the dried flesh" of local bodies "and that without any preparation."[10] In other words, Du Chesne complains that physicians and apothecaries counterfeit for true mummy by using unprepared local bodies in place of the foreign bodies that gave mummy its "true" status—specifically, the foreign, imported bodies, embalmed using foreign burial practices, and often with the help of regional climate, which came to be known as true mummy. Thus, the provenance of mummy was the authenticating factor for the real or "true" product. In contrast, locally farmed mummy—that derived from "ordinary graves," which came to signify bodies dug up in local graves, as well as

---

[9] Alexander Ross, *Arcana microcosmi, or, The hid secrets of man's body discovered in an anatomical duel between Aristotle and Galen concerning the parts thereof : as also, by a discovery of the strange and marveilous diseases, symptomes & accidents of man's body : with a refutation of Doctor Brown's Vulgar errors, the Lord Bacon's natural history, and Doctor Harvy's book, De generatione, Comenius, and others : whereto is annexed a letter from Doctor Pr. to the author, and his answer thereto, touching Doctor Harvy's book De Generatione / by A.R.,* 1652.

[10] Du Chesne, *A breefe aunswere*, 34.

recently and locally executed criminals' bodies—was catalogued as counterfeit or "false" mummy, along with other informally prepared or unprepared bodies.

The geographical coding of mummy is significant because it speaks to a rift between theory and practice for the process of authenticating mummy. In his *Workes* (1634), physician Ambroise Paré devotes an entire chapter to "A discourse of Mumia, or Mummie" in which he summarizes the prevailing theories about mummy. Therein he references Andre Thevet's description of *true mummy* defined by geographical or regional provenance but circulated through a kind of nomadic dispersal:

> the *true Mummie* is taken from the monuments and stony tombes of the anciently dead in Egypt, the chinkes of which tombes were closed, and cimented with such diligence; but the enclosed bodyes embalmed with precious spices with such art for eternity, that the linnen vestures which were wrapt about them presently after their death, may be seene whole even to this day; but the bodies themselves, are so fresh that you would judge them scarce to have been three dayes buryed. And yet in those Sepulchers and Vaultes from whence these bodyes are taken, there have beene some corpes of two thousand yeeres old. *The same, or their broken members are brought to Venice from Syria and Egypt, and thence disperst over all Christendom* [emphases mine].[11]

What Thevet describes here is the practical realities of how mummy comes to be circulated as a commodity. The bodies for true mummy, or indeed "their broken members," are transported to Venice, and this is by way of the middle East, namely Syria and Egypt, and from Venice "disperst over all Christendom." Thevet outlines the path that the foreign bodies of true mummy would need to take before arriving to all areas of early modern Europe for consumption.

Mummy embodies a form of overlooked Medieval and early modern nomadism, an import of particular prevalence in early modern Europe. As a nomadic substance, the geographical origins of which were much more difficult to discern than in theory, mummy spoke

---

[11] Ambroise Paré, *The workes of that famous chirurgion Ambrose Parey translated out of Latine and compared with the French* (London, 1634), 449.

to early modern concerns about diet and digestion, in addition to mummy's own purported preservative powers. On the one hand, mummy was believed to be a preservative substance with the power to heal. Mummy, understood as true mummy, was capable of preserving the body of the consumer from harm, and its potency came from the preservation of the body, its fluids, and most importantly its vital spirits. Because of its virtues, mummy was used as a key ingredient in a large variety of preservative recipes, accounting for substances such as Sir Peter Temple's balm, "The most vniuersall medcine in this booke" (f. 98r).[12] The mummy-infused balm, Temple holds, cures all manner of woes/griefs. As evidence he lists forty-two virtues of the balm, a large majority of which he annotates "probatum est"—"it is proven"—to verify its efficacy. The virtues of the mummy-infused balm included the following:

> good for all manner of Greene-wounds outward or Inward being the first thing aply'd there to...good for old atches...good for all maner of strains...good for the Gout that proceeds from cold...good for the Ciatica...good for Cornes on the Toes...good for the Collicke...good for Grinding or Griping in the Belly...good for stoping of blood... (99r-101r)

The uses of mummy as a kind of panacea made it an extremely valuable commodity—so much so that mummy was a literal example of how the dead body could be more valuable than the living.

Additionally, in the cultural milieu of early modern England and Europe, mummy was increasingly becoming a contentious substance. What studies on early modern mummy have neglected to delineate are the ways in which the true/false, foreign/local distinction made

[12] Stowe MS 1077, British Library.

mummy an ingestible substance that ran counter to the prevailing ideas about foreign and local substances in early modern culinary and medical thought.[13] Both culinary and medical knowledge were experimented with and validated through effects on the body and subscribed to the same ideas of internal balance and external threat that the prevailing view of the Galenic humoral body advertised. The well-being of the early modern body depended on those non-natural substances—most notably diet—that individuals brought into their bodies to maintain or regulate the balance of their natural complexions. In the diet-focused philosophy of the early modern well-tempered body, local ingredients were preferable to foreign ingredients because region determined diet; foods that were local were the foods that the English or European body was accustomed to. If the body were to ingest foods that were foreign, exotic, or otherwise unfamiliar, the body, unaccustomed to those foods, may reject them outright. The resulting instances of indigestion—or worse—with the consumption of foreign foods led to the theory that foreign foods were poisonous. Thus, the history of food and diet, which was at the time also the history of medicine, promoted an association between the foreign/exotic and the poisonous, speaking to a deeply engrained philosophy of human difference between regions and races of people.

I pause here to stress, then, what an anomaly the idea of preservative foreign mummy was. According to the logic of mummy, foreign matter was preferable to local matter, more efficacious for the preservation of the body. This was completely at odds with the traditional

[13] The controversies surrounding mummy involved contrasting philosophies of human difference and human universality that figured in the philosophies of health that circulated in what I conceptualize as culinary nomadism and medical nomadism. By culinary and medical nomadisms, I refer to the circulation of material ingredients, practices, and experiential and experimental knowledge that accompanied the advancement of the early modern culture of diet, health, and medicine, all of which were related and interconnected but which, I suspect, begin ever so subtly to branch out into what would later become distinctly culinary and medical modes of thought; from early on, however, the culinary and the medical are integrated.

association of foreign products with poisonous material—the idea of "foreign contamination." In the philosophy of mummy, wherein the ideas of "foreign" and "local" are situated in early modern Anglocentric (and Eurocentric) thinking, foreign bodies contained the power to heal as true mummy. In Fray Luis de Urreta's history of Ethiopia (1610-11), for example, the process of making mummy requires a foreign body:

> take a captive Moor, of the best complexion; and after long dieting and medicining of him, cut off his head in his sleep, and gashing his body full of wounds, put therein all the best spices, and then wrap him up in hay, being before covered with a cerecloth; after which they bury him in a moist place, covering the body with earth. Five days being passed, they take him up again, and removing the cerecloth and hay, hang him up in the sun, whereby the body resolveth and droppeth a substance like pure balm, which liquor is of great price: the fragrant scent is such, while it hangeth in the sun, that it may be smelt.[14]

In this graphically culinary description of an Ethiopian method of manufacturing *mumia*, the Moor is dressed much like a meat, stuffed with spices. The preparation is culinary, but it is the Moor's body that provides the essential material needed for the production of mummy. Similarly, Webster's Ethiopian servant Zanche in *The White Devil* (1612) offers up her body as a medicinal source. Zanche, or "The Moor," as Monticelso refers to her, recognizes the medicinal potential of her body:

> I have blood
> As red as either of theirs: wilt drink some?
> 'Tis good for the falling-sickness. I am proud:
> Death cannot alter my complexion,
> For I shall ne'er look pale. (5.6.223-237)[15]

What Zanche articulates here is her awareness of medicinal cannibalism—in the form of blood drinking—as a remedy for epilepsy, also called "the falling-sickness." But furthermore, by

---

[14] Samuel Purchas, *Purchas his pilgrimage* (London, 1617), p. 849.

[15] John Webster, *The White Devil* (Methuen Drama, 2008).

offering up her body as physic, she gestures explicitly to her own blood as a source of medicinal remedy, a gesture further racialized by what precedes and follows that offer. Her blood, she acknowledges, is "As red as either of theirs," referring to her white counterparts in the play, even if her body is unmistakably foreign; moreover, her body is racially marked by her "complexion" which cannot be altered "For I shall ne'er look pale." Thus, Zanche here identifies in no uncertain terms her body of difference as consumable and as a particular source of remedy upon being consumed. As the one true moor of the play, and marked thus as foreign, Zanche is the one body that theoretically would provide the proper material for true, efficacious mummy.

Mummy was aptly described by Thomas Fuller as "good Physick, but bad food."[16] As physic, it was medically sanctioned cannibalism, wherein the "mysterious healing potency" of the human body was "transmitted through ingestion and absorption."[17] At the same time, as a form of cannibalism, mummy was subject to the early modern horror and fascination with eating human products. According to dietary philosophy, substances that were "most similar to the human body" were subsequently "the most easily assimilated and thus the most nutritious"; this theory taken to its logical extreme, however, would mean that "the substance most easily converted into human flesh, then, is nothing other than human flesh itself."[18] Thus, in Renaissance dietary logic, like not only attracted like—like was best assimilated, best absorbed, agreed most with like, meaning cannibalism would comprise the most ideal diet. As noted earlier, foreign foods were dangerous due to this like-to-like rationale. But the danger that foreign foods

---

[16] Thomas Fuller, *Good Thoughts in Worse Times Consisting of Personall Meditations, Scripture Observations, Meditations on the Times* (London, 1647), 101.

[17] Noble, *Medicinal Cannibalism*, 5.

[18] Ken Albala, *Eating Right in the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 68.

and ingredients posed went beyond mere disagreement with the body; perhaps more threateningly, foreign foods had the power to *transform*. Because of the body's inherent ability to adjust, the body could incorporate and retain foreign qualities through what it ingested; a gradual change in diet had the potential—and was even proven—to change the body. In this way, foreign ingredients were thought to be capable of transforming or altering what we now think of as racial or ethnic identity.[19] Thus the danger of foreign food items was not just that they poisoned, but that they had the potential to actually change local bodies. If foreign foods could poison—and eventually transform—how much greater, then, the threat of foreign human flesh as something to be ingested? How much greater, too, the problematic local bodies according to the system of poisonous, locally-harvested mummy? These distinctions were crucial in determining the resulting effects of mummy as *pharmakon*—as remedy or poison.

Furthermore, the realities of mummy's dispersal throughout early modern Europe made the true/false distinction near impossible to verify in practice. In the reality of the economic circulation of foreign imports, mummy resulted in a number of anatomized and dismembered human bodies pulverized and dispersed throughout early modern Europe. In practice, in other words, mummy was unidentified and unidentifiable, and therefore unable to be verified as coming from a "true" or "false" source. Thus, travel accounts or medical treatises, wherein early modern writers have established the guidelines or descriptions for determining the origins of mummy, are contrasted to Webster's literary experiments for mummy, in which he locates mummy in any local body within the world of his plays.Webster obsesses over identifying the

[19] Historian Rebecca Earle identifies this dietary and racial fear in her study of early modern Spanish perceptions of diet on European and Amerindian bodies. Upon the discovery of the New World, the Spanish found that consuming the food of the natives did not agree with them, and thus began the impetus to transplant Spanish crops and other food items to colonial settlements in the Americas. See Rebecca Earle, *The Body of the Conquistador* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

bodies from which the mummy comes, and in *The White Devil* mummy comes from the bodies of Lodovico and Vittoria, both locals in the world of the play and criminals. Mummy appears twice in *The White Devil*, both times as images of violence to bodily integrity, false mummy that is pernicious to the body. In the first example, Gasparo tells Count Lodovico that

> Your followers
> Have swallowed you like mummia, and being sick
> With such unnatural and horrid physic
> Vomit you up i'th' kennel. (1.1.15-18)

In this first image, Webster describes mummia, or mummy, as "unnatural and horrid physic" that makes one sick, inducing vomiting, a description matching the effects of poison. Through Gasparo's analogy, we are forced to imagine Count Lodovico's body as potential mummy, and poisonous mummy, from its hypothetical effects on the bodies of those who consume him. Not being a "foreign" body in the play, that which would provide true mummy, Lodovico produces instead false mummy that poisons and harms. Later, Webster demonstrates the process of making mummy, a product derived from the dismemberment and decomposition of the human body, in Isabella's threat to make Vittoria into mummy. She threatens to

> dig that strumpet's [Vittoria's] eyes out; let her lie
> Some twenty months a-dying; to cut off
> Her nose and lips, pull out her rotten teeth;
> Preserve her flesh like mummia, for trophies
> Of my just anger. (2.1.248-9)

Webster shows here how "mummy"—particularly, false mummy—can be made from any body. Isabella's description forces us to imagine Vittoria's body undergoing the dismemberment and "preserving" process that will produce false mummy since she, too, does not constitute the foreign body that would produce true mummy. The two images of local *mummia* in *The White*

Devil, alongside Zanche's example of, perhaps, truer or at least efficacious physic, confirm the theory that the foreign body can provide true physic and the practice whereby local bodies are poisonous but easily accessible and easily made counterfeit mummy. These images work together to reveal Webster's understanding of the darker world of false mummy beyond the advertised preservative effects of the true, revealing his understanding of the cultural controversies surrounding mummy—its status as pharmakon/poison, its unverifiability—beyond its perceived healing capabilities. In Webster's world, the implicit danger is that "mummy" is always the poisonous, local mummy.

Webster demonstrates the danger of unverified and indiscriminate bodies used for mummy, how easily mummy is made and counterfeited when local bodies can be used in place of perceived foreign ones. The practices of counterfeiting mummy—by, for example, digging up graves, or processing locally executed bodies—led to a growing suspicion of mummy as false, poisonous mummy, the kind of vomit-inducing "unnatural and horrid physic" Webster describes. The drive to counterfeit, however, derived from the value of a substance like mummy, which depended on a promise of preservation, however elusive—the notion of the powerful panacea capable of curing all ills. The healing power attributed to mummy was dependent upon a set of practices in the production of the substance that determined whether the corpse material, the dead bodies, from which the mummy was produced was the proper material. The promises of true mummy would ensure that there was value, perhaps more value, in the corpse than in the living body. Depictions of mummy often illustrated the entire corpse in a coffin, mirroring typical depictions of the corpse. In a late fifteenth-century copy of the popular medieval pharmacopia, the *Livre des simples médecines*, the entry for *momie* is illustrated by "an image of

an open tomb displaying its grisly contents: a blackened skeletal corpse with its abdomen sliced open, its head thrust back and the hands coyly covering the genitals."[20] Most often depicted in much the same way in other herbals, the entire corpse, according to art historian Michael Camille, was the "context" for mummia: "all the illustrated copies with the exception of a few...illustrate it using the same visual image of the corpse in its sepulcher."[21] As a result, the representative value of mummy is the inviolate whole of the (preserved) corpse, usually encased within the coffin. Listed among other simples with medicinal qualities, mummy's representation, Camille argues, symbolized the whole corpse, emphasizing that the powdered or pulverized substance individuals purchased still had synecdochic significance:

> The key to understanding why *mumia* was so potent a drug is to be found not in its naturalism of depiction but in its symbolic wholeness... For even though when you went to buy your mummy to cure your stomach you bought only a small amount of sticky black stuff in a vial or even in powdered form, a few black grains of substance, the image of what you were buying retained the integrity of the corpse, the inviolate whole of the cadaver, the sign of death itself and its power to bind and control.[22]

In other words, the "inviolate whole" of the corpse that the corpse *drug* represented contributed in large part to the notion that the drug had preservative, and curative, qualities.

But the very notion of that "inviolate whole" body becoming food for the sake of becoming a *cure* for the consumer spoke to highly contentious debates about the status of life and death in the body. After all, mummy was consumed, ingested, and believed to be effective because of those qualities that defined a living body; it was believed that the life essences, or vital essences, of the "inviolate whole" were preserved in mummy and would transfer to the

---

[20] Michael Camille, "The corpse in the garden: mumia in medieval herbal illustrations," *Micrologus* 7 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 298.

[21] Camille, "Corpse in the garden," 299.

[22] Camille, 317.

consumer. If mummy indeed had the power to heal or to cure because of vital essences that remained in the corpse from which it was processed, what was the status of life in the corpse?

Lingering Life in the Early Modern Corpse

To determine the status of life in the corpse, an evaluation much more complicated that it might initially seem, it helps first to delineate what constituted the dead body. As Susan Zimmerman poses, what is it about the body itself that marks it as dead? Two primary early modern discourses—scientific and religious—attempted to define what exactly it meant to be "dead," a label that was deceptively simple and reductive for a state that was far more complex. In many ways, the debate was grounded in the ideological rifts that formed between religions with the Protestant Reformation. It was the nature of the Christian body that was under fire in the sixteenth century; the materiality of the body was at the heart of fundamental religious debates, in which Protestant reformers in England "repudiat[ed] Catholicism's persistent foregrounding of the body and its images in ritual practices (including funerary and burial rites)."[23] The Catholic emphasis on the body, according to Protestant reformers, was a "preoccupation with the corporeal" that disturbed the relationship between the body and the soul; according to this emphasis, "generative power" was a "constituent property of materiality," which meant that the body could have a "life" of its own beyond the soul.[24] The status of the material body, as living or dead, undergirded the most pervasive religious controversies of the time, as a result of which

[23] Susan Zimmerman, *The Early Modern Corpse and Shakespeare's Theatre* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 7.

[24] "To Protestant reformers,…the Catholic preoccupation with the corporeal dangerously distorted the relationship between body and soul by implying that generative power might be a constituent property of materiality—that the material body (before and after death) could have an independent or autonomous viability, a 'life' without benefit of informing spirit." Zimmerman, *Early Modern Corpse*, 8.

Protestantism aimed to "reformulate materiality," i.e. the body and flesh, as "definitively *dead*," to counter the largely Catholic elision of the body and the spirit, matter and life.[25]

The belief that the corpse mysteriously retained life persisted. Anatomists, needing to dissect corpses for research in the growing practicum of the field of anatomy, had to defend themselves "against the accusation that dissection desecrated the dead."[26] Such "desecrations" of dead bodies became a culturally constructed taboo, intended to protect against "the mysterious power of the corpse," the belief that it could, for example, "rejuvenate the living through its *mummia*."[27] But if the cutting open of the corpse was believed to be a desecration of the dead body, a transgression or contamination of the "inviolate whole" or the "mysterious power of the corpse," that notion was contradicted by other paradigms of the dismemberment of the body. Though we might be struck by the violence of dismemberment in Isabella's narration of Vittoria's transformation to mummy in *The White Devil*, the dismemberment in the process of making mummy paradoxically had ties to a burial practice that was sometimes called "division of the corpse." This division of the corpse was related to embalming, and may have developed from the embalming process, which "typically involved evisceration" and was "used to preserve

---

[25] Zimmerman, *Early Modern Corpse*, 8. Zimmerman additionally identifies the "conceptual connections between Catholic hypostatisation of the body"—that is to say, the abstraction of the spirit made material in the body—and "the dissolution of Christian identity that made sense of Protestant opposition to such seemingly disparate phenomena as cosmeticised women, relics and painted statues" (27). Webster brings all three of these—cosmeticized women, relics, and painted figures in the form of the wax figures—into the circulation of death in *The Duchess* and onto the stage. "Protestants believed that similar ontological confusions…inevitably accompanied Catholic practices of revering relics and statues" (27). "In worshipping these artifacts, the faithful not only confused material signifiers with immaterial entities, they also embraced the concept of falsely autonomous, or wholly debased, material bodies" (27). "But it was the ontological status of the corpse—in a sense, the ultimate relic—that foregrounded most dramatically the complexity of the relationship between redeemed and debased bodies in the Christian system" (27).

[26] Zimmerman, *Early Modern Corpse*, 9.

[27] Zimmerman, *Early Modern Corpse*, 9.

bodies for state funerals."[28] In the extreme, sometimes division of the corpse involved "completely dismembering the body."[29] Yet in this case, the dismemberment of the body in the division of the corpse was "long since…domesticated by the Christian cult of relics," which were often themselves "severed body parts."[30] The practice of dividing the corpse arose in part from the practicalities of travel and transporting the dead body for burial "when the person in question had died far from home."[31]

If corpse division was a condoned practice of dismembering a dead body, it therefore spoke to differences between northern and southern European—specifically Italian—beliefs about the nature of the "dead" body. Katharine Park argues that the contrasting ideas about what constituted the dead body led to differences in the way the body was handled upon death and what requests were made for the preparation of the corpse in the Middle Ages and the early modern period. In Italy, death was imagined as "a quick and radical separation of body and soul"; in contrast, northern European countries like England saw death as "an extended and gradual process," which corresponded to the "slow decomposition of the corpse and its reduction to the skeleton and hard tissues, which was thought to last about a year."[32] Thus, for the Italians death was instantaneous, which meant that at the moment of death there was an immediate separation of body and soul; thus the recently dead body was "inert or inactive." For the northern Europeans who believed that death took about a year to complete, the recently dead body was

---

[28] Katharine Park, "The Life of the Corpse: Division and Dissection in Late Medieval Europe," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 50.1 (1995): 111-132, 111.

[29] Katharine Park, "Life of the Corpse," 111-12.

[30] Katharine Park, "Life of the Corpse," 115.

[31] Katharine Park, "Life of the Corpse," 112.

[32] Katharine Park, "Life of the Corpse," 115.

treated during this "liminal period" as "active, sensitive, or semianimate, possessed of a gradually fading life."[33] This is in part what contributes to what Zimmerman describes as the "graveyard ambience" in *The Duchess of Malfi*, an ambience that proceeds from the long and popular tradition of the "mysterious semi-animate status" of the corpse.[34]

It was because of the northern European belief in a kind of "lingering vitality" of the corpse that Park identifies an interest in corpse medicine, "drugs made from the fat or flesh of the recently dead," as a "predominantly northern European" interest.[35] The perceived vitality of the corpse thus led to differing views on mummy. In her observation of sixteenth-century German and Italian medical sources, Park notes that Italian writers emphasized that "real mummy" came from "embalmed and long-dead corpses," whereas the Swiss-German Paracelsus believed that "real mummy" came from the corpse of someone who died "an unnatural rather than a natural death, before falling ill"; Paracelsus's theory was the corpse drug needed to be harvested sooner rather than later to reap the benefits of its lingering vitality: "such a body should not sit longer than a day and a night before the drug was harvested—only enough time to absorb the influence of the sun and moon."[36] Thus, in the discourse of the early modern corpse, mummy figured as a special and troubling case, affected by and itself complicating ideas about life, death, and the body. If live bodies were seen as already dead, as Webster portrays, conversely corpses and dead bodies were seen as potentially still living.

---

[33] Katharine Park, "Life of the Corpse," 115.

[34] Zimmerman, *Early Modern Corpse*, 129.

[35] Katharine Park, "Life of the Corpse," 116.

[36] Katharine Park, "Life of the Corpse," 116-7.

The quality of semi-animacy, that lingering life, which formed the belief in the vitality retained in mummy and transferred to the consumer, derived from the life of the person when they were still alive. The northern European belief in "a sensitive and potentially active corpse" was not merely relegated to "residual life" generally remaining in the corpse, but acknowledged more specifically the nature of the life of the formerly living self.[37] In other words, the northern Europeans considered the material body to be "integral to the self," which meant that the "selfhood of the corpse persisted" after death and during the "transitional year" after burial.[38] In this "liminal" state, during which the body decomposed, this selfhood of the corpse, Park argues, "did not depend at all on the body remaining intact," which meant that "its personal identity and properties could inhere in its scattered parts as easily as in the whole"—i.e., in saintly relics or in mummy.[39] In contrast, the Italians separated the self from the material body, identifying the self instead with the soul or the spirit. The self as the immaterial Christian soul was believed to "temporarily animat[e] and [inhabit]" the body until death, at which point the soul left the body.[40] In this Italian view, then, death marked the immediate separation of body and soul in contrast to the northern view that the corpse retained life during the process of gradual decomposition. Thus, in the moment of death, the corpse became "insensitive and inanimate, a not-self," changing its status "*from subject to object* [emphasis mine]."[41] The ambiguity surrounding this distinction between the body as subject or as object, a distinction rooted in the

---

[37] Katharine Park, "Life of the Corpse," 118-119.

[38] Katharine Park, "Life of the Corpse," 119.

[39] Katharine Park, "Life of the Corpse," 119.

[40] Katharine Park, "Life of the Corpse," 119.

[41] Katharine Park, "Life of the Corpse," 119. "No longer a person, it became a memento that recalled or represented the person by virtue of long and intimate association."

interpretation of what constituted life in the body, plays out in Webster's characterization of the Duchess both as herself and as mummy and how her body is read in light of the semi-animate corpse.

The Preservative Duchess

In light of debates about the status of life in the corpse, how are we to read the significance of Bosola's reduction of the Duchess's body to no more than a "salvatory of green mummy" (4.2.118-19)? The theory behind mummy as an effective preservative holds that mummy retains elements of life. The Duchess's comparison to mummy thus paradoxically both depicts her body as dead, but also as a corpse that retains life. In other words, to be considered mummy, even portraying the Duchess as dead means that she retains some vital element even upon death. This latent vitality provides, like Shakespeare's Cleopatra, a way for the Duchess to persevere through being consumed, if indeed life remains in mummy to be transferred to the consumer.

If debates about the status of life in the corpse addressed the extent to which the early moderns considered the body part of the self, it is all the more fitting that Bosola's reference to green mummy comes as a response to the Duchess's significant question posed to him: "Who am I?" It is in reply to this that Bosola states, "Thou art a box of worm-seed, at best, but a salvatory of green mummy: what's this flesh? a little cruded milk, fantastical puff-paste: our bodies are weaker than those paper-prisons boys use to keep flies in: more contemptible; since ours is to preserve earthworms" (4.2.123-7). According to Bosola, the Duchess is not a "who"—a subjectivity or a self—but rather a number of "whats," "stuff." At best, he says, she is a "salvatory of green mummy," a box containing recycled remnants of human body parts to be

used, consumed, ingested by others for purposes of physic. She is flesh that has been chopped and pulverized as medicine for sale at the apothecary shops, flesh that, Bosola continues, is compared to curdling or rotting milk, fragile puff-pastry, paper fly-traps. Even worse since our flesh, Bosola implies, serves the purpose of preserving earthworms—when dead, we serve as the sustenance our bodies provide for worms.[42] Through Webster's perspective, the body—as mummy—is always in a state of dynamic deadness. Bosola's example not only describes the Duchess as mummy, but he breaks down further what mummy, what bodily flesh is, and characterizes it as *food*.[43] The Duchess's identity, framed by her question "Who am I," is reduced to a substance, a drug derived from human corpses—she is reduced, in a sense, not only to her dead body, but to her *consumable* dead body.

In a sense, dead bodies in *The Duchess of Malfi* are already marked as being consumable. Earlier in the play, Bosola meditates that

> in our own flesh, …we bear diseases
> Which have their true names only tane from beasts,
> As the most ulcerous wolf, and swinish measle;
> Though we are eaten up of lice, and worms,

---

[42] Webster's ideas of death and decay and the worms that metonymically represent our dead and decomposing bodies accompany—introduce, in fact—the entire play in its printed form in his dedicatory epistle. It is in the epistle that Webster describes the Baron Berkeley's favor as "mak[ing] you live in your grave, and laurel spring out of it" and compares "the ignorant scorners of the Muses" to "worms in libraries" that "live only to destroy learning," that "wither, neglected and forgotten." The worms are made both symptomatic of and preserved by the dead body. Worms are also representative of the process of decay and destruction, as well as of neglect—and it is through neglect that the worms are most closely associated with Bosola. Bosola is the neglected figure, one whose misfortunes are guided by his state of neglect.

[43] Culinary confections and baked meats, it turns out, were apt metaphors for the conceptualization of (the dead body as) mummy; baked meats, pies, and human corpses prepared for burial were all presented in what was called a coffin, the outer "basket" which was often composed of "puff-pastry," another term Bosola uses to describe the human body. Beyond the metaphor, the preparation of dead bodies for mummy often read as culinary. The association between pasties and corpses was not as far-fetched as we might think. As Wendy Wall has noted, the kitchen for the early moderns was a site that was associated with death and mortality; see her "Jell-O: Mortality and Mutability in the Kitchen." *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* 6:1 (2006): 41-50. Indeed, in *The White Devil* Zanche compares, perhaps recognizes, the act of killing as the act of tasting; she tells Flamineo that one of them should be the one to kill Vittoria: "let you or I / Be her sad taster, teach her how to die." So, too, Vittoria herself acknowledges in the act of killing the act of ingestion, and of cannibalism turned physic: "To kill one's self is meat that we must take / Like pills, not chew'd, but quickly swallow it."

> And though continually we bear about us
> A rotten and dead body, we delight
> To hide it in rich tissue: all our fear,
> Nay, all our terror, is, lest our physician
> Should put us in the ground to be made sweet. (2.1.55-64)

In Bosola's meditation, while living, the default status of the body is already "rotten and dead." Here the notion is also that our bodies become "sweet"—consumable—after we die and are buried, with the suggestion that there is a sweetness that develops in the process of decomposition—a rotting sweetness—as well as the literal sweetness that comes from embalming with spices and, in some cases, honey. The threat of becoming mummy looms over all of life, is the default state of things. The living are perceived as carrying a dead body with them—they, the living, are already mummy. This is only reinforced by the image of the physician placing the bodies in the ground "to be made sweet"; the phrasing, "to be made," indicates that being made sweet is the very purpose for burying bodies in the ground, and the gustatory sense invoked forces us to consider the dead body as the ingestible body. "Our fear," of being put in the ground to be made sweet actually suggests the preservation of bodies—specifically the use of embalmed or otherwise preserved dead bodies that were valued for the vitality they were believed to retain. By becoming mummy, "the corpse is no longer an individual person...It has become food for us--to be eaten by anyone who wants to be cured of ailments ranging from nosebleeds to dyssentry."[44]

Thus, when we consider the Duchess's body as no more than a salvatory of green mummy, we need to consider the entirety of the mummy controversy for Webster. Because of the significance of local or foreign provenance for items, other bodies, ingested into the body,

---

[44] Michael Camille, "The corpse in the garden: *mumia* in medieval herbal illustrations," *Micrologus* 7 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 298.

Webster zeroes in on the bodies he explicitly, if metaphorically, transforms into mummy on stage while gesturing to the potential for *any* body to become mummy. While Noble forgoes "establish[ing] the identity of those whose bodies were processed as medicine," dismissing it as "an impossible task,"[45] I argue that those identities, if impossible to uncover in practical reality, are what Webster significantly obsesses about in relation to mummy in both tragedies and are key to understanding his larger concerns with death and bodies in *The Duchess*, and particularly the problematic of bodily matter—wherefore the body, and to what extent is the body aligned with, or at odds with, selfhood?

Both as herself and as mummy, the Duchess, if perhaps unwillingly, enters—or is made to enter—into the kind of objectified circulation of production, consumption, and ingestion characteristic of culinary and medical nomadisms. It is helpful, therefore, to consider the Duchess, and mummy, as contrasting but integrated examples of Rosi Braidotti's nomadic subject. According to Braidotti's theory of nomadic subjectivity, rooted in feminist theory, the

> "disposable" bodies of women, youth, and others who are racialized or marked off by age, gender, sexuality, and income, reduced to marginality, come to be inscribed with a particular violence in this regime of power. They experience dispossession of their embodied and embedded selves, in a political economy of repeated and structurally enforced eviction (Sassen 1996).[46]

Applying Braidotti's ideas to the Duchess's status is useful in that it opens up the study of early modern food and medicine to the feminist and globalized discourses that have been essential to the study of early modern travel and exchange but have as yet eluded the materialist discourses of food and medicine. Mummy unsettles the theoretical framework of Braidotti's nomadic

---

[45] Noble, *Medicinal Cannibalism*, 5.

[46] Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 6.

subjectivity precisely because it literalizes it. To borrow the structure of Braidotti's proposed description and to reconfigure it for mummy, I propose the following: in the substance and symbol of nomadic mummy, "disposable" bodies are marked off by age, gender, sexuality, race, and class, reduced to object and are inscribed by a violence that is quite literal—the bruising, pulverizing, and dismemberment of the body. These bodies, or "they," experience a dispossession of their embodied and embedded "selves" in a medical economy dictated by the troubled/ing authentication of a falsely constructed exoticism and the misperception of a greater value of the body as a victim of violence and death.

If Braidotti's point of nomadic subjectivity is to identify a "creative alternative space of becoming that would fall not between the mobile/immobile, the resident/the foreigner distinction, but within all these categories,"[47] my point is to look at the Duchess-as-mummy—the Mummy of Malfi—as herself a nomadic subject and object who aims to preserve herself by dictating the terms of her own circulation. Nomadism, Braidotti asserts, is "not fluidity without borders, but rather an acute awareness of the nonfixity of boundaries. It is the intense desire to go on trespassing, transgressing."[48] The Duchess resists categorization precisely because she rests at the intersection of the living and the dead in circulation—the fertile woman and the life-giving corpse drug. A representative of the intermediary space between life and death, the Duchess embodies the transition between the two states, recognizing that they are fluid and two-directional, invoking nomadic boundary-crossing and states of liminality as the norm: "I know death hath ten thousand several doors," the Duchess notes, "For men to take their exits; and 'tis

---

[47] Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 7.

[48] Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 66.

found / They go on such strange geometrical hinges, / You may open them both ways" (4.2.215-18). The Duchess not only straddles life and death most explicitly in the play, but she is also the one who recognizes the fluidity of these seeming disparate states of being, embodying in herself the fraught tensions about matter and vitality in the belief system of the early modern English.

For those around the Duchess, the paradox that the dead body—for consumption—is more valuable than the living body forms the obsession with the Duchess's body, especially for her brothers. Mummy forms the lens through which Webster examines the ramifications of this paradoxical thinking. The Duchess, while recognizing the fluidity of life and death, still acknowledges the external evaluation of bodies in the marketplace:

> Our value never can be truly known,
> Till in the Fisher's basket we be shown;
> I'th' Market then my price may be the higher,
> Even when I am nearest to the Cook, and fire. (3.5.135-8)

The Duchess of Malfi thus becomes the mummy from Malfi, not to be circulated, but to be eaten — imagined as "sweet" eating—most explicitly by her brothers who, she repeatedly remarks, feed upon her. The Duchess knows her brothers await her death in order to consume her: analogously she notes "With such a pity men preserve alive / Pheasants and quails, when they are not fat enough / To be eaten" (3.5.109-11). So, too, the Duchess understands how she is being evaluated for what she offers to her brothers upon her death. "Go tell my brothers, when I am laid out," she acknowledges upon her death, "They then may feede in quiet" (4.2.223- 24). Saying goodbye to Cariola, she tells her "Farewell, Cariola. / In my last will I have not much to give: / A many hungry guests have fed upon me; / Thine will be a poor reversion" (4.2.96-9). The

Duchess, Webster suggests, understands how her value is being perceived, for what she affords her consumers.

The rift between Protestant reformists and the Catholics, the northern Europeans—i.e., the English—and the Italians, clarifies why Webster might have depicted the ambiguous status of the Duchess as a living and an already dead body. Because of the life force that lingered in mummy that was available for consumption, Ferdinand and Bosola and others who see the Duchess as already dead would have recognized her value from the vitality she carried while living. As much as the Duchess perceived as a potential corpse, she is constantly described in terms that indicate her embodiment of a dynamic life force. Her vitality, represented as having preservative—or restorative—powers, at times borders on the ability to defy death. For example, from early in the play she is able to raise men from the dead:

> whilst she speaks,
> She throws upon a man so sweet a look
> That it were able to raise one to a galliard
> That lay in a dead palsy. (1.2.116-19)

Antonio here, admiring the Duchess, describes her life force as a life-*giving* force. This is perhaps why she is mistaken to be more valuable upon death, for promising to provide those virtues for which mummy was prized. In her pleas, her concern continues to be the preservation or provision of life: "Make not your heart so dead a piece of flesh," she beseeches Antonio, "To fear more than to love me" (1.2.367-8). Even when the Duchess wastes away at the sight of her seemingly dead family, she speaks in terms of resisting death and reviving the dead, calling upon Portia, wife of Brutus:

> That's the greatest torture souls feel in hell,
> In hell: that they must live, and cannot die.

> Portia, I'll new kindle thy coals again,
> And *revive the rare and almost dead example*
> Of a loving wife. [emphasis mine] (4.1.70-74)

Webster thus sets up the imminent "threat" of her as a source of continual life. Like the true mummy, both in what it promises through ingestion and also in its value as an expensive exotic commodity, the Duchess is believed by her brothers, Ferdinand and the Cardinal, to be more valuable dead than alive, explicitly through the wealth her brothers hope to gain by her death. However, the extension of her live-giving force is that which her brothers fear most: her fertility —her ability to procreate, have children, and extend the family line.

The Duchess's vitality, as a kind of life-giving force and, by extension, a healing force, contributes to her argument for her "circulation" outside the limitations of the dead body in a way that her brothers fear. The value of the kind of freedom of mobility that she seeks—be it mobility of status, of behavior, of desire—is one that finds its model in the circulation of precious jewels like the diamond: "Diamonds are of most value / They say, that have pass'd through most jewellers' hands" (1.2.220-1). The diamonds become a kind of symbol for the Duchess's advocacy of nomadism and circulation, symbolic of a freedom of movement and of agency. Given the nature of her brothers' obsession with controlling her, the Duchess may have intended the tongue-in-cheek nod to the potential misinterpretation of her diamond analogy by her brothers: Ferdinand, in his incestuous and possessive paranoia, takes the bait: "Whores, by that rule, are precious" he retorts (1.2.222). It is this distinctly sexual obsession and desire for control that Ferdinand has that makes the idea of the Duchess's "circulation" particularly distasteful and dangerous to him. The Duchess's eventual re-marriage, and the birth of her children, become to Ferdinand markers only of the Duchess in circulation, that is to say her

uncontainable sexuality and fertility. Her brothers, in their greed and their fear, want to prevent her mobility while alive. Thus, paradoxically, the Duchess of Malfi seeks rather to be a kind of nomadic subject whereas her brothers seek to make her into an object whose circulation, or nomadism, is not a threat because it is under their control.

Because of the ways in which the Duchess's ability to procreate deprives Ferdinand and the Cardinal of control over her body as well as her assets, the Duchess's body is more valuable to them dead than alive—that is to say, in circulation as an object rather than as a subject, a live body capable of producing. The struggle for control over the Duchess's vitality, amidst debates about the nature of the body and selfhood, was a struggle for her subjectivity and a struggle for dominance of agency. The Duchess recognizes that the state of being alive enables her agency by preserving her self, and resists her brothers' attempts to contain her early in the play. When Ferdinand violently attempts to find the Duchess's new husband, whom he does not know is Antonio, the Duchess questions his motives for preventing her marriage: "Why should only I," she asks, "Of all the other princes of the world, / Be cas'd up, like a holy relic? I have youth / And a little beauty" (3.2.137-40). She has use and a purpose as a living being, the Duchess argues, recognizing that a role as a relic is one in which her vitality serves another's purpose, rather than her own. Thus, when the Duchess is reduced to nothing more than a salvatory of green mummy by Bosola, when we are being directed to read her on stage as the performance of a corpse, she both recognizes and resists that role by announcing famously, "I am the Duchess of Malfi still" (4.2.139). She asserts her selfhood in the moment she is deprived of it.

Ferdinand and the Cardinal fear the nomadism of the Duchess as a self, as a live body, a nomadism they associate with promiscuity. Her vitality, thus, would be generative rather than

contained and controlled, making her ability to procreate open to the production of new selves, or in her brothers' view prone to unwanted corruption from the outside. Especially for Ferdinand, it is the corruption or tainting of her—and "his"—blood, the intermixing of the family line with a foreign component, that is particularly horrifying and forms his obsession with controlling her body. "Damn her! that body of hers," Ferdinand obsesses, "While that my blood ran pure in't, was more worth / Than that which thou wouldst comfort, call'd a soul" (4.1.119-21). Rather than advocating for a kind of promiscuity, however, the significance of the Duchess's vitality as selfhood is that it prescribes to her some agency as a nomadic subject, that freedom of mobility that resists being cased up like a holy relic. Her admittance of the "foreign," in the sense of foreign blood—that of Antonio—prescribes to the right ideology of mummy, in which the foreign is beneficial, and even necessary for healthy procreation.

In reading the Duchess as mummy, un-metaphoring her comparison to dead-but-living bodily matter, the instances of her brothers feeding upon her can be seen as more than just a metaphor for obtaining her wealth. The Duchess of Malfi, reduced to her dead body, to mummy, to her flesh, is arguably the most local body of the play. In her brothers' eyes, the Duchess is already potentially dead, is already thought of in terms of being ripe for the digging up. As the most local mummy, she is thus the most poisonous "mummy" for her brothers who misinterpret her value and her danger to them. Because she is their sister, she is the most local and poisonous body for their consumption. In the logic of false mummy, the Duchess's body would be most poisonous particularly for Ferdinand who, we find out, is her *twin brother* and whose desires are entrenched in the taboo of incest. She becomes the physical and physiological manifestation of what Bosola notes to Ferdinand, that "You have bloodily approv'd the ancient truth, / That

kindred commonly do worse agree / Than remote strangers" (4.2.264-66); taken quite literally, the Duchess's ingestion by Ferdinand would disagree with him most, a situation that Ferdinand misreads.

Ferdinand's misreading of the Duchess as mummy, as an ingestible preservative, addresses one of the central questions scholars have grappled with in the play: the nature and cause of Ferdinand's lycanthropy. Interpretations for this sinister transformation have ranged from self-alienation, Ferdinand's association with the devil, and his psychological deterioration and madness stemming from the taboo of his incestual relationship with his sister.[49] Among the reasons for *why* Webster may have chosen lycanthropy as an appropriate affliction for Ferdinand, I argue that what has been overlooked is the Duchess and her material body as consumable mummy as integral to Ferdinand's transformation.[50] Misreading the Duchess's vital potential, alongside an examination of the materiality of mummy, provides the medical and physiological context for the moral and psychological complexities of Ferdinand's lycanthropy.

---

[49] See Frank Whigham, "Sexual and Social Mobility in *The Duchess of Malfi*," *PMLA* 100.2 (1985): 167-186; Lynn Enterline, "'Hairy on the In-side': *The Duchess of Malfi* and the Body of Lycanthropy," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 7.2 (1994): 85-129; Mary Floyd-Wilson, *Occult Knowledge, Science, and Gender on the Shakespearean Stage*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013; Susan Zimmerman, *The Early Modern Corpse and Shakespeare's Theatre*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005. Frank Whigham interprets Ferdinand's lycanthropy as his being a "unitary wolf at last" that "brings him to his logical end in total isolation" (Whigham 171). Lynn Enterline interprets his lycanthropy as his inability to "mourn properly" and a manifestation of his "displaced" grieving (Enterline 96). His lycanthropy "speaks only of an alien skin, of an exterior surface turned into a now alienated interior" (Enterline 120). Mary Floyd-Wilson argues that Ferdinand's lycanthropy develops through his association with witchcraft: "As a demonic disease…lycanthropy is fitting punishment for his violations of nature" (Floyd-Wilson 26). Susan Zimmerman states that Ferdinand's lycanthropy makes sense as "one of the possible fates of the melancholic…that emblematises a psychic estrangement or exile from the ordinary structures of human life" (Zimmerman 143-44). Zimmerman argues that while the Duchess "seems to direct the action" in the play, that "she functions primarily as Ferdinand's self-distorting mirror" (Zimmerman 144).

[50] Brett Hirsch in posing the question "Why…did John Webster pen a lycanthropic character into The Duchess of Malfi?" attempts to answer that it is "Webster's unique choice with the wider concerns of his time: the precarious boundaries between animal and human, male and female, body and soul, sanity and madness, good and evil" (Hirsch 1). Hirsch further notes that Ferdinand is "the only werewolf to appear on the Jacobean stage" (1). Brett D. Hirsch, "An Italian Werewolf in London: Lycanthropy and The Duchess of Malfi," *Early Modern Literary Studies* 11.2 (2005): 21-43.

We can read the kind of effect local, incestuous, cannibalistic feeding would have had on Ferdinand for whom his lycanthropy manifests as an infection from within, much like an episode of poisoning from ingestion or indigestion. Additionally, Ferdinand's associations with graveyard digging and cannibalism would have made lycanthropy been a particularly fitting affliction. Late in the play, after the Duchess's death, the doctor diagnoses Ferdinand with "lycanthropia" and notes his symptoms:

> In those that are possess'd with 't [lycanthropia] there o'erflows
> Such melancholy humour they imagine
> Themselves to be transformed into wolves;
> Steal forth to church-yards in the dead of night,
> And dig dead bodies up: as two nights since
> One met the duke 'bout midnight in a lane
> Behind Saint Mark's church, with the leg of a man
> Upon his shoulder; and he howl'd fearfully;
> Said he was a wolf, only the difference
> Was, a wolf's skin was hairy on the outside,
> His on the inside; bade them take their swords,
> Rip up his flesh, and try. (5.2.8-19)

To locate the source of Ferdinand's internal corruption, we can begin by turning to the doctor's description of Ferdinand's lycanthropic behavior, in which he was found "'bout midnight in a lane / Behind Saint Mark's church, with the leg of a man / Upon his shoulder," in the way that those possessed with lycanthropy "Steal forth to church-yards in the dead of night, / And dig dead bodies up." We can imagine Ferdinand's lycanthropic graveyard search as a manifestation of his desire to dig up local bodies, metonymically to dig up the Duchess for his consumption. He even earlier foretells his graveyard exploits, prophecizing that "The wolf shall find her grave, and scrape it up," although attempting to rationalize or in denial of his aims, "Not to devour the

corpse," he insists, "but to discover / The horrid murther" (4.2.303-5). Thus the desire to destroy and then consume the Duchess's body is what destroys Ferdinand.

As Whigham has argued, Ferdinand is cursed by the close incestuous relationship; that incest manifests in the poisonous local mummy of the Duchess that Ferdinand seeks to consume. Ferdinand contracts lycanthropy by way of his desire for cannibalism, a kind of affliction that emerges from his diseased cycle of desire—for incest, for local mummia, for dead bodies. It is the consumption of flesh that makes one sick rather than making one well. Ferdinand's lycanthropy manifests as a kind of disease or infection from the inside—an inside-out lycanthropy. The idea for the manifestation of lycanthropy from the inside may have come from a particular case; Simon Goulart describes a man who "thought himselfe to bee a Wolfe" and "did constantlye affirme that hee was a Wolfe, and that there was no other difference, but that Wolues were commonlie hayrie without, and hee was betwixt the skinne and the flesh."[51] However, the idea of a disease working to infect or corrupt from the inside was not new. Webster proves obsessed with how early modern infections could move from the inside out. In *The White Devil*, for example, Monticelso describes Vittoria as a whore by using the analogy comparing the whore's infectious corruption to "sweetmeats which rot the eater," and "Poisoned perfumes" that work to infect from "in man's nostril" (3.2.81-82). Sweetmeats were referred to as a general label of a number of similarly prepared culinary treats, encompassing mostly preserved sweets of various kinds with relation to pastries, pasties, and baked meats. False mummy follows the other examples of internal infection Webster provides, the dangers of internal corruption from consuming sweetmeats or perfumes that in being incorporated into the body, affect the inner

[51] Simon Goulart, *Admirable and Memorable Histories containing the wonders of our time. Collected into French out of the best authors. By I. [sic] Goulart. And out of French into English. By Ed. Grimeston* (London, 1607), 387.

workings of the body. Ferdinand's corruption from the inside manifests as his skin becoming hairy "on the inside," corresponding to the nature of infection caused from something brought within the body. In a sense, both brothers are victim to inaccurate thinking about mummy; what they neglect to remember is that as the most local body to them, the Duchess is the most poisonous for them to consume, the most detrimental to their bodies, in the way that incest would be. Ferdinand's cannibalistic, internal lycanthropy is thus the physiological manifestation of the moral reprehensibility of incest as consumption; Ferdinand's incestual desire can be seen as a misplaced desire to eat the body of your sister, consume local mummy, which results in his lycanthropic disease arising from the poison of ingesting false mummy.

Ferdinand's lycanthropic activities of digging up dead bodies echo his earlier role as someone who participates in the trade of dead bodies, before the Duchess's death. In his attempts to torture the Duchess, he leaves a dead hand with his sister: "What witchcraft doth he practise," the Duchess asks, "that he hath left / A dead man's hand here?" (4.1.54-5). Certainly the dead man's hand could have been the product of a graveyard search, as implied by how Ferdinand was caught with a dead man's leg during his lycanthropic wanderings. The hand is but a precursor to Ferdinand's further manipulation of the Duchess through the use of "dead" bodies. The stage directions immediately following indicate that "*Here is discovered, behind a traverse, the artificial figures of* ANTONIO *and his children, appearing as if they were dead*." As far as the Duchess, and the audience, are concerned at this point, the bodies are truly the dead bodies of the Duchess's family, and Bosola connects the dead hand to the figures that have been revealed:

> Look you: here's the piece from which 'twas tane;
> He doth present you this sad spectacle,
> That now you know directly they are dead,

Hereafter you may, wisely, cease to grieve
For that which cannot be recovered. (4.1.56-60)

Although the stage directions detail that these are "artificial figures" that "[appear] as if they were dead," there is no performative foreknowledge of this; the sight of bodies on stage and Bosola's speech well could have had convinced viewers that indeed "this sad spectacle" was real —that Antonio and the Duchess's children were, in fact, dead. It is not until later that Ferdinand, observing the Duchess's reaction, reveals that the bodies are artificial, though not to the Duchess herself:

Excellent; as I would wish: she's plagu'd in art.
These presentations are but fram'd in wax
By the curious master in that quality,
Vincentio Lauriola, and she takes them
For true substantial bodies. (4.1.110-114)

His manipulation of "dead bodies," even if simulacra, is geared towards bringing the Duchess "By degrees to mortification" (4.2.174), but here we discover that the performance of these bodies consists of "presentations…but fram'd in wax," which the Duchess misreads for "true substantial bodies." Yet again we have a moment where the authenticity of the corpse is misinterpreted. The Duchess, being fooled, is appropriately moved:

There is not between heaven and earth one wish
I stay for after this: it wastes me more,
Than were't my picture, fashion'd out of wax,
Stuck with a magical needle, and then buried
In some foul dunghill. (4.1.61-65)

Ironically, in the pain of mistaking the wax figures for "true substantial bodies," the Duchess reconceptualizes her own self as a "picture, fashion'd out of wax." The wax simulacrum she imagines for herself sounds like a preternatural token of witchcraft, a kind of early modern

voodoo doll that can be manipulated: "Stuck with a magical needle, and then buried / In some foul dunghill." In other words, the Duchess imagines herself as a lifeless body to be buried in the ground. According to Margaret E. Owens, Webster alludes here "to necromantic practices involving miniature wax dolls, one of many allusions to witchcraft in this play."[52] The Duchess's relegation to a miniature wax doll, then, serves to express the extent to which the images of her dead family afflict her. "It wastes me more," she says of the spectacle, than the creation of her own wax figure that serves as a disembodied simulacrum, the manipulation of which could effect change upon the Duchess's body through some form of sympathetic power. The Duchess characterizes the effect as "wasting" her, alluding both to wax as it was melted over a flame and additionally to the definition of waste as having resonances of consumption and decay, "To consume or destroy (a person or living thing, his body, strength) by decay or disease; to cause to pine, emaciate, enfeeble; to undermine the vitality or strength of."[53] Although ignorant of the waxy artificiality of the figures in Ferdinand's spectacle, the Duchess however evinces her own knowledge of waxworks.

According to Owens, the wax figures of the dead bodies would have been inspired by "a vibrant culture of effigeal and waxwork exhibition in early modern England."[54] As simulacra of real bodies, wax figures maintained an "ambiguous status" in that they "seemingly poised

---

[52] Margaret E. Owens, "John Webster, Tussaud Laureate: The Waxworks in *The Duchess of Malfi*," *ELH* 79.4 (2012): 851-77, 863. See also Floyd-Wilson, who views this witchcraft as part of Ferdinand's arsenal of manipulations to gain control over his sister; she articulates questions about what Ferdinand's role here alludes to within the context of magic and the occult: "Webster stages the Duchess's torture in such a way that audiences are unable to determine the nature of Ferdinand's 'art.' Is he an experimenting proto-scientist? A gulling mountebank? An equivocating witch? Or an unknowing demonic agent?" (123).

[53] "waste, v.". OED Online. September 2016. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/226029.

[54] Owens, "Tussaud Laureate," 853-4.

between life and death, the organic and the artificial, the animate and the inanimate."[55] By simulating live bodies, the wax figures would have participated in what what Owens identifies in *The Duchess* as "the play's semiotic economy of doubling, replication, and surrogacy, effects which imply the decentering and dispersal of the subject."[56] Yet, the ambiguous status of the waxworks however rested only in their potential; in reality, they were devoid of life. The connection between Ferdinand's wax figures and his lycanthropy lies in Bosola's description of the Duchess—and the Duchess's body—as but a "salvatory of green mummy," a substance that historically originated with its relation to "wax," through the Arabic "mum," and would later stand in for actual bodies, if dead, that were purported retained the vitality of the living. The wax figures are thus implicated in the dispersive practices related to the semi-animate corpse, dependent on the simulation of life for its effectiveness, but emphasizing the unease with which the efficacy of nonliving depends on the belief in a life that inheres in the matter. Webster's concerns about these dynamics, of matter and vitality, brought forth in the material physiological, and ideological practices of mummy, locate the ultimately tragedy in misreading the Duchess and her resistance to being categorized as mummy or an already dead corpse. Corpse material may contain life but cannot bring forth life, and the Duchess's ability to reproduce is her ultimate argument: not only does she represent the state of having a life-giving force, but she also denotes that true vitality manifests not in being contained but in being able to produce/create new life.

Conclusion: Ruins and Breath

---

[55] Owens, "Tussaud Laureate," 851-2.

[56] Owens, "Tussaud Laureate," 854."Nonetheless, in the latter half of the play, the drive toward dispersal is countered by a tendency to consolidate or monumentalize the Duchess. Both dynamics are played out around differing configurations of the effigy, as either an intact, monumental statue or a fragile, fragmented mannequin" (854).

When the Duchess asks Antonio "Make not your heart so dead a piece of flesh / To fear more than to love me" (1.2.367-8), she continues by asserting her status as a living body: "This is flesh, and blood, sir, / 'Tis not the figure cut in alabaster / Kneels at my husband's tomb" (1.2.369-71). The Duchess, in other words, makes the significant distinction here between reading herself for her true, vital potential and reading herself as an entity representative of the end of a productive life. This is the distinction at stake for Webster's idea of preservation in the play. If the promise of mummy, and the promise of the Duchess, lies in the lingering vitality contained in the body, what Webster ultimately depicts is the preservative anxiety of divorcing *anima*—the soul and the spirit as breath and life—from the corporality of the body, from "living" matter.

Indeed, the Duchess has a life-force that could be mistaken for the kind of subjectivity/ essence that remains in the body for the most efficacious mummy—the kind of belief that led some to believe that effective mummy needed to be made from the swift death of young healthy person, in order to best retain that vitality. It is significant, thus, that the Duchess's long sought after and climactic death is death by "Strangling" (4.2.203), the stopping of her breath. The order for the Duchess's execution by strangling is informed by the same misinterpretation by her brothers in ordering the swiftest death for her, trapping, in a sense, the vitality within the body for use after death. Just before her execution, however, the Duchess is able to recognizes the split that will occur between her body and her breath: "Dispose my breath how please you, but my body / Bestow upon my women, will you?" (4.2.224-5). In other words, the Duchess aligns her breath with her life and acknowledges how it separates from her body. The Aragon brothers can be said to misunderstand the nature of the body/breath dynamic and its relationship to the

selfhood of the Duchess, and that misunderstanding is most literally and materially represented in mummy. In their view, the Duchess-as-mummy continues to hold that promise. Their view thus of the Duchess is wrong, Webster implies, because the Duchess would have constituted false mummy, which, in Webster's world, is the only kind of mummy that is actually in local circulation. False mummy, in other words, fails to preserve because it manifests simply as dead, human matter consumed because it is mistaken to contain that vitality.

What the Duchess ultimately acknowledges is the idea of *anima*—of the soul and the spirit as the breath—separate from the corporality of the body. It is fitting, thus, that the Duchess's long sought after and climactic death is death by strangling—the stopping of her breath. When she revives briefly, her voice, as a product of breath, returns, enough for her to call Antonio's name; as Bosola witnesses: "She stirs; here's life" (4.2.335). He means, of course, that there is life in her, returned in her, but Webster's phrasing also allows for the Duchess once again to represent life itself—here is the Duchess, here is life. She dies again shortly thereafter. "Oh, she's gone again," Bosola narrates, "there the cords of life broke" (4.2.348). Once again her life is what constitutes her selfhood, and her life being gone again, Webster's chooses for Bosola to narrate woefully that "*she's* gone again" [emphasis mine], showing that it was the breath, the soul, the spirit that constituted the selfhood of the Duchess—that while her body remains in front of Bosola, she, the Duchess, is gone.

If the Duchess's breath is removed from her body at the moment of death, Webster suggests that the Duchess's self continues in the circulation of her breath, in an immaterial existence as her voice and as her echo. This echo is first heard by Antonio and Delio who,

unaware of the Duchess's death, notice that the echo follows them as they walk around the ruins of an abbey. The echo, Delio notes, is

> So hollow, and so dismal, and withal
> So plain in the distinction of our words,
> That many have suppos'd it is a *spirit*
> That answers. [emphasis mine] (5.3.6-9)

Antonio, surprised when he hears the echo, notes that "'Tis very like my wife's voice," in response to which Webster writes in the Echo's echo in agreement, "Ay, wife's voice" (5.3.26). Delio notices the seeming subjectivity of the echo, telling Antonio "Hark: the dead stones seem to have pity on you / And give you good counsel" (5.3.36-37). Delio's comment speaks to effort to locate the source of that subjectivity, here in the dead stones. The attempted alignment of the *dead* stones and echo serves rather to emphasize the stark separation of matter and vitality, body and breath. Antonio, in response, dismisses the echo, "Echo, I will not talk with thee; / For thou art a dead thing" (5.3.36-38), but in doing so re-emphasizes the dead nature from which it stems, or perhaps (mis?)interpreting that life must inhere in a body.

By separating the Duchess into these two constituent parts, Webster raises the question of what constitutes the distinctions between the living, the nonliving, and the dead, particularly with regard to organic and physical matter. If mummy promises the preservation of life beyond the moment of death, Webster troubles that in *The Duchess of Malfi*, raising the real possibility that mummy is always false mummy—that mummy is mere flesh with no actual living essence, which is why it is ineffective and poisonous. Various of Webster's characters devalue the living body for a promise that the dead body holds, one that does not exist because it is located, Webster suggests, in breath as the life-giving agent. If life is equated to breath, the very premise

behind mummy is false, Webster shows; life essences will not continue in the body, and bodies have no life if they have no voice. Bosola's articulates exactly this fear when he utters upon his death, "Oh, I am gone: / We are only like dead walls, or vaulted graves / That, ruin'd, yields no echo" (5.5.95-97).

But fed upon the Duchess's vitality, we look to see her brought back to life; ultimately Webster suggests that the preservative promise lies not in consumption but in circulation, not in consuming life but in creating life anew, a process of renewal. We find the promise of continued preservation, and Webster's commentary on the preservative ends of his drama, in the recursive performance of the Duchess's embodied vitality. While we recognize the disposable, circulating bodies on stage, what remains after the performance, in the legacy of *The Duchess*, is the continued vitality of the titular figure herself, re-voiced anew with each performance. At the very point at which she is reduced to mummy, at the point where we are directed to read her on stage as the performance of a corpse, she both recognizes and resists that role by asserting, memorably, "I am the Duchess of Malfi still" (4.2.139); that she can voice this means that she remains. Despite mummy's contentious complication of identity and subjectivity, the Duchess's ending claim suggests a promise—the continued assertion of identity, claim, and agency in performance that pushes up against the global network of "disposable" bodies that threatens to dismantle it. The promises of mummy, then, leave us not with the Duchess's "mortification," but rather with a gesture back to a moment of performative hope during a time of despair—the Duchess's gesture to vitality returned: "Portia, I'll new kindle thy coals again," she promises, "And revive the rare and almost dead example / Of a loving wife" (4.1.72-74). By locating or isolating *anima* from the bodies to which it inheres, Webster suggests that the breath and voice are where the

preservative promises of circulation can be seen to fruition—in the performative life of dramatic work and the bodies and voices that give it life.

CHAPTER 3: ABORTIVE LEGACIES: CURDLED MILK IN THE BREAST AND PRESERVING THE BODY POLITIC IN SHAKESPEARE'S *MACBETH*

Lady Macbeth's legacy as one of Shakespeare's most memorable female characters can be credited to her unforgettable speech wherein she calls for a physiological, and gendered, transformation. "Unsex me here," she famously commands, "make thick my blood, / Stop up th'access and passage to remorse; / That no compunctious visitings of Nature / Shake my fell purpose" (1.5.41, 43-46).[1] This process culminates in a final act whereby Lady Macbeth's transformation is complete: "Come to my woman's breasts, / And take my milk for gall…!" (1.5.47-48). As a process of unsexing, what Lady Macbeth calls for, critics have interpreted, is the cessation of her menses, her "compunctious visitings of Nature." Her call to turn her milk to gall is among the many mentions of milk throughout the play. But what is the connection between Lady Macbeth's "compunctious visitings of Nature" and the transformation of her milk? Why does her milk turn to gall in the moment after she has called for the thickening of her blood?

We can look to a key moment in *Hamlet* to provide a possible explanation. In what ends up being one of Shakespeare's most visceral images of corruption within the body, the ghost of Hamlet's father describes his murder by poison through the ear at the hands of Claudius. The poison, he describes,

---

[1] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*. Ed. Kenneth Muir. Arden Shakespeare: London, 2005.

> Holds such an enmity with blood of man
> That swift as quicksilver it courses through
> The natural gates and alleys of the body,
> And with a sudden vigour *doth posset*
> *And curd, like eager droppings into milk,*
> *The thin and wholesome blood*: so did it mine. (1.3.61-70)

Shakespeare explains that Old Hamlet's blood, as a result of poison, in essence curdles like milk; the effect of poison, here, is to thicken the blood to the extent that it "*doth posset* / *And curd, like eager droppings into milk,* / *The thin and wholesome blood* [emphasis mine]." As we and our early modern counterparts were familiar, the process of milk putrefying involved the separation of the solids and the liquids of the milk—as Shakespeare so eloquently put it, "like eager droppings into milk." Of note is the term "eager," spelled "Aygre" in the Folio from the French, to express the idea that the curdled milk was sour and acidic. The unpalatable descriptors of curdled milk resonate with Lady Macbeth's gallish milk, compared to a substance defined by its intense bitterness.[2]

By placing Lady Macbeth's breastmilk alongside the eager milky droppings of Old Hamlet's thickened blood, I propose a reading of Lady Macbeth's milk as curdled milk. Lady Macbeth's famous speech and her gesture to milk have been well covered by scholars,[3] who have examined the implications of Lady Macbeth transformation of "unsexing." However, scholars have not examined the implications of that transition *physiologically*, of reading Lady Macbeth's milk as *curdled*. By attending to the problematic of curdled milk, Shakespeare's play draws upon ancient conception theories about the origins of human procreation, in which curdled milk served

---

[2] "gall, n.1." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2016. Web. 16 December 2016.

[3] For example, a recent book chapter by Heather Love is listed as "Macbeth: Milk," in which Love examines how *Macbeth* responds to questions about temporal queerness. See Love, "Macbeth: Milk," in *Shakesqueer: A Queer Companion to the Complete Works of Shakespeare* (Duke University Press, 2011), 201-

as a symbol for the creation of the embryo, while problematizing curdled milk as a symbol of early modern witchcraft. A focus on Lady Macbeth's *curdled* milk demonizes an already gendered and feminized substance by aligning it with early modern witchcraft, as witches were well believed to cause milk to curdle. Rather than uplifting milk as a symbol and substance of the maternal bond or the nurturing process, Shakespeare suggests that milk is a signal of denial. Lady Macbeth's call for her unsexing moves from blood to milk, and her unsexed milk transforms to bitter, masculine gall. The resulting curdled milk makes milk poisonous and destructive rather than preservative or nurturing.

Furthermore, interpreting her milk as curdled provides a new perspective on the play's rhetoric of purging, a process believed necessary for the health of the body (politic) but complicated by the rejection, therefore, of milk as a substance associated with maternal nourishment. When Malcolm insincerely refers to milk he does it to suggest that a good king produces the "sweet milk of concord." Edward is thus presented as a healing or nurturing kind of king, but this de-literalizes milk—turns milk into a metaphor in order to de-feminize milk. (To speak of men who are full of milk is usually a negative descriptor, signifying youth, as in Twelfth Night.) When Lady Macbeth, however, makes the milk of human kindness into a metaphor for kindness and humanness, Malcolm picks up this trope and not only de-literalizes it but makes it masculine—separates it from the female body and, subsequently, from corruption. If Macbeth is clogged by bad feminine milk—from Lady Macbeth, from the witches—or perhaps from Scotland as mother—Shakespeare suggests an attempt to take the female nurturing bonding preservative of milk and make it into an abstract masculine substance. Shakespeare's play thus demonizes the symbolic and literal registers of milk to abstract it from the feminine body and to

masculinize it, as a religious and politicized symbol of wellness and generation and a substance of nourishment and corruption. What results is the play's rhetoric of purging, which is itself an effect of the play's curdling.

I begin by outlining ancient conception theories, wherein curdled milk was thought to symbolically represent the viability of procreation. I then move to early modern contention with milk as a physiological and nutritional substance; milk's status as a substance informs its resonance and use as a powerful symbol of humankind. Finally, by applying the troubling potential of curdling to milk in the play, I examine Shakespeare's experimentation with the materiality and physiology of milk and its effects upon the health of the body and the body politic, with ramifications for the unification of Scotland and England and for the psychosomatic aftereffects of curdling and purging for his audience. In light of the deleterious implications of curdled milk for the preservative ends of nourishment and digestion, I propose a new reading of the Folio's original spelling, "dis-eate" in one of Macbeth's final speeches in light of the failed preservation of his status and his legacy. The curdled milk at the heart of the Macbeths' degeneration blurs the boundaries between supernatural occurrence and physiologically-induced psychosis that links the metaphors of performance as feast and as vision/dream, implicating the audience in the Macbeths' clotted illnesses of body and mind and the longevity of their resulting psychosomatic effects.

Ancient Curdled Milk, Part I: Curds and Conception

In his lament to God about the tribulations in his life, Job in the Book of Job cries: "Remember...that thou hast fashioned me as clay; and wilt thou bring me into the dust again? Hast thou not poured me out as milk, and curdled me like cheese?" [Job 10:10]. Job's reference

to curdling milk gestures to a long-standing belief about the process of procreation, in which milk and semen curdle to form an embryo. The curdling of milk was a significant metaphor for the formation of the foetus and the generation of offspring—thus an image integrally tied to generating humanity and life.

The curdling of milk analogy of human conception was proposed by Aristotle in the fourth century, B.C.—what Sandra Ott calls the "cheese analogy" of conception.[4] According to Aristotle's theory, the material components of milk describe the effects of male semen upon female reproductive material:

> When the material secreted by the female in the uterus has been fixed by the semen of the male (this acts in the same way as rennet acts upon milk, for rennet is a kind of milk containing vital heat, which brings into one mass and fixes the similar material, and the relation of the semen to the catamenia is the same, milk and the catamenia being of the same nature)—when, I say, the more solid part comes together, the liquid is separated off from it, and as the earthy parts solidify membranes form all round it; this is both a necessary result and for a final cause, the former because the surface of a mass must solidify on heating as well as on cooling, the latter because the foetus must not be in a liquid but be separated from it. (*De generatione animalium*, Bk. II, 739b, 22-31)[5]

In this description, Aristotle notes that milk and catamenia, or menstrual discharge, are "of the same nature," and that the male's semen "acts…as rennet acts upon milk." The curdling is necessary for the formation of the embryo because "the foetus must not be in a liquid but be separated from it." Aristotle here draws upon the material states of milk as an explanation for the material process of the creation of new life. Earlier in his text, Aristotle explicitly compares the female contribution to curdling milk in his explanation of the interaction between male and female reproductive substances:

---

[4] Sandra Ott, "Aristotle among the Basques: the 'cheese analogy' of conception." *Man* (1979): 699-711, 699.

[5] Aristotle, *De generatione animalium*, Bk. II, 739b, 22-31.

> it is plain that the semen does not come from the whole of the body; for neither would the different parts of the semen already be separated as soon as discharged from the same part, nor could they be separated in the uterus if they had once entered it all together; but what does happen is just what one would expect, since what the male contributes to generation is the form and efficient cause, while the female contributes the material. In fact, *as in the coagulation of milk, the milk being the material*, the fig-juice or rennet is that which contains the curdling principle, so acts the secretion of the male, being divided into parts in the female. [emphasis mine] (Book I 729a, 7-14)[6]

Milk in Aristotle's explanation is aligned with the female by way of metaphor. The "coagulation of milk" is the effect of the two fluids, male and female, coming together and reacting. Thus, the "secretion of the male" is what contains the "curdling principle," what Aristotle compares to fig-juice or rennet. Rennet was a liquid found in the stomach of young mammals that was used in cheese making. The rennet would cause milk to separate into curds and whey—milk's respective solid and liquid components. The process of coagulating milk forms the metaphor for how the male and female fluids react, or how the male fluid acts to "set" the female contribution:

> The action of the semen of the male in 'setting' the female's secretion in the uterus is similar to that of rennet upon milk. Rennet is milk which contains vital heat, as semen does, and this integrates the homogeneous substance and makes it 'set'. As the nature of milk and the menstrual fluid is one and the same, the action of the semen upon the substance of the menstrual fluid is the same as that of rennet upon milk (*Generation of Animals* 739b21-27. Translation: A.L. Peck).

Aristotle describes semen as containing a "vital heat" that makes the "homogeneous substance" of feminine catamenia "set." What result, given that "the nature of milk and the menstrual fluid is one and the same," are the curds that form the embryo. Thus the curdling or coagulation of milk becomes the primary metaphor for the generation of humanity.

That we and our bodies developed from or consisted of curdled milk is thus expressed by Job and echoed poignantly in John Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*, in which Bosola contemplates,

---

[6] Quoted in Ott, "'Cheese analogy' of conception," 699.

"what's this flesh? a little cruded milke" (4.2.124-5),[7] gesturing to what the early moderns inherited about ancient ideas of milk in the production of life and the gendered causes that contributed to milk's curdling. The curds that form the flesh of mankind develop, it was believed, from the milk-like material of women's menstrual fluid which is "set" by the vital heat of male semen. Indeed the analog between female menstrual fluid and milk goes beyond metaphor; milk was believed to be a form of blood itself, called "white blood" or "'twice-concocted' blood" that was produced from blood in the mammary glands.[8] Milk was thus believed to be a type of blood, which strengthens the connection the ancients maintained between milk, blood, and flesh.

Since antiquity human breast milk was held to be an especially nutritive substance with healing qualities. As a female fluid, it was sanctioned as a more refined blood: Galen's system of humoral dietetics, according to Marsilio Ficino, maintained that it was better to drink women's milk, "concocted from blood," than their blood proper "when one uses women's liquids for regeneration," due to the "more rudimentary construction of female physiology and the excremental, moon-governed nature of most female fluids."[9] In fact, menstrual blood and milk both constituted women's seed and generative matter, significantly influencing the formation of progeny in ways that raised the threatening possibility of exceeding the father's generative influence.[10] Breast milk, thus, continued the process of the mother's shaping of the child, especially as a nutritive substance that was easily incorporated and assimilated into the body.

---

[7] John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1983.

[8] Albala, "Milk," 21.

[9] Valeria Finucci, "Introduction: Genealogical Pleasures, Genealogical Disruptions," in *Generation and Degeneration: Tropes of Reproduction in Literature and History from Antiquity through Early Modern Europe*, eds. Valeria Finucci and Kevin Brownlee, 1-14, 2.

[10] Victoria Sparey, "Identity-Formation and the Breastfeeding Mother in Renaissance Generative Discourses and Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*," *Social History of Medicine* 25.4 (2012): 777-794, 778.

At the same time, milk was considered to be an unpredictable and volatile substance, particularly when ingested into the body. Ancient medical authority Galen describes the contradictions and dangers of milk in his *De alimentorum facultatibus*, in which he explains that "the best milk" is among "the most wholesome of any of the foods we consume," but that dangers arise because not all milk is wholesome. Such "unwholesome milk," Galen articulates, fills even healthy individuals with "unhealthy humour."[11] Moreover, milk is "composed of opposing substances and properties," consisting of liquid "whey-like nature" as well as a more solid "oily and cheesy" nature.[12] Due to milk's complex composition, even the best milk can become acidic, depending on different stomachs, or can "[send] up a greasy eructation."[13]

It is thus that the purgative effects of milk are often mixed up with its benefits. The substance of milk, given to "cheesy thickness"—its curdled or curdling quality—is "unsafe for people who use it to excess," especially for people in whom vessels used to "transfer nutriment" are narrow.[14] In particular, this cheesy component of milk "thickens the humours" and produces blockages in the liver, kidney, and bowels.[15] Other bodily complications arise from milk due to this curdled, cheesy quality:

> All milk…is unsuitable for the head unless one has a very strong one, just as it is no good for organs in the hypochondrium that are easily made flatulent. For in very many people it generates wind in the stomach, so that there are very few who do not suffer from this. But when it has been boiled as much as possible with any of the foods with

---

[11] Galen, *On the Properties of Foodstuffs: De alimentorum facultatibus*, trans. Owen Powell (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 125 (686).

[12] Galen, *De alimentorum*, 127 (691).

[13] Galen, *De alimentorum*, 127 (691).

[14] Galen, *De alimentorum*, 126 (687).

[15] Galen, *De alimentorum*, 126 (688).

> thick juice, it gets rid of flatulence but becomes more obstructive in the liver and more productive of stones in the kidneys.[16]

The generation of flatulence, obstructions, and stones in the body due to milk give the substance its reputation as a dangerous or threatening foodstuff.

The Milky Scots

What Galen noted as various milk-related physiological complications can be read as elements that complicate digestion. Perhaps fittingly, milk consumption was associated with hardiness and, by extension, barbarity since classical times. Milk was a substance believed appropriate for "uncivilized nations," and classical belief held that more civilized peoples "gradually lost the ability to consume milk in adulthood," due to their digestive systems becoming "weaker and more delicate."[17] The ancient and premodern difficulties associated with digesting milk have their scientific grounding in our modern understanding of the evolution of lactose tolerance and intolerance among different groups and their consumption of milk. European populations who consumed and used milk throughout generations would have evolved the ability to "manufacture lactase…the enzyme that breaks down the sugar lactose" into adulthood; in particular they were Northern Europeans who evolved to be able to consume milk without the problematic digestive issues that those with lactose intolerance would experience.[18]

Thus, evolutionary traces of milk indigestion, or lactose intolerance, point to certain groups as being evolutionarily primed to be able to drink milk, a sign of their hardiness that was recognized since antiquity. Milk thus was associated with the barbarism of northern peoples,

---

[16] Galen, *De alimentorum*, 126 (687).

[17] Albala, "Milk," 20.

[18] Albala, "Milk," 19.

particularly of the Scots and the Irish within Britain, a barbarism that Charles Estienne attributed to their milk drinking.[19] Thus, milk and its unique material properties were integral in the formation of the belief that the Scottish were a barbarous people, believed to be hardier in temperament, which is particularly significant for our examination of curdling milk in *Macbeth*. English chronicler Raphael Holinshed describes the inhabitants of the Scottish and Irish northern isles as maintaining a primitive diet which consisted in large part of milk.[20] Fed on milk, or being able to digest such an indigestible substance, Holinshed describes, the Scots are "lesse delicate" and "more hard of constitution of bodie," which enables them to "beare off the cold blasts" and to be "bold, nimble, and thereto more skilfull in the warres."[21]

Furthermore, Scottish breastmilk was the site of Scottish preservation. The Scots were "not so much corrupted with strange bloud and aliance" in part due to the common practice for Scottish mothers to nurse their own young.[22] In other words, the Scottish were believed to be raised through their own breastmilk. Holinshed's description of nursing mothers in Scotland describes breastfeeding as an *uncivilized* practice that represented a kind of barbaric hardiness. Not only was it "a cause of suspicion of the mother's fideltie toward hir husband, to seeke a strange nurse for hir children (although hir milke failed)," but also Scottish breastfeeding ensured the preservation of Scottishness:

---

[19] Albala, "Milk," 29. Caroli Stephani [Charles Estienne], *De Nvtrimentis, ad Baillyum, libri tres* (Paris, 1550), 40: "Scoti atque Hiberni ob sui lactis vsum ferocem, robustúmque corporis habitum induere conspiciantur."

[20] Raphael Holinshed, "The Description of Scotlande," *The first volume of the chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande conteyning the description and chronicles of England, from the first inhabiting vnto the conquest: the description and chronicles of Scotland, from the first original of the Scottes nation till the yeare of our Lorde 1571: the description and chronicles of Yrelande, likewise from the first originall of that nation untill the yeare 1571* (London, 1577), 3.

[21] Holinshed, "Description of Scotlande," 3.

[22] Holinshed, "Description of Scotlande," 3.

> each woman would take intollerable paines to bring vp and nourish hir owne children. They thought them furthermore not to be kindlie fostered, except they were so well nourished after their births with the milke of their brests, as they were before they were borne with the bloud of their owne bellies, nay *they feared least they should degenerat and grow out of kind, except they gaue them sucke themselues, and eschewed strange milke*, therefore in labour and painfulnesse they were equall.[23]

Breastfeeding among the Scots is a sign of hardiness and a preservative measure, characterized by "intollerable paines." As a result, breastfed Scottish children developed a kind of hardiness being "so well nourished" with their mothers' breastmilk "as they were before they were borne with the bloud of their owne bellies." Maternal breastfeeding additionally preserved the child from degeneration or degeneracy; by giving "sucke themselues" and eschewing "strange milke" of wetnurses, Scottish mothers believed their milk would ensure prevention against the threat that their children "should degenerat [sic] and grow out of kind." Thus, in the experience of Scottish breastfeeding, Scottish generation and hardiness—as Scottish*ness*—is preserved; women's milk, after all, was believed to transmit "more than nutrition to the child; it also carried character traits."[24] Breastmilk in particular protects against *degeneracy*, here imagined to arise out of a process of de-generation—the lack of generating Scottishness and Scottish lineage.

Milksop Macbeth

Despite the linkages between milk and (the retention of) Scottishness, too much milk, it seems, was not good. In his chronicles, Holinshed recounts the historical narrative of Macbeth, who is insulted by way of milk, setting milk up here as a counter to the hardiness of the Scots:

> Manie slanderous words also, and railing tants this Makdowald vttered against his prince, calling him a faint-hearted milkesop, more meet to gouerne a sort of idle moonks

[23] Holinshed, "Description of Scotlande," 18.

[24] Mary Floyd-Wilson, "English Epicures and Scottish Witches," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 57.2 (2006): 131-161, 137.

> in some cloister, than to haue the rule of such valiant and hardie men of warre as the Scots were.[25]

Macbeth, in historical narrative then, is a "faint-hearted milkesop" who is not fit to govern "such valiant and hardie men of warre as the Scots were." The term *milksop* complicates the association between milk and Scottish hardiness rather than support it. The term derives from a piece of bread soaked in milk and was used to describe a weakling, often with the additional association of being someone still in the infant stages of nourishment.

The historical Macbeth, then, is portrayed as weak, even infantile, characterized as being soaked or full of his mother's milk. This corresponds to Shakespeare's characterization of Macbeth, through Lady Macbeth, as indeed too full of milk:

> Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be
> What thou art promis'd—Yet I do fear thy nature:
> It is too full o'th' milk of human kindness,
> To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great;
> Art not without ambition, but without
> The illness should attend it: what thou wouldst highly,
> That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,
> And yet wouldst wrongly win; thou'dst have, great Glamis,
> That which cries, 'Thus thou must do, if thou have it;
> And that which rather thou dost fear to do,
> Than wishest should be undone. (1.5.15-25)

Lady Macbeth intimates that Macbeth's being "too full o'th' milk of human kindness" impedes his ability to attain those things for which his ambition strives, to "catch the nearest way." Milk here serves as a metaphorical obstacle to Macbeth's political ambition. Interpretations for the descriptor "too full o'th'milk of human kindness" have focused on what human kindness might mean. Suggestions have referred to "kindness" as "absence of hardness," or humankind-ness as

[25] Holinshed, 168.

humanity, but also that a reconsideration of humankind-ness may connote "natural inherited traditional feelings imbibed at the mother's breast."[26]

Placed alongside Holinshed's historical descriptor, Macbeth as "too full o'th' milk of human kindness" corroborates with his being a milksop; that is to say, Macbeth is too full of a mother's milk, making him weak and infantile, and thus effeminate. Indeed, in *Twelfth Night*, Viola, dissembling as the male Cesario, is described in terms that emphasize her seeming youth and effeminacy by Malvolio, with reference to the belief that it is mother's milk that determines such a constitution: "Not yet old enough for a man, nor young enough for a boy…one would think his mother's milk were scarce out of him" (1.5.146, 150-1).[27] If Macbeth is too full of milk, he, too, retains his mother's milk.

Furthermore, Macbeth's being "too full o'th'milk" means that he is constituted of an overabundance of milk, making him all the more prone not only to the effects of milk on the body, but also the effects of curdling on milk. As I noted earlier, Galen's medical theory argued for the danger of milk in excess—that excessive amounts of milk put the body in danger of being clogged or plagued by obstructions and various other digestive illnesses. With an over-milky constitution, then, Macbeth straddles the line between Scottish hardiness and milky weakness; Lady Macbeth's accusation characterizes Macbeth as perhaps not Scottish enough. Scottish hardiness, it would seem, determined the ability to digest milk; if Macbeth is too full of milk, what is suggested is that Macbeth is not properly hardy enough to digest the milk—

---

[26] Kenneth Muir, ed., *Macbeth* (Arden Shakespeare), London (2005), 27.

[27] The association of being full of milk and being infantile, in Macbeth's case, corresponds additionally to the northern/southern dichotomy established between regions and temperament. John Gillies, when explaining how Herodotus's description of the northern-most Scythians inverts knowledge of the Egyptians, notes that correspondingly "where the Egyptians are the most ancient and learned of men, the Scythians are the 'youngest,' the most ignorant and the most savage" (Gillies, *Difference*, 9). See also Mary Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama* pp. 31-32.

correspondingly, he suffers from milk in excess = danger of being clogged as in earlier discussion in ancient curdled milk.

Mother's Milk

The threat of Macbeth's being too full of milk is further colored by the shaping influence of breastmilk in early modern discourses of breastfeeding. Shakespeare draws upon the racialized discourse of breastmilk's effects on impressionable children, and the shaping effects of breastmilk, to emphasize Macbeth's impressionability at this moment. Macbeth is too full of milk, a substance that is highly impressionable and influential. I set out the racial fears inherent in breastmilk to set the stage for how milk was already seen as a substance with that kind of shaping ability. Then, I move to how this manifests materially through curdling as evidence of milk's impressionability—easily influenced. Curdling adds an additional layer of threat by being associated with witchcraft. In other words, Macbeth is ideally primed for being influenced by witchcraft--he is full of milk and in danger of being curdled.

The danger of the assimilation of milk into the human body was that the body absorbed and retained the qualities of the woman nursing. Breastmilk was a substance in which racialized concerns of alteration and preservation were located. The anxiety of Scottish mothers to preserve future generations of hardy Scottish children by nursing them themselves speaks to the power of breastmilk not only to preserve and to generate, but also to alter and to manipulate. The milky potency of Scottish identity passed down through generations resonated with the burgeoning and uneasy status of early modern English identity.

Breastmilk was a particularly dynamic and dangerous substance because it was a product of the body. Its nutritional value was especially integral to an early modern understanding of the

composition of the body. Food historian Ken Albala notes that substances most like to the human body were best and most easily incorporated into the body, and thus,

> Despite turgid warnings, milk always forms a central part of all discussions of nutrition… Only one step removed from blood, milk too is a powerfully nourishing substance. It is, in fact, 'twice concocted' blood manufactured in the mammary glands from blood itself. It thus carries all the nutrients originally consumed by the mother in a highly refined form.[28]

As a "powerfully nourishing substance" and a form of blood, breastmilk would be easily incorporated into the body and highly influential for shaping the child who ingested it. These concerns manifested in the threat that wetnurses, by providing their own breastmilk, would be able to shape and alter a feeding child's identity from that given by the mother and the father, transmitting the "moral and bodily character of the nurse to her charge, ideally complementing, but more often compromising or even eradicating the familial identity the child had inherited from its parents."[29] Easily incorporated and at the same time foreign, strange milk in the form of a foreign nurse's milk, and as a live, human food, would have been a particularly threatening example of how powerful milk was as an ingestible substance for shaping bodily constitution.

If wetnursing prominently displayed the power of milk as a shaping agent, it characterizes those concerns about influence along racial lines. In early modern England, wetnursing, or the "hiring out of infant feeding" rather than nursing one's own children, was in widespread practice during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[30] However, it was also condemned for the same reasons underlying Scottish anxiety of degeneracy due to the alteration

---

[28] Albala, "Milk," 21.

[29] Rachel Trubowitz, "'But Blood Whitened': Nursing Mothers and Others in Early Modern Britain," *Maternal Measures: Figure Caregiving in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh, (Aldershot, UK; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000), 82-101, 84.

[30] Michelle Dowd, *Women's Work in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 58.

of identity and lineage. This paranoia, also a kind of racial paranoia, centered on foreign wetnurses and "strange milk" in early modern England and was identified most often with groups I conceptualize as the *domestic foreign*. These groups included Jews, the Irish, and the Scottish, who were just domestic enough to present a covert threat from the inside to English identity, being in most threatening proximity to and within England. Fears about the power of "strange milk" to influence and transform English children appeared in a range of domestic manuals and travel narratives in the period, all of which were concerned with the "racialized construction of English national identity."[31] The theory that breastmilk was itself a form of blood was at the heart of concerns about "lactation, civilization, savagery, and England's national identity."[32]

Wetnursing can be seen to serve as evidence of the particularly influential qualities of milk, in the form of racial concerns that manifest as the threat of corruption or corruptibility. It is, after all, this racialized corruptibility that informs Scottish preservative anxieties about generation and degeneracy. But furthermore, I would argue that a reading of this racially-charged, corruptible milk as, additionally, *curdled*, brings attention to these Scottish anxieties of degeneracy as a *medical* concern, locating sites of curdled, degenerative corruption in and of the body. By locating Scottish degeneracy as a medical concern, I will examine how the metaphorical physiology of curdling integrally affects early modern understanding of the health of the Scottish body politic and state, according to *Macbeth*.

---

[31] Trubowitz, "'But Blood Whitened,'" 83.

[32] Trubowitz, "'But Blood Whitened,'" 86.

Locating curdling milk in the body first means going to the source: mothers' breastmilk. In *Macbeth*, the source for maternal milk is Lady Macbeth. To return to her call to the spirits, to unsex her, Lady Macbeth's command to thicken her blood leads to her command for the spirits to come to her breasts and transform her milk:

> Come, you Spirits
> That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
> And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full
> Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood,
> Stop up th'access and passage to remorse;
> That no compunctious visitings of Nature
> Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
> Th'effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
> And take my milk for gall, you murth'ring ministers,
> Wherever in your sightless substances
> You wait on Nature's mischief! (1.5.40-50)

As I noted earlier, Lady Macbeth's call to "make thick my blood, / Stop up th'access and passage to remorse; / That no compunctious visitings of Nature / Shake my fell purpose," has been interpreted to mean that she calls for the stopping of her menses as a process of becoming unsexed, or masculinized. In other words, the process of unsexing, according to Lady Macbeth, means the cessation of the reproductive faculties that define her femininity.

Correspondingly, scholars have interpreted her call to "take my milk for gall" as part of that process of masculinization. Janet Adelman, for example, argues that Lady Macbeth enforces her masculinity by "demonstrating her willingness to dry up that milk in herself," an interpretation Adelman locates specifically in Lady Macbeth's later imagined infanticide at her

breast.[33] Lady Macbeth's earlier reference to Macbeth's "milk of human kindness," thus, "mark[s] him as more womanly than she," Adelman argues.[34] In other words, the presence, and indeed overabundance, of milk, genders one feminine—milk itself is used as a marker of femininity. If Lady Macbeth indeed intends to "dry up that milk in herself," as Adelman argues, then indeed the process of unsexing as a process of masculinization involves the removal of milk. The imagined removal or lack of milk as indicative of masculinity corresponds to Macbeth's status as a weak milksop because he is too full of milk, but it also contends against Scottish hardiness preserved throughout generations through Scottish mothers' nursing: indeed, Holinshed's account seems to suggest that the insistence to nurse their own young determined the hardiness of Scottish women.

However, Lady Macbeth does not specifically command the spirits to take *away* her milk; rather, she calls for the spirits to "*take her milk for gall*." Critics have puzzled over Shakespeare's phrasing here, which might indicate the removal of milk and replacement thereof with gall, or the transformation of milk *to* gall. What is significant, and remains the same, however, is that the end product is a gallish substance which arguably means that Lady Macbeth's reproductive fluid is non-nourishing and nonviable. I want to press on the implications of this change, from milk to gall, and to think of it as a transformative process. Specifically, I argue that we might think about this transformation as the curdling of Lady Macbeth's breastmilk. Drawing on Shakespeare's wording of Lady Macbeth's speech, the

---

[33] Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays,* Hamlet *to* The Tempest (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 138. "Lady Macbeth's argument is, in effect, that any signs of the 'milk of human kindness' (1.5.17) mark him as more womanly than she; she proceeds to enforce his masculinity by demonstrating her willingness to dry up that milk in herself, specifically by destroying her nursing infant in fantasy: 'I would, while it was smiling in my face, / Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums, / And dash'd the brains out' (1.7.56-58)." (Adelman 138)

[34] Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, 138.

curdling of her milk, believed to be white blood or twice-concocted blood, would be the natural extension of her call to "make thick her blood." Here, an early modern understanding of milk and the reproductive female body provides a link between Lady Macbeth's ceased menses and the reference to breast milk that follows: some believed that the production of breast milk occurred when the menstrual cycle ceased, as early moderns noticed upon pregnancy, and the theory was that the menstrual blood was "diverted from the uterus during pregnancy to nourish the foetus" and was converted into breast milk to feed the child after delivery.[35] Thus, Lady Macbeth's call to "make thick her blood" would reasonably have had a physiological parallel in thickened breastmilk, something akin to what we might imagine in the aforementioned description of poisoned blood in *Hamlet*, which would "posset / And curd, like eager droppings into milk."

Furthermore, the curdling of a mother's breastmilk had basis in real medical concerns about early modern women's reproductive health. As a substance given such significance in the production and growth of new human life, imbued with the power to nourish and alter life, human breast milk was the focus of a plethora of remedies. In health and domestic manuals and medical receipt books of the period, a large number of recipes dealt with a range of various problems associated with women's milk. Such remedies ranged from healing "a milk sore in the breast,"[36] to providing "A Medecine to drye vpp a woemans Milke troubling her in Childbedd,"[37] or to creating poultices "To Increase A Womans Milk"[38] or "For a woman that hath lost her

---

[35] Layinka M. Swinburne, "Milky Medicine and Magic," in *Milk: Beyond the Dairy: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery, 1999,* Devon, UK: Prospect Books (2000), 337.

[36] Anne Brumwich (and others), Wellcome MS 160/92, c. 1625-1700.

[37] Mrs. Corlyon, Wellcome MS 213/28, 1606.

[38] Elizabeth Jacob (and others), Wellcome MS 3009/73, 1654-c. 1685.

milke."[39] Among the remedies that attended to the problems that could affect women's milk, a number specifically addressed the concern about the *curdling of milk in the breast*, which manifested in different forms. In her seventeenth-century manuscript receipt book, Lady Frances Catchmay records a remedy "for a Womans brest that is curdeled | wth milke."[40] So too, Philip Stanhope records two receipts, one for a remedy "Against the sorenesse of any breasts by reason of the Curdling of milke in womens Breasts," taken from "L[ady]. Hu.," and another for "A Cattaplasme for Breasts that are hardned with congealed milke."[41] Lady Ayscough's receipt book additionally provides a remedy for "Brest curdled with Milk to help," but also one "For a Breast wherein | the Milk is wharled & knotted" which requires a massage to "breake the wharles | easily with your finger morneing and euening."[42] Curdled milk in the breasts, not an uncommon problem, was a painful one, even causing "rednes inflamation | swelling paine and torment," which corresponds to contemporary medical understandings of the nursing woman's affliction *mastitis*.[43]

Ancient Curdled Milk, Part II: Curds and Cancer

Early modern concerns about curdled milk in the breast had precedent in ancient Greek and Roman medicine.[44] Greek physician Soranus describes women's milk as an indicator of

---

[39] Jane Jackson, Wellcome MS 373/108, 1642.

[40] Lady Frances Catchmay, Wellcome MS 184A/36, c. 1625.

[41] Philip Stanhope, Wellcome MS 761/33, c. 1635.

[42] Lady Ayscough, Wellcome MS 1026/114, 84, 1692.

[43] Townshend Family, Wellcome MS 774/22, 1636-1647.

[44] I am indebted to conversations and postings with Laurence Totelin on our work for the connections between early modern curdled milk and its ancient precedents.

health, and notes that the qualities of "Colour; smell; composition; consistence; and with regards to its taste, whether it changes with time" are indicators that should be observed:

> Consistence and thickness: it should be moderately thick. For fluid, thin and watery milk is not nutritious and may disturb the bowels; while thick and cheesy milk is hard to digest and, in the same way as food that has been partially chewed, it blocks up the pores (i.e. ducts) and, as it occupies the main passages of the body, it is a danger to life. [Soranus, *Gynaecology* 2.22][45]

Soranus thus notes smell and taste and consistency among the indicators of the quality of a woman's milk, and describes that "cheesy milk…blocks up the pores" and presents a "danger to life" because of the ways in which it can obstruct passages in the body. In her translation of Soranus's *Gynaecology*, Laurence Totelin notes that it is the Greek word *turōdēs* that she translates as "cheesy," taken "from the verb *turoō*, make into cheese curdle."[46] In other words, what Soranus describes as dangerous for the body is curdled milk, which can be determined by consistency and taste. Curdling was a process of putrefaction, and thus the resulting curdled breast milk could have been bitter or sour or otherwise unpalatable. Lady Macbeth's reference to transforming her milk to gall thus would seem to have basis in reality, suggesting the physiological realities of curdled milk will render it bitter, potentially inedible and, at worst, poisonous. Again, this corresponds to the parallel between Lady Macbeth's gallish milk and Shakespeare's description of curdled blood in *Hamlet*, forming "aygre," or sour and acidic, droppings in milk. Other ancient medical writers affirmed the dangers of curdled milk, that "cheesy breast-milk is unhealthy for the woman and a sign that she is sick."[47] According to Paul

---

[45] Quoted in Laurence Totelin, "Curdled Milk in the Breast: Take II." *The Recipes Project*, 18 June 2013, recipes.hypotheses.org. Accessed 7 January 2017.

[46] Totelin, "Curdled Milk, Take II."

[47] Totelin, "Curdled Milk, Take II."

of Aegina (seventh century CE), curdled milk was considered poisonous when drunk in too large a quantity, and this poisoning manifested itself through a feeling of suffocation: "Those who have taken a large amount of curdled milk (literally, milk containing rennet) suffer from a great feeling of suffocation (pnigmos) because it is lumpy.' (Paul 5.58)."[48]

It is thus that the physiological curdling of milk was symptomatic of ill health. In the seventeenth century, curdled milk figured as a symptom associated with cancer: "If in a Woman with Child, the Dugs are liable to Inflamation, Tumors, and Ulcers; much more are they so in a Child-bed Woman, and one that gives suck, by reason of the curdling of her Milk."[49] Midwifery manuals and medical texts that focused on female health in the seventeenth century identified the connection between the womb and the breasts as one of the causes of breast cancer. Jane Cancer, in her book on midwifery, notes that

> there are Kernels growing in the breasts which are small round spungy bodies, and sometimes swell by humors flowing thither: there grow sometimes other hard swellings caused by that they call the *Kings-evil*; it is engendred of gross Phlegm or thick mattery blood, and grows hard under the skin; the stopping of the Courses is the ordinary cause, when the Menstrual blood runs back to the breasts, this will soon become a Cancer.[50]

Sharp explains the kernels as products of curdled milk: "If the milk be much, and stay long in the breasts, it does curdle, when the thinner part evaporates, and the thick stayes behind and turns

---

[48] Totelin, "Curdled Milk, Take II."

[49] Jean Riolan, *A Sure Guide, or, The Best and Nearest Way to Physick and Chyrurgery: That is to say, The Arts of Healing by Medicine, and Manual Operation. Being An Anatomical Description of the whol Body of Man, and its Parts, with their Respective Diseases, demonstrated from the Fabrick and Vse of the said Parts. In Six Books… Written in Latine, by Johannes Riolanus, Junior; Doctor of Physick…Englished by Nich. Culpeper, Gent. and W. R. Doctor of the Liberal Arts, and of Physick.* London, 1657, 97. "Dioscorides writes, That the swelling of the Dugs is brought down, by the application of bruised Hemlock, which Experience shews to be true. Howbeit, Dodonaeus approves not of this Medicine, by reason of the malignant, and venemous Nature of this Herb, which being applied unto the Dugs, may wrong the Heart."

[50] Jane Sharp, *The Midwives Book. Or the whole Art of Midwifry Discovered. Directing Childbearing Women how to behave themselves In their Conception, Breeding, Bearing, and Nursing of Children. In Six Books, Viz. By Mrs. Jane Sharp Practitioner in the Art of Midwifry above thirty years.* London, 1671, 342.

into kernels and hard swellings, which being the Cheesy part of the milk will soon grow hard, and this will easily inflame and impostumate."[51] In other words, Sharp describes the dangers of curdled milk as the source of illnesses, possibly even cancer, and connects the curdling of milk to the curdling of "thick mattery blood," a result of the reproductive link in the mother's body by which "Menstrual blood runs back to the breasts." Thus, physiology of curdled milk in the breast signified danger to the health of mother, in the form of blockages and swellings symptomatic of cancer.

Witchcraft and the Curdled Milk of Morality

That the curdling of the milk was thought to be related to cancers in the period allows for the suggestive interpretation of Lady Macbeth calling to be infected with a kind of breast cancer as symptomatic of the corruption of her maternity. Indeed, Lady Macbeth's curdling milk manifests as a cancerous symptom of what critics interpret as a larger moral illness. Curdling as a process of putrefaction was thus a process of corruption; curdled milk, therefore, was corrupted milk. Bodily corruption was often not only read medically, but as symptomatic of moral or spiritual corruption. This may be why the curdling of milk was a commonplace indication of witchcraft—witches were believed to steal milk or to make milk go bad. In Tirolian Hans Vintler's 1486 tract concerning virtuous behavior, *Pluemen der Tugent* or *Tugendspiegel*, "(Flowers of Virtue or Mirror for Virtue)," appears a woodcut Sigrid Schade describes as *Milchzauber*, or "milk magic," in which the witch is depicted as a "milk thief."[52] According to Nancy Hayes, the depiction of the witch, and of this milk magic, references the period's anxiety

---

[51] Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, 357.

[52] In Nancy Hayes, "Negativizing Nurture and Demonizing Domesticity: The Witch Construct in Early Modern Germany," *Maternal Measures: Figuring Caregiving in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh, (Aldershot, UK; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000), 179-200, 179-80.

about the "availability of milk" as well as its link to witches; milk theft and corruption served to demonstrate a woman's identity as a witch and could lead to witchcraft accusations and executions.[53]

Curdled milk thus serves as a material site where medicine and magic, or witchcraft, intersect. If witchcraft was characterized by the manipulation of substances like milk, Lady Macbeth's manipulation of her own milk and blood serves to strengthen the connection scholars have interpreted between her and witchcraft, and the witches of the play. The witch-figure was a figure of the anti-maternal; as Hayes notes, the witch constituted "the negative maternal, the depriver of her children's food and comfort, the Other to the Mother." Whereas the mother's role is predicated on "feeding her child, in ensuring its physical survival," the witch performs the opposite.[54] Lady Macbeth thus represents the threat of the Scottish lactating mother who, in her murderous speeches, has gained the reputation of the anti-maternal. When she describes that she "would, while [her infant] was smiling in my face, / Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums, / And dash'd the brains out" (1.7.56-58), contrary to fulfilling a maternal role as the nourisher and protector of her child, she imagines killing her child alongside depriving it of her breastmilk.

Lady Macbeth's imagined infanticide, the climactic demonstration of her anti-maternity, has been connected to her earlier desire to be unsexed. Stephanie Chamberlain reads the infanticide as evidence of Lady Macbeth's "attempt to seize a masculine power to further Macbeth's political goals," but that in light of Macbeth's "feminized reticence," Lady Macbeth

---

[53] Hayes, "Negativizing Nurture," 181.

[54] Hayes, "Negativizing Nurture," 179.

"assumes a masculinity she will prove unable to support."[55] But Lady Macbeth's relationship to gender, beyond simply demonstrating a masculinity that she cannot support, is more complex, as evidenced by the milk she turns to gall. On the one hand, the category of the anti-maternal through the figure of the witch presupposes the witch as primarily a feminized category—though male witches existed, and were prevalent, witches and witchcraft were often associated with female attributes.[56] Because women were thought to be prone to corruption, composed of cold and moist humors and leaky fluids, it would seem fitting that Lady Macbeth and the weird sisters form the antagonists of the play. However, Lady Macbeth and the weird sisters are significantly masculinized. Lady Macbeth's call for her unsexing as a masculinizing process has been discussed, and the three witches apparently have beards, causing Banquo to comment that "you should be women, / And yet your beards forbid me to interpret / That you are so" (1.3.45-7). That the purportedly female antagonists of the play are demonized for their masculine qualities emphasizes the monstrosity of their hermaphroditic status. If they were ever impressionable women, they certainly are no longer as witches.

Feminine bodies like Lady Macbeth's seem to be the site of corruption, but it is Lady Macbeth's call for masculinity that causes the curdling of her milk—the transformation of cold, moist milk to hot, choleric gall. What results can be interpreted as exactly what happens when masculine and feminine fluids combine: curdling, which forms the basis for conception and the formation of the embryo. In other words, curdling results from the combination of the male and

---

[55] Stephanie Chamberlain, "Fantasizing Infanticide: Lady Macbeth and the Murdering Mother in Early Modern England," *College Literature* 32.3 (2005): 72-91, 72. Lady Macbeth's power, Chamberlain argues, is "conditioned on maternity," a power that undermined the "transmission of patrilineage" (Chamberlain 73).

[56] For more on early modern male witches, see Lara Apps and Andrew Gow, *Male Witches in Early Modern Europe* (Manchester University Press, 2003).

female components. In conception, curdling is good, and necessary, because it is a natural part of reproduction. According to the curdling theory of conception, all humans, therefore, are formed of curdled milk, as Job describes. But, as Totelin notes, "Curdling of blood/milk/semen is to be expected in the formation of an embryo but not when a woman is nursing."[57] Other forms of curdling, it would seem, are bad; curdling obstructs, coagulates, corrupts, and poisons outside of the natural realm of human procreation.

Uncurdled milk, then, is uncorrupted milk—what did this mean? It is fitting that milk serves as a metaphor in the early modern imagination for the Word of God. In Elizabeth Clinton's description and treatment of the nursing dyad between the breastfeeding mother and her nourished child, she relies on biblical metaphors of believers as nursing infants and the scripture as "the sincere milk of the word."[58] By semiotically figuring scripture as milk and the believer as the infant nourished by milk, Clinton highlights the importance the early moderns placed on milk and maternal breastmilk and its nourishing qualities. Holinshed echoes this metaphor, referring to the "milke of the worde of God."[59] Corrupted, or curdled, milk therefore posed much more than a health concern—it was a concern about the soul. Curdled milk placed one's life and state of redemption at stake.

If milk at its best represented scripture and the true word of God, then milk gone bad analogically represented the corruption or curdling of that true scripture. A corruption of divine scripture, I suggest, can be found in the form of false prophecy. In other words, curdled milk

---

[57] Totelin, "Curdled Milk, Take II."

[58] See Elizabeth Clinton, *The Countesse of Lincolnes Nurserie* (1622); 1 Peter 2:2.

[59] Holinshed, "The second Booke and the Hystoricall description of Britaine," *Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande*, 75.

metaphorically represented false or corrupted prophecy, which in *Macbeth* manifests precisely through the prophecies of the three witches and of Lady Macbeth, all of whom arguably use witchcraft to distort prophecy and the natural state of things. The threat that curdled milk poses —to the physiological and moral health of the body and body politic—manifests in the various instances of clogging in *Macbeth*, wherein Macbeth's body and mind, and the future of Scotland, are put in threat.

Curdled Visions

I place the metaphor of the milk of the word, and its logical counter in the curdled milk of corrupted prophecy, alongside the physiological effects of curdled milk and its associated obstructions in the body/body politic, to point out how Shakespeare imagines the urgent threat of corruption and degeneration in *Macbeth*. Instances of witchcraft and the psychosomatic illnesses that plague the Macbeths resonate with—and manifest medically as—the adverse effects of curdling milk and blood within the body. The danger of milk, as prone to curdling, made it difficult to digest because it easily troubled the nutritive and generative processes of the entire body. Milk could curdle in the stomach, resulting in indigestion in the form of physiological putrefaction, which was essentially a poisoning of the body that began in the stomach. Early modern medical practitioners and theorists, from both major strains of medical thought—Galenic and Paracelsian—viewed the stomach as a discriminating organ. Galenists saw the stomach as the kettle or oven of the body, responsible for proper coction of ingested food; Paracelsians saw the stomach as an internal alchemist, responsible for the separation of the pure from the impure.[60] In both models for digestion, the threat of putrefaction posed the primary threat to the

[60] Antonio Clericuzio, "Chemical and mechanical theories of digestion in early modern medicine," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* (2011), doi:10.1016/j.shpsc.2011.10.025, 1.

system, whether as improper coction or failure to separate the pure from the impure. Maintaining proper digestion was much like walking a tightrope—one motion gone astray and the entire body and its functions would fall apart. Ken Albala calls digestion the "most psychosomatically influenced system in our bodies," upon which the health of the body depended.[61]

The impact of digestive problems, as in those caused by corrupted milk, affected psychological soundness. Indigestible foods, or foods difficult to digest, could alter the mind by way of their effects on the body; they would "send fumes throughout the body, swelling it, or worse rising into the brain and causing nightmares."[62] Milk's ability to curdle was evidence of such indigestibility; it was believed that "Exactly as milk goes sour and curdles outside the body, it can also corrupt when exposed to the digestive heat of the stomach."[63] Thus the predominant threat of milk as putrefaction meant that in the stomach, milk could "scald and easily burn," causing various blockages in the body; the "faulty processing" of milk in the stomach caused "sooty vapours" to "rise into the head" and left "chalky deposits" in the veins, creating stones in the kidneys.[64] If undigested/indigested milk resulted in such pockets of solid matter that caused problems with blockage, the corruption of milk in the body was a physiological problem that could affect cognitive abilities.[65]

---

[61] Albala, *Eating Right*, 56.

[62] Albala, *Eating Right*, 59.

[63] Albala, "Milk," 22.

[64] Albala, "Milk," 22.

[65] Albala, "Milk," 22.

It was commonplace knowledge in early modern Europe that fumes and vapors caused by indigestion could product fantastical visions. Pierre Le Loyer's commentary on the nature of the corrupted senses speaks to this phenomenon:

> when the phantasie is thus deceived...the senses are for a season so obfuscated or invenomed with certaine vapors arising into the braine, that the contagion passeth from thence into the phantasie, and maketh it to imagine all things false and absurde, as long as those vaporous fumes doe continue turning within the braine.[66]

The sooty vapours of corrupted milk thus align with the phenomenon of fantastical visions spurred by problems in the digestive system. Indigestion was commonly seen as the root of all illness, physical and mental, and the link that appears often between the supernatural, episodes of madness, and physiological problems. Because Shakespeare often frames supernatural elements in *Macbeth* alongside the psychosomatic anxieties of ingestion and indigestion, those supernatural moments in the play, real or imagined, serve as an effective barometer of the degeneration of the mind from the degeneration of the body. For example, upon encountering the three witches for the first time, Banquo wonders if their appearance may be the psychological by-product of a problematic ingestion: "Were such things here, as we do speak about," he asks, "Or have we eaten on the insane root, / That takes the reason prisoner?" (1.3.83-5). Later in the play, the appearance of Banquo's ghost is prompted by Macbeth's invocation of digestion. At the scene of Macbeth's staged banquet, Macbeth begins by greeting his guests by saying "Sweet remembrancer, / Now good digestion wait on appetite / And health on both" (3.4.36-38). At this moment, Banquo's ghost enters the scene and the stage. The original folio indicates that Macbeth's toast to good digestion and the entrance of the ghost that haunts him coincide. Some editors have found this to be confusing, and the timing of Macbeth's speech and the stage

[66] Pierre le Loyer, *A Treatise of Specters or Straunge Sights*, London (1605), 90.

direction to be odd, and have taken the liberty to place the entrance of Banquo's ghost later, in some editions. However, I think it purposeful and indicative that Shakespeare places Macbeth's concern with good digestion alongside the entrance of Banquo's ghost, at a moment during which Macbeth's, and our, diseased perception is put into question. The supernatural works in tandem with physiological effects upon the body to explain the human relationship to the supernatural—indeed, witchcraft as a curdling force enacts these psychosomatic confusions as much as it is caused by them, as in theories of the mind's production of visions and hallucinations.

Macbeth blurs this line between the real and the unreal, and between cause and effect in the intersection of witchcraft and physiology and their psychosomatic repercussions. For example, even before the appearance of Banquo's ghost, Macbeth has a moment characterized by the confused blurring of the real and the unreal in his vision of the dagger:

> Is this a dagger, which I see before me,
> The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee:—
> I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
> Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
> To feeling, as to sight? or art thou but
> A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
> Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?
> I see thee yet, in form as palpable
> As this which now I draw. (2.1.33-41)

Macbeth recognizes that he can see, but cannot seem to touch, the dagger, a "fatal vision" that seems not to be "sensible / To feeling, as to sight." As Macbeth questions, the dagger may well be "A dagger of the mind," a vision or hallucination constructed by his imagination. The notion that the dagger is a "*false* creation" that "[proceeds] from the heat-oppressed brain" speaks directly to the kind of hallucination produced by vaporous fumes entering into the brain from the

body—and the curdling or corrupting of Macbeth's physiological and psychosomatic processes.[67]

The psychosomatic alteration that results from such hot, sooty vapours appears earlier. Lady Macbeth, in line with her own witchy abilities to manipulate, and curdle, her physiology, also plans to manipulate Duncan's guards through their possets, a popular drink made by curdling milk with hot ale or wine. According to her plan,

> When Duncan is asleep
> …his two chamberlains
> Will I with wine and wassail so convince,
> That memory, the warder of the brain,
> Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason
> A limbeck only. (1.7.62, 64-8)

The fuming brains of Duncan's "spongy officers" (1.7.72), Lady Macbeth notes, will cause "Their drenched natures" to lie "in swinish sleep…as in a death" (1.7.68-69). True to her prophecized plans, Lady Macbeth "drugg'd their possets, / That Death and Nature do contend about them, / Whether they live, or die" (2.2.6-8). Although sometimes listed as a digestive, possets provided in practice what some authors argued against when it came to drinking wine and milk together in the same meal; the addition of wine was held to increase the danger of milk's effects on the body, as "Together they coagulate, and can lead to strangulation, once the crass substance makes its way through the bloodstream toward the heart and lungs."[68] In possets, the hot ale or wine reacted with the milk to separate "the solid milk curd and liquid whey," leading to exactly the qualities that make milk curdling so dangerous for the body.[69] When Lady

---

[67] Brooke notes that "Heat was thought of as a fluid substance which could literally weigh on the brain." Brooke, Kindle location 1498.

[68] Albala, "Milk," 22.

[69] Albala, "Milk," 22.

Macbeth describes how her drugged possets will affect the guards, she describes the psychosomatically-influenced cognitive disruption such that memory becomes "a fume," and the "receipt of reason" becomes a "limbeck," or an alembic, a type of vessel used in alchemical processes of purifying or distilling, separating refined from condensed matter.

That Lady Macbeth specifically uses possets, a night-time drink, to drug the "spongy officers" prompts us to re-read the context of Macbeth's vision of the dagger. As in *Macbeth*'s other instances of supernatural occurrence, like the appearance of the three witches and that of Banquo's ghost, Macbeth's vision of the dagger is preceded by a moment of ingestion. Immediately before his vision, Macbeth has just asked his servant to "Go, bid thy mistress, when my drink is ready, / She strike upon the bell" (2.1.31-32). This reference to his drink, as a moment of ingestion, just before the moment of his "hallucination" gestures to the same connection between the problem of posseting or posseted fluids and the potential for cognitive or psychological dysfunction in the form of the "heat-oppressed brain."

The physiological problem that Shakespeare depicts in *Macbeth* in the notion of curdled milk is the curdling of fluids that are processed through the digestive system until it reaches the brain. The vulnerability of the body and the brain to such curdling is exemplified in the model of the "spongy officers" that Lady Macbeth describes. The descriptor "spongy" speaks to the early modern concern that the English constitution was particularly impressionable and that their brains were "naturally spongy," and thus "excessively porous."[70] While "spongy" was often used

[70] Mary Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 14; John Sutton, "Spongy Brains and Material Memories," in *Embodiment and Environment in Early Modern England*, edited by Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett Sullivan (Palgrave, 2006), 14.

to describe the brain, it was also used to describe the bowels, which emphasized the similarity in function it shared with the brain, both as digestive organs:

> the digestive aspect of brain function is stressed, suggesting that the idea of the second brain in the gut has a correlate in the idea of a second gut in the brain, and indeed digestion was a process imagined to occur throughout the body as various parts engaged in what was frequently described as the third concoction during which the parts assimilated what nourishment they required.[71]

The structure and functions of of the brain were theorized to work by way of "networks of pores traversed by fluids."[72] The "spongy brain" was thus quite literal. The networks of fluids of the spongy brain involved "animal spirits distilled from the blood" which "flowed through hollow nerves and around the brain, leaving traces in the flexures of its fibres and thus altering the networks' subsequent responses."[73] This model of fluidity, and thus porousness, portrayed the spongy brain as exceptionally unstable and impressionable. English bodies and brains were especially porous due to their moist complexions, which resulted in their being "susceptible to foreign influence, malleable, and inconstant"[74] due to their "braine-sick humors."[75]

The "spongy officers" that guard Duncan serve as an example of the early modern vulnerability to the effects of food and drink—and, indeed, curdling—and their "drenched natures" bring up the image of the network of pores in their brains and bodies filled by fluids. Considering the sponginess of the northern body and brain, reading Macbeth's vision of the

---

[71] Jan Purnis, "The Belly-Mind Relationship in Early Modern Culture: Digestion, Ventriloquism, and the Second Brain," in *Embodied Cognition and Shakespeare's Theatre: The Early Modern Body-Mind*, edited by Laurie Johnson, John Sutton, and Evelyn Tribble (Routledge, 2014), 246.

[72] Sutton, "Spongy Brains," 18.

[73] Sutton, "Spongy Brains," 18.

[74] Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity*, 55.

[75] William Slatyer, *Palae-Albion or The History of Great Britanie* (1621), 9; quoted in Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity*, 55.

dagger recalls Lady Macbeth's earlier claim that he is "too full o'th'milk"; we recognize that his hallucination may be caused by the "heat-oppressed brain," the overheating of his overabundance of milk. Indeed, Lady Macbeth's manipulative mastery would seem to be over the power to curdle liquids. Macbeth's milky self curdles in the same way Old Hamlet's blood does, prone to the influence of the poisonous "spirits" Lady Macbeth pours in his ear, which possets and curds like eager droppings into milk, clogging Macbeth the "milkesop"—the spongy bread that soaks up milk.

Given the parallel between the spongy brain and the spongy bowels, it is no wonder that metaphors of digestion were used to imagine the acquisition of knowledge. Brain function and digestion were connected and "highlighted in early modern expressions of how knowledge is acquired and processed."[76] In his *Areopagitica*, John Milton uses the analogy of digestion to explain the effect of books and knowledge on the reader. Milton argues that

> "To the pure, all things are pure"; not only meats and drinks, but all kind of knowledge whether of good or evil; the knowledge cannot defile, nor consequently the books, if the will and conscience be not defiled. For books are as meats and viands are—some of good, some of evil substance… Wholesome meats to a vitiated stomach differ little or nothing from unwholesome, and best books to a naughty mind are not unappliable to occasions of evil. Bad meats will scarce breed good nourishment in the healthiest concoction…[77]

Milton's argument is that the individual person and mind determines how ideas will be "digested," placing the onus of proper or improper digestion upon the moral strength of the discerning reader. Importantly, Milton's qualifying statement acknowledges that in reality bad meats, or bad foods, "will scarce breed good nourishment in the healthiest concoction"—that bad

---

[76] Purnis, "Belly-Mind Relationship," 247.

[77] John Milton, *Areopagitica*, in *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003), 716-49, 727.

meats will inevitably have a negative effect on the body of even the most discerning individual, and this manifested in very real ways when it came to the influence of bad or corrupted food upon the fancy/early modern minds, as Le Loyer had noted. In this way, knowledge acquisition was psychosomatically influenced; correspondingly, Lady Macbeth comments to her husband "Why, worthy Thane / You do unbend your noble strength, to think / So brainsickly of things" (2.2.43-5).

Milk, then, as a fluid with the potential threat to curdle and solidify, provides the metaphor in *Macbeth* for how knowledge can be made dangerous, or corrupted. When cognition is imagined physiologically, milk figures as detrimental to the sponge analogy in the way that it curdles—it acts as harmful or poisonous, "indigestible," through the potential for suffocation/ coagulation. If the function of the sponge was to facilitate the fluid mobility of the circulatory system of animal spirits in the body, and if—as in *Hamlet*—poison in the blood could "posset" like curds in milk, presumably forming solids that clotted the blood, in *Macbeth* posseting or curdling milk poisoned when incorporated into the psyche because it was corrupted milk that obstructed the flow of fluid spirits in spongy organs. As a substance that represented divine knowledge, then, milk's vulnerability to corruption was all the more dangerous for the body, mind, and soul. Macbeth is prone to the effects of curdled milk through the weird sisters/witches who serve as wet-nurses of false prophecy. Macbeth wrongly digests the knowledge given to him and is nourished on false hopes, a dangerous and distorted foreknowledge that delivers fantasy rather than substantial nourishment. The witches' words of prophecy/divinity/witchcraft, and those of Lady Macbeth, proceed to have that effect upon Macbeth, who is too full of the milk of human kindness, or humankindness, and have the power to curdle in his mind and body.

As curdled milk, the effects of the false prophecy manifest in Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as a sickness composed of blockages that must be purged. Just as Lady Macbeth has called for the spirits to make thick her blood, she is "troubled" with "*thick-coming fancies* / That keep her from rest [emphasis mine]" (5.3.38-39). Her reference to the "thick-coming fancies" that plague her resonate with the state of being clogged and overladen, which culminates in the body and mind overcome with diseases. Moreover, Lady Macbeth's illness, as Macbeth recognizes, stems from her bosom, approximate to where she had previously called for her milk to be taken for gall. It is fitting, thus, that Macbeth asks the doctor to cleanse her "stuff'd bosom," clogged due to her curdled milk. Lady Macbeth's own vision, proceeding perhaps from her own heat-oppressed brain, is of her unclean hands that she cannot wash away, a signal to Macbeth that her mind has begun to deteriorate. Macbeth describes hers as a sickness characterized by clogging that requires a kind of purging. "Cure her of that," Macbeth pleads to the doctor,

> Canst thou not minister to a mind diseas'd,
> Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
> Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
> And with some sweet oblivious antidote
> Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff
> Which weighs upon the heart? (5.3.39-45)

What Macbeth identifies as characteristic of "a mind diseas'd" is a "rooted sorrow," a kind of clot that must be "Pluck[ed] from the memory," "Raze[d] out…of the brain," the only solution to which, as antidote, is to "*Cleanse* the *stuff'd* bosom of that perilous stuff / Which weighs upon the heart [emphasis mine]." The only cure at this point, as Macbeth gestures to, would be a process of removal—plucking, razing, cleansing—as purging, to rid "the stuff'd bosom" of the

curds that block the healthy, and natural, flow of fluids. To cleanse Lady Macbeth's stuffed bosom would mean to uncurdle her milk, to save her from cancerous curdling.

However, as the doctor acknowledges, he cannot in fact "minister to a mind diseas'd" and perform these processes of removal. Rather, "Therein the patient / Must minister to himself," the doctor admits. The solution therefore requires a *self-regulated removal* that cannot be administered externally, one that places the onus of uncurdling, and perhaps the very ability to uncurdle, on the individual self. After all, Lady Macbeth's curdling of her blood and milk was self-inflicted; perhaps, thus, her cure must be self-administered. Macbeth, in his anger, sees the doctor's response as the failure of physic: "Throw physic to the dogs; I'll none of it" (5.3.47). But what Macbeth has pleaded for is a medicinal remedy for a physiological curdling that has extended to moral and spiritual corruption.

For Macbeth as well, the epistemological dilemma of the witches' distorted truths proves too much. The curdled milk of false prophecy leads to a kind of clogging and suffocation of his own. In fact, Macbeth chokes on the very words he needs to connect spiritually to the "sincere milk of the [divine] word." "But wherefore could not I pronounce 'Amen'?" he despairs, "I had most need of blessing, *and 'Amen'* / *Stuck in my throat*. [emphasis mine]" (2.2.30-2). Fittingly, in what reads as a curdling of the milk of scripture, "Amen" comes out as a false word that has stuck, clogged in his internal physiological and moral systems. To return to physician Soranus's warning, cheesy and curdled milk in the breast was a phenomenon that Soranus compared to *choking*. In Macbeth's choked *amen*, thus, are connected the spiritual dangers of curdled milk to Macbeth's own predilection for being too full of milk.

The Sweet Milk of Concord

The curdling of the Macbeths, additionally, manifests in the curdling of the body politic. He continues his pleading to the doctor, this time to administer physic to purge Scotland of the English:

> If thou couldst, doctor, cast
> The water of my land, find her disease,
> And purge it to a sound and pristine health,
> I would applaud thee to the very echo…
> What rhubarb, cyme, or what purgative drug,
> Would scour these English hence? (5.3.50-53, 55-6)

Macbeth still attempts to appeal to an externally-administered purging as the solution for the various diseases of blockage and stoppage that Shakespeare presents as the sickness that plagues Macbeth, his situation, and his destiny. In his desperation for a solution, he looks to common ideas about physic and herbal remedies—rhubarb, cyme—believed to be purgative.[78] Macbeth, and Shakespeare, draw upon prevalent early modern ideas about purges and laxatives needed for the well-being of the body. Purges were believed to be necessary for the health and balance of what Wendy Wall calls the "highly soluble" early modern body, which was "in constant need of evacuations: enemas, laxatives, and emetics for the lower body stratum; herbs, changes in thermal conditions, and air for upper body 'purges' (vomiting, coughing, burping); blood-letting, exercise, and orgasm for all around purification."[79] So, too, does Macbeth see these herbs and purgative drugs as the solution for purging Scotland of its corruptions and clogs, what he sees in the form of the English.

---

[78] Muir notes that "cyme" has been interpreted by some to be "a misprint of *cynne*," or senna (Muir 149). According to Dodoens's *New Herball* (1586), senna was used to "purge the belly, scoure away fleume and choler, especially blacke choler and melancholie."

[79] Wendy Wall, *Staging Domesticity: Household Work and English Identity in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 169.

However, Macbeth's interpretation that the English are the curds that impair the health of Scotland reverses the direction of strange corruption in Shakespeare's England. Metaphors of digestion, and of milk, thus connect to metaphors of the body politic. The well-being of the political state, using the metaphor of the body politic, was often described in terms of illness and health in early modern texts. The corporeal body and its inner workings provided the perfect analogy for the internal functions of a healthy political body. The health of the body politic was additionally connected to dietary theory that spoke to the dangers of incorporation of the foreign. These concerns were brought to the forefront upon the contested succession of James I to the English throne after Elizabeth's long reign, or the incorporation of a Scottish monarch combining the two nations in place of an English queen. What results is the anxious assertion of the health of the nation in physiological terms. In fact, those anxieties manifest in the imperative to maintain that health, articulated in terms of the fluidity and naturalness of healthy blood. In *The Miracvlovs and Happie Vnion of England & Scotland* (1604), James's projected reign as monarch is ensured through that healthy blood flow imagined in the unification of England and Scotland by way of the purging of corruptions:

> Shall we se now out of what matter our enemies can worke dissention, their is neither ambition nor discontentment amongst our great men, nor burthens vpon the people, lawes haue their due course, and *purge the vaines of the common wealth, from vnnaturall stoppings and corruptions*. [emphasis mine][80]

Stoppings and corruptions are characterized here as unnatural and harmful for the body, and purging was thus seen as a forceful way of bringing the body back into its natural state of flow

[80] *The Miracvlovs and Happie Vnion of England & Scotland; by how admirable meanes it is effected, how profitable to both Nations, and howe free of any inconuenience either past, present, or to be discerned* (Edinburgh, Printed by Thomas Finlason, 1604), C2r.

and health. According to the analogy, James I's was "blood…of both nations,"[81] which emphasized the stakes of the threats of stoppings and corruptions in the system of health that dictated both his own body and the body politic he ruled. The articulated assurances of his rule belied a deep anxiety, and we see that anxiety manifested in the way writers emphasize over and over the potential of this union:

> this Iland is happily come within the circle of one Diadem, not by Conquest nor by weaknes, nor for protection, but are drawne together by the vertue of an vnited blood, and made one mans Kingdome by the happy coniunction of the Royal blood of both nations. And is that blood growne one, and shall not the Kingdomes growe one?[82]

The anxiety centers around the joining of two formerly disparate entities, the addition of one to the other that, in physiological terms, could manifest in curdling, as in the case of milk and wine, which breaks apart the milk into solids and liquids. Thus we see the reiteration of that joining, "within the circle of one Diadem," drawn by the "vertue of an vnited blood," "made one mans Kingdome" which is the "happy coniunction of the Royal blood of both nations," ending in a rhetoric question that aims to form the correspondence between the "blood growne one" and the "Kingdomes grow[ne] one."

If the goal of James's reign, the successful union of England Scotland, can be imagined as "vnited blood," and if that integration is yet a tenuous one, one that requires vigilance in making sure to "purge the vaines of the common wealth, from vnnaturall stoppings and corruptions," the connections that result between the united body politic, physiological corruptions, and purging can be considered in relation to the curdled milk and blood and their effects in *Macbeth*. Furthermore, if the regulation of the kingdom was seen through the purging

---

[81] *Miracvlovs*, C3r.

[82] *Miracvlovs*, C3r.

of the "vaines of the common wealth, from vnnaturall stoppings and corruptions," appropriately, then, Lady Macbeth's call for a thickening of blood registers as the threat of corrupted and curdled blood that lies at the heart of the anxiety about the "vnited blood" of England and Scotland and its potential to make "the Kingdomes growe one."[83] Indeed, referencing Lady Macbeth's "often-quoted speech" to make thick her blood, Bryan Adams Hampton notes that "Instead of healthful purgation, Lady Macbeth's invocation conveys the opposite: physical, emotional, and spiritual constipation."[84] Rather, Hampton argues that it is Lady Macbeth's "abandonment of her traditional gendered role of purging the household in favor of occult power" that causes "disease within the household" which "directly challenges God's sovereignty."[85] But more directly, I argue that Lady Macbeth's call for occult power manifests in the form of curdling, and correspondingly, the Macbeths' rule thus manifests as a kind of clot, the effect of which addresses a range of significative possibilities: the clogged and diseased system of the nation that needs purging, the corruption of the sincere milk of the word through false prophecy, the curdled and thus nonviable milk of the breast that fails to nourish the infant and future generations. In fact, the intersection of the curdled milk of false prophecy and the corrupted and clogged body politic that resists the integration of the foreign would continue with the rhetoric of the commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell and the English civil wars of the

---

[83] "It can bee no other, then in the disposing of our new body, from which wee maye take the beginning of the happiest Empire that euer was, Plato to illustrate the strength of friendship borroweth so much of Poetrie as to tell a tale that the bodye of man was firste rounde, and whilest hee enjoyed that forme was doubly furnished of all the Organes and abilities of man, after, abusing his strength the Gods diuided him and left him (C2r) but the halfe of that he was; but yet with a power (as finding the other halfe which is a perfect friende, not differing in resemblance) hee mighte againe enjoy his firste strength and happines. England hath founde her other halfe, she is nowe doubly furnished with the strength of a Kingdome, she hath foure armes, foure legs, two hartes (made one) two powers, and double forces." (C2v)

[84] Bryan Adams Hampton, "Purgation, Exorcism, and the Civilizing Process in *Macbeth*," *SEL* 51.2 (2011): 327-347, 338.

[85] Hampton, "Purgation, Exorcism, and the Civilizing Process," 338.

seventeenth century; writers like Andrew Marvell, in his "First Anniversary of the Government under His Highness the Lord Protectorate," would speak to the threat of "Sorcerers, atheists, Jesuits possessed" (l. 314)—according to David J. Baker "All manner of menacing interlopers" who "may try to entice the English into false readings of the Scriptures, but their 'king' (311) spits them out, and by protecting doctrinal purity, ensures their national purity as well."[86]

What Malcolm offers, then, "here from gracious England," (4.3.43) is the solution to the clogging of Scotland. Malcolm, speaking satirically to Macduff, uses the metaphor of milk to express the susceptibility of the kingdom, pretending to threaten that

> had I power, I should
> Pour the sweet milk of concord into Hell,
> Uproar the universal peace, confound
> All unity on earth. (4.3.97-100)

In other words, what Malcolm threatens, for sake of comparison to Macbeth, is the curdling of the "sweet milk of concord," which, in the heat of Hell, would "Uproar the universal peace, confound / All unity on earth." But here Malcolm thus recognizes and articulates that a monarch's good and natural rule consists of the "sweet milk of concord," uncorrupted by unnatural and occult forces. Most obviously, then, the sweet milk of concord of goodly rule has been curdled by the rule of the Macbeths who themselves are curdled by the false prophecy of unnatural and occult ambitions. Hampton compares the purgation in *Macbeth* to exorcism[87] and explains how "Malcolm returns resolving to ritualistically purge Scotland" because "He recognizes that the body politic of Scotland is in need of supernatural purgation, perhaps even a

---

[86] David J. Baker, *Between Nations: Shakespeare, Spenser, Marvell, and the Question of Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 150.

[87] Hampton, "Purgation, Exorcism, and the Civilizing Process," 331. "*Macbeth* is an exorcism in five acts, a play about domestic purgation that resonates keenly with the tension produced when the categories of material and spiritual, and sacred and profane, are collapsed."

kind of national exorcism, as Macbeth's foulness becomes a fair sacrifice by agents of England's saintly king."[88] Transferring this anxiety to the political situation in *Macbeth*, we see Macbeth's Scotland essentially characterized by stops—perhaps the very ones Lady Macbeth had ordered. Indeed Cathness, one of the noblemen, speaks of joining Malcolm and characterizes himself and others of Malcolm's followers as contributing to a kind of purge:

> march we on,
> To give obedience where 'tis truly ow'd:
> Meet we the med'cine of the sickly weal;
> And with him pour we, in our country's purge,
> Each drop of us. (5.2.25-9)

Macbeth is imagined to be a source of clogging himself—perhaps serving dangerously as curdled milk in the political system in the way that his own body suffers from dis-temperance. The noblemen who discuss supporting Malcolm as a kind of political purge note that Macbeth "cannot buckle his distemper'd cause / Within the belt of rule" (5.2.13-16). As if to set up the state of indigestion, or inner dis-temperance, that Macbeth will need to address, the noblemen note:

> Who then shall blame
> His pester'd senses to recoil and start,
> When *all that is within him does condemn*
> *Itself, for being there*? [emphasis mine] (5.2.22-5)

If Macbeth's insides, "all that is within him," condemns itself for being within him, his disease manifests as a need for a forced release. In particular, as in his discussion with the doctor, Macbeth's need for purging must be self-administered, for the source of his clotting is himself.

Thus, Macbeth may be reminded of the purgative effects of milk at the moment he ruminates on his final push. Just before he calls for Seyton, an obvious homonym to Satan, he

[88] Hampton, "Purgation, Exorcism, and the Civilizing Process," 337.

has just dismissed another servant, a "cream-fac'd loon" he calls "whey-face" (5.3.11, 17), then continues to one of his final speeches. In the original Folio text, the speech reads,

> Seyton, I am sick at hart,
> When I behold: Seyton, I say, this push
> Will cheere me euer, or dis-eate me now.
> I haue liu'd long enough: my way of life
> Is falne into the Seare, the yellow Leafe,
> And that which should accompany Old-Age,
> As Honor, Loue, Obedience, Troopes of Friends,
> I must not looke to haue: but in their steed,
> Curses, not lowd but deepe, Mouth-honor, breath
> Which the poore heart would faine deny, and dare not.[89]

Editors have often replaced the original spelling of "dis-eate" here to "disseat" or "dis-seat."[90] In Nicholas Brooke's argument for this editorial decision, for example, he speculates that the Folio's "dis-eate" is "probably a misprint since its only possible sense, 'vomit my life out', is too strained... Steevens's 'dis-seat', meaning unseat from throne and life, is much more probable in the context."[91] However, in light of my argument about the role of curdled milk in the play, I disagree with this editorial decision; rather, given the concerns with curdling and indigestion with corrupted milk and the rhetoric of digestion and purging—and indeed the need for self-purging—in the play, the sense of "vomiting my life out" could be exactly what is meant: to dis-eat, to purge the corruption causing his indigestion. The act of dis-eating is an act of purging, part of an internal system of regulation that aims to resolve the problems of curdling and clogging.

---

[89] William Shakespeare, *Mr. VVilliam Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies Published According to the True Originall Copies*, London, (1623).

[90] I have quoted here from the Arden Shakespeare *Macbeth*, which reads "disseat" without a note; the Oxford Shakespeare *Macbeth* reads "dis-seat," and Nicholas Brooke provides an explanation for his editing choice. Unless otherwise specified, all further quotes from *Macbeth* will be taken from the Arden Shakespeare and identified in-text by act, scene, and line numbers.

[91] Brooke, Kindle location 2597. Brooke also mentions that the second Folio's "disease" is "a plausible guess," but decides in favor of "dis-seat."

The threat that a push will "dis-eate" him fits into the metaphor of the state as a political body, but provides the additional valences of corporeal and degenerative/disintegrative threat that this chapter has argued for: purging the sickness of the state, the sickness of his soul, the curdled milk of false prophecy as a poisonous substitute for the divine word. Macbeth's call to the final push is perhaps his final moment of truth with the prophecies, an attempt to dis-eate what he's believed, ultimately implicating Macbeth's dis-eating in a problem of epistemology: the need for discriminatory ingestion and digestion for proper generation, redemption, and salvation. Thus, if Brooke speculates that the only possible sense of "dis-eate" is to vomit, I open that definition up to the possibilities that the construction "dis-" and "eate" and the idea of vomiting provide: purging, rejecting, ejecting, the opposite of eating, a lack of nourishment.

Additionally, dis-eating is abortive. It is the rejection of the generation of matter. Just as the body fails to generate matter when it fails to digest, so too Macbeth and Lady Macbeth fail to generate progeny to continue their blood and their line. As Hampton notes, "Instead of a (re)productive, life-sustaining and life-generating household, Macbeth's inverted household is abortive; it is purgation as destruction."[92] Given that James I was thought to be a descendant of Banquo's long line of kings, Shakespeare contrasts the fear of clogging and the forced dis-eating that the Macbeths represent by portraying Banquo and his line as a source of what seems like healthy/healthful/temperate eating—"True worthy Banquo:" Duncan notes, "he is full so valiant, / And in his commendations I am fed; / It is a banquet to me" (1.4.54-6). Thus eating becomes a metonymy for generation-at-large; Banquo, characterized by his function as nourishment, thus is hailed as "father to a line of kings," while Macbeth laments

[92] Hampton, "Purgation," 340.

> Upon my head they plac'd a fruitless crown,
> And put a barren sceptre in my gripe,
> Thence to be wrench'd with an unlineal hand,
> No son of mine succeeding. If't be so,
> For Banquo's issue have I fil'd my mind;
> For them the gracious Duncan have I murther'd;
> Put rancours in the vessel of my peace,
> Only for them; and mine eternal jewel
> Given to the common Enemy of man,
> To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings! (3.1.59-69)

We must think about Macbeth's "dis-eate" as a word that did not begin as a word. Rather, as in Peter Brook's philosophy of theater, the word "is an end product which begins as an impulse, stimulated by attitude and behaviour which dictate the need for expression."[93] In our case, Macbeth's need to "dis-eate" is an end product stimulated by the curdling that needs to be remedied.

Conclusion: Curdled Milk and Rethinking Gendered Corruption in *Macbeth*

Moreoever, if the symbol of healthy rule is milk at its best and most nourishing, and if purging is a kind of exorcism, it would seem that Shakespeare, through his male characters, attempts to remove and abstract that "sweet milk of concord" from the female body—that is, if we see Lady Macbeth and the weird sisters as female figures particularly prone to, and agents of, corruption and curdling. As representatives of corruption, then, Lady Macbeth and the witches in the play would seem to demonstrate "The fears of female coercion, female definition of the male," which are "initially located cosmically in the witches" but then "find their ultimate locus in the figure of Lady Macbeth."[94] Adelman argues for the feminine, and maternal, source of

---

[93] Peter Brook, *The Empty Space: A Book About the Theatre: Deadly, Holy, Rough, Immediate*, New York: Touchstone (1996), 12.

[94] Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, 137.

corruption, that "In the figure of Lady Macbeth…Shakespeare rephrases the power of the witches as the wife/mother's power to poison human relatedness at its source."[95] What results, Adelman suggests, is "The play's central fantasy of escape from woman," in which "Macbeth's bloodthirsty masculinity is partly a response to Lady Macbeth's desire, in effect an extension of her will," but also "simultaneously comes to represent the way to escape her power."[96] The escape from woman that Adelman describes would align with Malcolm's suggestion of milk abstracted and removed from the female body.

However, though it is easy to categorize the female body as problematic, the common site of corruption, this perception is shortsighted given the history of curdled milk. Rather, I would argue that attention to the details and history of curdled milk enables us to read the gendered concerns in *Macbeth* as not solely or primarily a criticism on female coercion and corruption, but more complicatedly as Shakespeare's critique on the threats of a toxic *masculinity*, one that interferes with the sweet, feminine milk of concord and can cause it to curdle. Curdled milk, thus, is as much a commentary on the dangers of unnatural masculine influence. For example, it is particularly the masculinization of Lady Macbeth and the three sisters, from Lady Macbeth's call for her unsexing and the transformation of her milk to masculine gall—or the vulnerability of her milk to the effects of hot gall—to the witches' masculinized beards and their resulting hermaphroditic status in the text that renders them sources of unnatural corruption. The analogy of curdling milk connects the masculinization of the female to ancient theories of conception, wherein the curdling that produced the embryo was caused by the curdling effect of the *male*

---

[95] Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, 137.

[96] Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, 138.

seed *upon* female material. Curdling, thus, is a manifestation of the masculine encroaching upon the female realm. Thus, the metaphor of curdling milk enables us to push on the argument that corruption unquestioningly comes from women.

Indeed it seems an overabundance of masculinity that drives the degeneration of the Macbeths. Macbeth, after all, in praising the masculinity of his wife exclaims that she should "Bring forth men-children only! / For thy undaunted mettle should compose / Nothing but males" (1.7.73-75). Ultimately at the heart of Macbeth's dis-eating is a reproductive and genealogical concern. Genealogy, according to Valeria Finucci, in the biological sense is connected to procreation and reproduction; in a metaphorical sense, to heritage and cultural patrimony. In *Macbeth* these concerns with patrilineage and degeneracy are tied up with the idea of nourishment and generation. The "ability to generate (*potentia generandi*)" was essential to early modern ideas of masculine power.[97] Manhood, Finucci recognizes, "had to be a performance to register on the body of the next generation."[98] But *Macbeth* troubles early modern presumptions about the role of the maternal and the paternal in generation. If Lady Macbeth unsexes feminine generative power into the ability to clog and clot, render milk and nourishment nonviable, Macbeth's only recourse is finally to call for a dis-eating, a cycle of indigestion that, in going against the natural process of procreation conceptualized in the cheese analogy of the generation of humankind, fails to nourish and to generate.

The significance of Macbeth's moment of *dis-eating*, then, agrees with what has hitherto been interpreted as a moment of *dis-seating*: just as his dis-seating loses him his throne,

---

[97] Valeria Finucci, "Introduction: Genealogical Pleasures, Genealogical Disruptions," in *Generation and Degeneration: Tropes of Reproduction in Literature and History from Antiquity through Early Modern Europe*, eds. Valeria Finucci and Kevin Brownlee, 1-14, 2.

[98] Finucci, "Introduction," 2.

Macbeth's dis-eating secures an abortive legacy, preventing the preservation of Macbeth's life and line. The re-evaluation of the original "dis-eate" in light of the threat of curdling results in a much richer and more nuanced understanding of the threat Macbeth faces—not only a threat of removal (dis-seating), but the threat of physiological impotence and expulsion. To uncurdle, after all, would be to undo the masculine potential to create embryos and a new generation of progeny. Thus we find "dis-eate" as word and concept to have been integral to the staging of *Macbeth* and the unproductive anxiety about being clogged, "stuff'd," by the milk that finds its way curdling and posseting within the veins of the play. If a play is to be digested by its viewers,[99] *Macbeth*'s "dis-eate" unsettles us, and leaves us with a powerful image of expulsion and the psychosomatic aftereffects of that curdling, the abortive legacies the remain through the visions and hallucinations of the insubstantial.

[99] See Michel Jeanneret, *A Feast of Words: Banquets and Table Talk in the Renaissance*, trans. Jeremy Whiteley and Emma Hughes, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

CHAPTER 4: JONSON'S MENSTRUES: REPRODUCTIVE FLUIDS, ALCHEMICAL SOLVENTS, AND PRESERVATIVE ANXIETIES IN BEN JONSON'S *THE ALCHEMIST*

In one of the first moments of on-stage action in Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*, his female protagonist Dol interrupts the argument taking place between her two male co-conspirators, Face and Subtle, by dashing Subtle's alchemical glass vial out of his hand, such that it breaks and leaks its contents onto the floor. Dol calls the contents Subtle's "menstrue," and commands him to "gather it up" (1.1.115-116).[1] In the next act, the skeptic Surly outlines and critiques the various terms and metaphors used in alchemy, including

> all your broths, your *menstrues*, and *materialls*,
> Of pisse, and egge-shells, womens termes, mans bloud, …
> And worlds of other strange *ingredients*,
> Would burst a man to name. (2.3.193-4, 197-8)

What are Jonson's "menstrues," why do they appear uniquely in Jonson's *The Alchemist*, and how do they signify for Jonson, alchemically and beyond?

Although Jonson satirizes alchemy in *The Alchemist* as a pseudoscience offering false promises/prospects, alchemy serves as a useful analogy for Jonson's ideas about poetic creativity. Specifically, Jonson draws on alchemists' use of feminine productivity and reproductivity, manifest most powerfully in women's menstrual blood, through the use of "menstrues," a term referring primarily to the female reproductive fluid but which in the sixteenth century began to

[1] Quotations for Jonson's *The Alchemist* are taken from *Ben Jonson's Plays and Masques*, ed. Richard Harp (New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001) and cited by act, scene, and line number.

be used to refer to alchemical solvents. By placing (alchemical) menstrues in vials and vessels, alchemists attempted to replicate the female womb artificially in order to generate/realize the various alchemical end products: the transmutation or maturing of metals into gold, the production of the elixir or the philosopher's stone, and the creation a living homunculus, or little man, perhaps the transmutative goal of alchemical process that most literally replicated human procreation. Similarly, Jonson generates his characters and his art on the stage, but/and does so insistently through (inert) matter. It is from this idea of generation from or through matter that Jonson develops his idea of his own poetic process. What presents a challenge to Jonson's idea of generation is the complicated reality of human reproduction and the counterargument that women were the ones who were believed to generate, a challenge to the male poetic birth articulated by early modern feminist scholars.[2]

My argument in this chapter provides another angle to Jonson's anxieties about male poetic legacy and what scholars have termed "womb envy": not only is Jonson among those early modern male writers who thought of their poetic creation in terms of birth, but rather, Jonson's idea of poetic birth takes into consideration the significance and implications of women's menstrual blood—what it could do and what it provided, the powers it was deemed to have, and its fraught status during the early modern period as generative matter and, problematically, sometime seed. The complication of "menstrues" to the idea of the male poetic birth was that its status as both matter and potential seed, in competition with the male seed—the sole male contribution to human reproduction—meant that the feminine fluid wasn't simply *used for generation* but it had the *power to generate*. In Jonson's *The Alchemist*, instead, the term, and

[2] See, for example, Elizabeth Harvey, chapter 3, "Matrix as Metaphor," and Katharine Maus, chapter 6, "A Womb of His Own."

the substance, seems to be emphasized for its alchemical neutrality: in being reduced to its meaning as mere alchemical solvent, even retaining its woman's fluid context as mere matter (according to some theories of conception), Jonson's "menstrues" would be deprived of the dangerously generative power that they were believed to have in early modern culture. In other words, Jonson's conception of his/male poetic production would seem to require that he ignore or discard the powerfully generative aspects of women's reproduction from which the ideas of male poetic birth derive while still retaining their use as matter with which, or from which, to generate.

Jonson's "menstrues," however, define Jonson's complicated outlook on creation in terms of matter, how Jonson thinks about using materials to create art. By emphasizing the menstruous in the alchemical, Jonson posits two things at once: 1) Jonson uses the menstruous as a means to undermine alchemical process and, in turn, uses the barrenness of alchemical promise to undermine the menstruous, but also 2) by emphasizing the materialist theory of menstrual blood's role in conception, Jonson nods to the female reproductive aspect of the gendered substance, complicating an otherwise masculine, parthenogenetic idea of poetic (re)production by simultaneously appropriating and limiting the generative qualities of menstruum to reconcile his theory of creative and performative generation with his anxiety about poetic preservation.

Menstrual Blood in Natural Philosophy and Medicine

The process of menstruation and the menstrual blood involved were subject to both positive and negative interpretation during the early modern period. The conflicting views on women's menses during the time were inherited from debates about the female body and female sexuality that had occurred for centuries, some of which were most recently articulated during

the Middle Ages but many of which revisited contentions from ancient Greek, Roman, and Arabic authorities. These conflicting views portrayed menstrual blood as either, and both, a positive and preservative substance on one end of the spectrum and as poisonous and foul on the other.

The widespread use of euphemisms to refer to menstrual blood is a key indicator of the positive/negative tensions that surrounded it. A positive interpretation of menstruation was that it was a sign of fertility in women; relatedly, menstrual flow was often referred to as a woman's "flowers," a "colloquial expression" that Monica Green records having been in use in England from the Middle Ages ("Flowers" 51).[3] The euphemism presented menstrual flow in a positive light, associating it with flowers which denoted "youth, freshness, fecundity, beauty" (Green, "Flowers" 51). The connection between flowers and fertility is articulated more explicitly in the anonymous twelfth-century *Treatise on Women's Diseases* (later revised to *Conditions of Women*), which explains the reason why "the menses" are called "the flowers" in women: "for just as trees without flowers do not bear fruit, likewise women without their flowers are deprived of the function of conception" (Anon., *Conditions of Women* f. 247r; qtd. in Green, "Flowers" 52-53).[4] Menstruation as a woman's "flowers" thus positioned menstrual flow as "the key to achieving pregnancy" (Hindson 90).

But if the term "flowers" was indicative of a positive view of menstrual fluid, it was also an example of the need for a euphemism altogether. At the same time that menstrual blood

---

[3] In the anonymously written *Treatise on Women's Diseases* (12th cent.), for example, references to menstruation use the Latin term "*flos* ('flower')" (Green, "Flowers" 52).

[4] See also Hindson, especially p. 89-90. Hindson notes that the ambivalence of early modern attitudes towards menstruation is evident in the "variety of terminology" used to refer to it as well as menstrual blood, which depended on the "circumstances in which menstruation occurred" (89).

denoted fertility, it was also considered to be a taboo substance. Ironically this was related to a positive interpretation of menstruation as a process of purification in addition to fertility, "one unique to the female body" (Green, "Flowers" 53). Menstruation was a process of purgation in which the body's impurities are flushed away, helping to maintain the body's healthy balance. In the purification view of menstrual flow, menstrual blood is paradoxically associated with the impurities that must be flushed away. Menstrual blood was thus held to be an impure substance, "contaminating, foul, and even poisonous" (Green, "Flowers" 51), with a longstanding association "with pollution in the Judeo-Christian tradition" as well as in Islamic religious thought (McCracken 3). Green unites "Medieval Islam, Judaism, and Christianity" in their belief that a woman was "ritually unclean during menstruation" and that "intercourse with her should be avoided at this time" (Green, "Flowers" 59). All three religions additionally attributed the origin of menstruation to "Eve's sin in Paradise" (Green, "Flowers" 59). Cardinal Lothario de Segni (Pope Innocent III), in his *De contemptu mundi sive de miseria conditionis humanae*, would characterize menstrual blood as

> so detestable and unclean, that grains that come in contact with it will not germinate, shrubs will wither, plants will die, trees will lose their fruit, and if dogs then were to eat it, they would run mad. Fetuses conceived [during menstruation] contract the defect of the seed, so that lepers and elephantics are born from this corruption. Thus according to Mosaic law, a menstruating woman is reputed as unclean [Lev. 15.19]; and if anyone were to approach a menstruating woman [sexually], he is ordered to be killed [Lev. 20.18]. (quoted in Elliott 116)[5]

[5] "[Profecto sanguine menstruo…] Qui fertur esse tam detestabilis et immundus, ut ex ejus contactu fruges non germinent, arescant arbusta, moriantur herbae, amittant arbores foetus, et si canes inde comederint in rabiem efferantur. Concepti fetus vitium seminis contrahunt, ita ut leprosi et elephantici ex hac corruptione nascantur. Unde secundum legem Mosaicam, mulier quae menstruum patitur, reputatur, immunda; et si quis ad menstruum patitur, reputatur, immunda; et si quis ad menstruatam accesserit, jubetur interfici." Lothario dei Segni (Innocent III), *De contemptu mundi sive de miseria conditionis* humanae 1.5, *PL* 217, col. 704.

The same sentiments are echoed in the fifteenth-century copy of *Placides et Timéo ou Li secrés as philosophes*, "attributed to a certain Albert de Trapesonde," who explains that "the flowers are a venom more evil and dangerous than the venom of a serpent, for if one throws some of them on a green herb, it will dry up, and if a dog eats some, it will be seized by madness, and if someone should lay some in the notch of a tree, never again will it bear good fruit" (264-5). In medieval England, the misogynistic rhetoric around the idea of polluted menstrual blood developed "alongside clerical misogynous literary traditions" in learned circles, "particularly at Oxford" where the education of English boys included teachings about women's reproductive functions and what to avoid (Green, *Making* 230): "Place a restraint on yourself," asserts William Wheatley (fl. 1305-17) in the fourteenth century, "beware women's poison: the vessel which you feel is delightful is full of diseased blood" (quoted in Johnson 164).

The perception of menstrual blood as poisonous also goes back to Roman naturalist Pliny, who attributed occult and even magical powers to menstrual blood, both helpful and harmful. In Pliny's *Natural History* we find echoed the various destructive effects of menstrual blood:

> Contact with it turns new wine sour, crops touched by it become barren, grafts die, seeds in gardens are dried up, the fruit of trees falls off, the bright surface of mirrors in which it is merely reflected is dimmed, the edge of steel and the gleam of ivory are dulled, hives of bees die, even bronze and iron are at once seized by rust, and a horrible smell fills the air; to taste it drives dogs mad and infects their bites with an incurable poison. (7: 549)

But additionally, Pliny notes other powerful effects of menstrual blood, recounting "Wild… stories" of the "mysterious and awful power of the menstruous discharge itself" that contains a "manifold magic" (28.77, 8: 55). For example, Pliny claims that "hailstorms and whirlwinds are driven away if menstrual fluid is exposed to the very flashes of lightning" (55), that during menstruation "if women go round the cornfield naked, caterpillars, worms, beetles and other

vermin fall to the ground" (56). Pliny describes menstrual blood as "this virulent discharge," but mentions other accounts that speak to its healing power: that "even this great plague is remedial; that it makes a liniment for gout, and that by her touch a woman in this state relieves scrofula, parotid tumours, superficial abscesses, erysipelas, boils and eye-fluxes" (59).

Nonetheless, even the stories about menstrual blood remedial qualities pose a threat because they continue to speak to menstrual blood as powerful. Studies on such menstrual pollution, which speak to its "symbolic contamination," portray how "menstrual blood and menstruous women are culturally defined as dangerous to established order (in various senses)"; the resulting taboos on menstruous women and menstrual blood are "devised to contain their energies and keep these from spreading beyond a limited place in the order of things" (Buckley and Gottlieb 25). In a sense, the claims to menstrual blood's power go hand-in-hand with the need to denigrate the substance by slandering it as poisonous, impure, and contagious—a substance desperately to be avoided and shunned so as to undercut its potency and potentiality.

The contention over the positive or negative perceptions of menstrual blood essentially derived from a masculine fear of and desire to understand women and their secrets and the corresponding tensions with regard to women's sexuality and, ultimately, women's power. The misogynistic underpinnings of the discourses surrounding women's sexuality, therefore, necessarily found their way into the practices of natural philosophy and medicine, which attempted to understand the physiology underlying these surface perceptions of menstrual—and reproductive—taboo unique to women.[6] Pliny, after all, prefaced his examination of the

[6] See Pomata on the rare phenomenon of menstruating men. Pomata notes that some men were reported to experience "various menstruation" (Pomata 110), according to early modern European medical literature. What is emphasized in accounts of menstruating men are not allegations of effeminacy, strangely enough, but rather "what is stressed is the link between vicarious menstruation (hemorrhoidal or otherwise) and positive traits such as longevity and fertility" (Pomata 119).

destructive and potent effects of menstrual blood by warning, "there is no limit to woman's power" (8: 55). The anxiety about women's reproductive power was especially acute in the context of "women's secrets," the idea that women had a secret body of reproductive knowledge that men did not have access to, or that quite literally women's bodies contained physiological secrets about generation that were hidden from view. This fascination with the *reproductive* secrets of women manifested significantly in the birth of anatomical practice and the resulting urgency to locate and open the womb through the anatomical art of dissection, as a process of unveiling what those "women's secrets" were that were obscured within the female body.[7]

It is in this context of determining, or limiting, the female role in procreation that the scientific/medical debate about menstrual blood signified so heavily. It was a feminine substance that could be verified outside of the enclosed womb and, in fact, may have analogically represented an access point into understanding the obscured reproductive functions of the female body. In the anonymous 1599 *Anatomie of the Inward parts of Woman* is described, for example, that "The mouth or entrance of the Matrice," or the womb, "which is vnclosed in worke of naturall generation, & receiueth the seede of man, & after conception so straitly closeth it selfe, that the point of a needle can not enter into it," with the exception of "times conuenient," specifically identified as "the auoiding of floures," or menstruation, "it [the womb] openeth it selfe" (1). Thus, not only additionally, but *derivatively* (and significantly for Jonson's uses), the importance of menstrual blood as a conflicted female substance (and topic of discourse) was not only its harmfulness, uncleanliness, or capacity to pollute, but rather, or furthermore, its *effectiveness*: its perceived role in biological reproduction. The stakes of the role of menstrual

[7] For more on women's secrets, see Park, *Secrets of Women*, and Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*.

blood, as a specifically feminine reproductive fluid, had everything to do with how much power women had over generation, and how much that generative power threatened the role of the male in procreation.

The conflict about women's and men's roles in procreation, and the contribution of the female in the form of menstrual blood, was derived from the two main competing "medical" models inherited from antiquity, referred to as the one-seed and the two-seed models of biological procreation. In the Middle Ages into the early modern period, these competing views about the role of menstrual blood in conception were inherited from the views of Aristotle, the "major scientific authority," and those of Galen, the "chief medical authority" (Green, "Flowers" 57).[8] Both discourses were concerned with understanding how the human body worked, and how (the) generation (of living things) was possible.

The point of contention in this case had to do with what the male and the female of the species contributed to the generation of a new being. The foundational premise, or point of agreement, among these male figures, natural philosophers and physicians, was that the male contributed seed to conception. The premise of male seed was central to the notion that "generation is especially the prerogative of the male—that is, that generation is masculine and it is masculine to generate," which was "reflected in the way semen was seen to function in impregnation" (Martin 84). What was under contention, then, was what the female brought to the equation.

The one-seed, two-seed debate addressed precisely this question about what the female contributed to conception and what her contribution meant. The terms "one-seed" and "two-

[8] Green additionally notes that this is in part based on a distinction between science, or natural philosophy, and medicine that existed in pre-modern times ("Flowers" 57).

seed" had to do with whether the male was the sole contributor of seed, or whether both the male and female contributed seed to the formation of the embryo. Aristotle articulates this mystery in his *Generation of Animals*:

> For thus we shall make it clear whether the female also produces semen like the male and the foetus is a mixture of two semens, or whether no semen is secreted by the female, and, if not, whether she contributes nothing else either to generation but only provides a receptacle, or whether she does contribute something, and how and in what manner she does so. (1127-1128; 726a31-726b1)

It is in Aristotle's exploration of menstrual discharge that we receive his theory about the possibilities of male and female semen/seed contribution: because menstrual blood is "what corresponds in the female to the semen in the male," and additionally, according to Aristotle, since "it is not possible that two seminal discharges should be found together," the resulting conclusion negates the possibility of seed in women by virtue of what Aristotle establishes as a kind of mutual exclusivity between menstrual blood and female semen: "it is plain that the female does not contribute semen to the generation of the offspring…For if she had semen she would not have the menstrual fluid; but, as it is, because she has the latter she has not the former" (727a26-30). What results is the one-seed model of conception, proposed by Aristotle and maintained by his followers, which holds that all that the woman provides to conception is the matter;[9] in this case, it is thus the menstrual blood that was largely thought to be the woman's sole contribution: "the female contributes the material for generation, and…this is in the substance of the menstrual discharges" (727b31-32).

In Aristotelian theory, then, menstrual blood was the matter upon which the "'form' of the new embryo" would be "imprinted by the male seed" (Green, "Flowers" 58). Aristotle's ideas

[9] This fits with the "strong antifeminist elements" that Katharine Park identifies in "Aristotelian natural philosophy and Christian theology," both of which shaped how women's sexuality and generation were talked about (Park 93).

about the "generation of the embryo out of the male's semen and the female's menstrual blood" continued in the widespread Latin *Secrets of Women*, attributed to Albertus Magnus and likely composed in the 1200s (Green, *Making* 209).[10] Because "the mother's body provided merely the 'matter' of the embryo by means of the blood," the actual creation of life was attributed to the power of the male seed, the "energizing and enlivening semen implanted by the man in the womb of the woman" (Martin 84). By ascribing semen to men only,[11] Aristotle shifts the significant portion of the power of generation to the male. This created a very clear and conceptually simple distinction between the male's contribution and the female's: form vs. matter.[12] Further nuance details that the embryo is the "form (*eidos*)" that is "present potentially in the matter from the female, actively in the semen from the male" (Preus 78). The formative male seed and receptive female blood thus conceptualize the power difference and dynamic by which the active male force is required in order to shape, manipulate, or otherwise control passive female matter, a theory that legitimized men's crucial—and irreplaceable—role in the process of generation.

Despite the conceptually simple one-seed model, or perhaps because of it, Aristotle himself envisioned "male semen and female mense as possessed of 'powers' struggling for mastery" (Elliott 187).[13] Consequently, conception is imagined as a power struggle between

---

[10] Green also notes that "one of the early manuscripts of the pseudo-Albertan *Secrets of Women* (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 22300, an. 1320, Erfurt), the text is actually called *The Book on Generation and Corruption*, a deliberate echo of the title of one of the Aristotelian texts on which it was loosely based" (Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, 290, note 15).

[11] According to Martin, this was apparently against the "majority opinion, among philosophers and scientists as well as (probably) popular opinion, that both men and women produce semen" (Martin 84).

[12] Additionally, Aristotle's distinction between the formal and material contributions of the two sexes in his theory of conception serves as "a paradigm case" of his theory of the four causes, "matter, mover, form, and end" (Preus 78).

[13] Preus notes that this "theory of 'powers'" that Aristotle articulates was "already partially developed by the Hippocratics and others" (Preus 79).

gendered substances, which for Aristotle resulted from the phenomenon that "the matter [i.e., menstrual blood] may accept more or less of the activity of the moving cause present in the semen" (Preus 79). The idea of a power shift between the male and female contributions to conception has to do with a view of of conception as a kind of "warfare," the foundational battle of the sexes.[14]

The female and male elements involved in this reproductive power struggle increased with the further complexity the Galenic two-seed model granted to conception. Contrary to the idea that the female only contributed matter to be acted upon for generation to occur, Galen posited that the female did provide matter but *also* provided seed—albeit, so as not to present too large a threat to the male side, a "(weaker) seminal fluid" (Green, "Flowers" 58). For Galen the female seed was "weaker, colder, thinner" and "served merely as 'a kind of nutriment for the male semen'" (Martin 85). This model allows Galen to attribute some material function to the male semen, as "the semen itself must become a part of that which is generated" (Preus 83). Galen writes in his *On the Natural Faculties* that blood is the matter that constitutes bodies, but qualifies it saying that "Nature does not preserve the original character of any kind of matter; if she did so, then all parts of the animal would be blood" (131). He continues by specifying the blood to be the menstrual blood, which

> flows to the semen from the impregnated female and which is, so to speak, like the statuary's wax, a single uniform matter, *subjected to the artificer*. From this blood there arises no part of the animal which is as red and moist [as blood is], for bone, artery, vein, nerve, cartilage, fat, gland, membrane, and marrow are not blood, though they arise from it. [emphasis mine] (131)

[14] Elliott describes this as "warfare between rival seeds" (Elliott 187).

It is thus, he determines, that the "altering, coagulating, and shaping agent" is semen: "For that which was previously semen, when it begins to procreate and to shape the animal, becomes, so to say, a special *nature*" (131). Alternately, however, by ascribing some material principle to the male semen in order to "[make] more plausible the transfer of form from male parent to offspring" (Preus 84), he must, in turn, ascribe the formal and active principles attributed to the male semen also to the female contribution, whether that be menstrual blood or another kind of seed. In other words, "the female must provide not only matter but also a source of movement" for the same reasons of resemblance of child to parent, in this case to the mother (Preus 84). If menstrual blood constituted the matter that would be worked upon by the male seed in Aristotelian logic, menstrual blood, then, was part of the Galenic reproductive framework that allowed for female seed—in other words, menstrual blood, as the female contribution, was dangerous precisely because it claimed further female reproductive significance: the idea that the woman contributed generative/formative active power (assumed with the idea of "seed") encroached upon what Aristotle had reserved as male territory.[15] In the Hippocratic *On Generation/Nature of the Child*, for example, which subscribes to latter model in which "both sexes contribute seed," it is "After 'mixing'" that the seed "must acquire breath (*pneuma*)" to inflate, and "Only then does it draw on menstrual blood to enable it to 'become a living thing'" (King 134).

This female encroachment upon formative *seed*, even if weaker seed, was all the more threatening because women were actually already troublingly perceived to own so many of

[15] In a note, Green elaborates that the "issue of whether or not women produced semen (from their 'testicles') as well as menstrual blood, or only the latter, was a key point of argument between natural philosophers (who largely followed Aristotle) and physicians (who followed Galen's belief that women did indeed produce seed)" (Green, *Making* 209, n. 15).

constitutive parts needed for reproduction. Women were the ones who gave birth, whose wombs were necessary for the embryo to form and to grow, and who were the ones who nourished the infant with their breastmilk; in other words, women's bodies were built to house, generate, and nourish the infant. Men did none of those things, but only contributed semen. How much more urgent it was, then, to attribute the bulk of the forming/generative power to men *as well as* ascribe male seed *some* material potential, given how little men seemed to contribute to conception compared to women. In a sense, the Galenic framework was a response to the Aristotelian theory of conception and an attempt to address the threat to masculinist ideas about generation. The reasoning was, if the semen were only to "bring about the development of the blood alone," then the menstrual blood "would be sufficient to generate on its own, and would not need the addition of semen; …females would generate from the menstrual fluid alone, parthenogenetically" (Preus 83). If women had all of the apparatus to generate, there would be no need for men. Correspondingly, these male authorities voice, with obvious anxiety, these arguments that women either "had…no semen (and thus did not contribute any important substance to the formation of the fetus…)" or had "genetically ineffectual semen," since "otherwise women's bodies would have *everything they needed—blood, semen, and womb—to generate without men,* and that *certainly could not be allowed* [emphasis mine]" (Martin 85). The fear of female parthenogenesis and subsequent attempts to combat such ideas manifested in myths and stories that claimed that monsters were created when women attempted to procreate on their own: "Apparently, men knew *they* could not generate without the other sex; these myths assured them that women couldn't either. Impregnation was thus an important sign of masculinity" (Martin 85).

Despite Aristotle's, Galen's, and other male authorities' best efforts to diminish or remove generative power from women, the anxiety of female parthenogenesis continued to seep into writings on reproduction. Even Lanfranc of Milan (c. 1296), writing in the context of surgery, is careful to "differentiate…between male semen and the female contribution of menstrual blood" following Aristotle's line, but uses this distinction in order to explain his surgical observations about the body's regenerative possibilities and impossibilities; Green summarizes, "if a limb is amputated, bone (which comes from male seed) *never grows back*, but flesh (which comes from blood and *regenerates daily*) *does* [emphases mine]" (Green, *Making* 100). Thus, we see even in surgery the influence of male and female contributions to conception to explain how the body functions—specifically, we see here an articulation of blood, originating from menstrual blood, as regenerative.

By the seventeenth century, we see the fear of menstrual blood's potency manifest in the various early modern permutations of these inherited ancient traditions. The taboo of a polluting menstrual flow seeps into the medical literature, as if to show that the danger of menstrual blood could be validated medically. For example, in *Queen Elizabeths Closset of Physical Secrets* (1656), the author A. M. refers to "this filthy menstrual matter" (51) which being "seperated from our natural bloud, and the nature being offended and overwhelmed therewith," manifests externally by being "thrust…to the outward pores of the skin as the excrements of bloud, which matter if it be hot and slimie, then it produceth the Pox, but if dry and subtil, then the Measels or Males" (*Queen Elizabeths Closet* 52). The taboo of "filthy" menstrual blood is thus made a medical cause of illness, resulting in "very contagious and infectious" diseases (52).

But alongside taboo myths in the medical literature itself, the period also witnesses texts that attempt to work through the gendered power struggles outlined in inherited theories of conception, attempts that seem to combine the theories together but also afford the female role much more significance. An anonymous work called *Aristoteles Master-Piece, Or, The Secrets of Generation displayed in all the parts thereof* (1684), for example, draws on the Galenic two-seed model rather than the Aristotelian model of conception when stating that "Man consists of the *Seed of both united* in the Matrix by Copulation" (16-17). The author continues by stating the material role of menstrual blood: "for the first seven days the Mothers Blood running to it it grows in shape like an Egg," but then takes care to emphasize the

> forming faculty and virtue in the Seed from a divine and heavenly gift, it being abundantly indued with Vital and Etherial Spirit, which gives shape and form to the Child; so that all the parts and bulk of the Body, which is made up in the space of many months, and is by degrees framed and formed into a decent and comely Figure of a Man, do consist in that. (*Aristoteles Master-Piece* 17)

The privileging of seed here likely refers to the male "Seed" which contains its "forming faculty and virtue" because it is "abundantly indued with Vital and Etherial Spirit, which gives shape and form to the Child"—but the acknowledgment just earlier in the same passage about "the Seed of both united" allows for the women's seed to demonstrate the same qualities.

Indeed the author of *Aristoteles Master-Piece* continues to articulate, dangerously, the significant contribution of the woman in conception. "The Child more frequently resembles the Mother than the Father," the author acknowledges, "because the Mother confers the most towards its Generation" (*Aristoteles Master-Piece* 29). The female contribution to the generation of the embryo/child consists, here, of both seed and matter, but even beyond the advantage of the

woman providing both seed and matter, the woman also provides more of each, a medical explanation that the author has decided to attribute to Galen:

> for besides their contributing Seminal matter, they [women], during the time they [the child] are in the Womb, feed and nourish the Child with the purest Fountain of Blood: which Opinion *Galen* confirms, by allowing the Child to participate more of the Mother than the Father, and refers the difference of the Sex to the influence of menstrual Blood; but the reason of the likeness he attributes to the force of the Seed; for as Plants receive more from fruitful ground than from the industry of the Husbandman, so *the Infant in more abundance receives from the Mother than the Father*; for first the Seed of both is heaped and fostered in the Womb, and there grows to perfection, being nourished with blood. [emphasis mine] (29)

Thus the mother provides "Seminal matter," contributes to the growth of the child "with the purest Fountain of Blood," which allows "the Child to participate more of the Mother than the Father," a sentiment emphasized in the author's repeating just a couple lines later that "the Infant in more abundance receives from the Mother than the Father" (29). The same author makes a phenomenal move (and unprecedented in antiquity) a few pages later whereby like the Galenic seed, which contributes both force and matter, menstrual blood is granted the same abilities to contribute *both matter and force* as well:

> Seed affords both force to procreate and form the Child, and matter for its Generation, also in the menstrual Blood there is both matter and force; for as the Seed most helps the material Principles, so likewise the menstrual Blood, the potential Seed, is, saith famous *Galen*, Blood well concocted by the Vessels that contain it, so that Blood is not only the matter of generating the Child, but also Seed, in possibility that *menstrual Blood has both principles, as matter, and faculty of effecting*. [emphasis mine] (31-32)

The menstrual blood, therefore, becomes a key player in establishing the woman as primary contributor to the generation of the child. It not only provides the matter from which the child is formed, but additionally is now granted the forming faculty as well. Both of these combine

within the mother's womb, and the time spent therein adds to the significance of the woman's contribution as well:

> for the Womans Seed receiving faculty from the menstrual Blood for the space of nine months, *overpowers the Mans* as to that particular, because the menstrual Blood flowing into the Vessels, rather cherishes and augments the one than the other; from which it may be more easily conjectured, that the Woman not only affords matter to make the Child, but force and vertue to perfect the Conception. [emphasis mine] (33)

This is a major point against which Jonson posits his parthenogenesis. The male poetic birth is an attempt to combat the potential threat of female parthenogenesis, the threatening idea that women could reproduce/generate in themselves *without men*.

Womb Envy in Literary and Alchemical Production

The context of menstrual blood in the theories of conception from medicine and natural philosophy serves as a specific example of the larger ideological (and masculine) concerns about gender, women, and women's bodies in relation to reproduction. As a result of this gender paranoia, the realm of women's reproduction underwent, and continued to undergo, male attempts to control reproductive knowledge. What had previously been the purview of women's knowledge and expertise, under sexuality and cosmetics, would become the field of women's medicine as "gynaecology," a "specialist field of medical knowledge," but a field that Green argues was a "masculine birth—a birth without female involvement, either as a maternal principle or assisting midwife" (Green, *Making* viii).[16] In other words, male authorities encroached upon the sciences related to generation and women's bodies as a means of control: it

[16] Green's argument is that sixteenth-century gynaecological writers had "inherited the *social structures*" from the history of the field "as well as the intellectual traditions that allowed men to be authorities in the field of women's medicine" (Green, *Making* viii). Green even notes that her "use of the term 'masculine birth of gynaecology'" is a "deliberately ironic allusion" to Francis Bacon's 1603 essay "*The Masculine Birth of Time*" in which "Bacon claimed that natural science—reasoned empiricism in all its glory—held the power to restore mankind's rightful dominion over nature that had been lost because of Eve's sin" (Green, *Making* viii).

was a quest to make what were previously classified as "women's secrets," which referred both to a feminine knowledge to which men had no access as well as, quite literally, the idea that the physiological reproductive functions were themselves hidden within women's bodies, secrets no longer.[17] After all, knowledge was power. It is no wonder, then, given the anxieties about women's significant role in reproduction, that the entire field of women's reproductive health, the very "science" of gynaecology, was made into a discipline legitimized by male "expertise."

The paranoia about potential female parthenogenesis derived in part from what we might now call "womb envy," a phrase that has been used by early modern scholars primarily in relation to male Renaissance poets—Jonson included—and the idea of the male poetic birth.[18] The phrase "womb envy" originated in psychology—likely in response to Freud's "penis envy"—with German psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Karen Horney (1885–1952) who used the term in the 1920s and 1930s (Bayne 152). Earlier than Horney, however, although without "direct mention of womb envy," Michael Joseph Eisler wrote in 1921 on "male pregnancy fantasies" (Bayne 152), which is pertinent to the arguments early modern scholars have made about womb envy.

The ideas of "male pregnancy fantasies" and "womb envy" are articulated in early modern scholarship with regards to the idea that poetic creation—and specifically male poetic creation—was often conceptualized in terms of labor and birth. Elizabeth Harvey explores the "Matrix as Metaphor" for male poets, for whom the stakes are how to "image their own voice in poetry in order to guarantee its recognizability," and, perhaps especially significantly, how then

---

[17] See Katharine Park, *Secrets of Women*, and the anatomical focus on dissecting the womb.

[18] McAdam echoes the idea that Jonson and other "male poets of the Renaissance," critics have noted, often subscribed to what has been termed, if qualifyingly, "womb envy" (McAdam 135).

to guarantee "*its survival as their product* [emphasis mine]" (Harvey 76).[19] Poets drew upon the only (and original) human model of creation—human procreation—to articulate their own creative products. In this way, the poet was believed to breed matters of his own. Katharine Eisaman Maus notes how male writers often associated "the creative imagination with the female body," specifically through the womb and through the metaphor of childbirth (Maus 182).[20] Poetic creation was thought of as, and spoken in terms of, birthing and labor, a clear example of how male poets appropriated the feminine-coded act of birthing in order to describe their own creative processes. Milton, for example, in his *Areopagitica* refers to "books…freely admitted into the World as any other birth" and makes a parallel between "the issue of the brain" and the "the issue of the womb" (725). Books are "any man's intellectual *offspring*" (725), and "contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose *progeny* they are" [emphases mine] (Milton 720). Even medical writers like Nicholas Culpeper, who authored midwifery manuals about birth, described birthing even in his other works, using it as a metaphor for his process of writing which consisted of "having brought forth to birth what then I conceived" (Culpeper, *Catastrophe magnatum*, A3r). Terms like Milton's "issue," "offspring,"

[19] Harvey points to midwifery books as evidence of men's encroachment upon the "feminine space" to which childbirth belonged (Harvey 79), but such male encroachment upon feminine reproductive domains had been ongoing since the middle ages and antiquity, as Park and Green have shown.

[20] Maus broadens it to a larger male project in the early modern period: "Given the vigor with which the masculine prerogative was asserted in the early modern period, what attracts these writers to such analogies? What leads male writers to imagine their poetic and intellectual endeavors in terms of a sex to whom those endeavors were proscribed —in terms, moreover, of the very organ that is supposed quite literally to chill and dampen the female intellect?" (Maus 185). Jonson is one example of the "Renaissance male appropriation of the womb as a figure for the imagination," an analogy, Maus notes, that is consistent with "an ideology that strictly limits female sexual freedom, and excludes actual women from literary endeavors" (Maus 193).

and "progeny," and Culpeper's imagined conception, imply an analogical connection between childbirth and linguistic production.[21]

It is in this context that Jonson, too, subscribes to the analogy of poetic production and birth, but especially as a male parent. Jonson, according to Maus, was "often described as the most aggressively 'masculine' of English Renaissance writers," but "depict[ed] his creativity as a maternal function" (Maus 185). However, I've noted that in Jonson's references to a creative birth, the emphasis seems to be on the male role—a kind of paternal function that draws on the masculine discourses of formative male seed but also gestures to the potential for a kind of creative male parthenogenesis. In Jonson's own elegy to Shakespeare, for example, he praises Shakespeare's works as his offspring: "Look how the fathers face / Lives in his issue" (ll. 65-66), Jonson says of Shakespeare's "Booke [that] doth live" (l. 23) despite, and beyond, Shakespeare's death. The paternal emphasis is clear in the metaphor for the book, or creative work, as child or "issue." In his *Epigrammes*, LXXIX "To Elizabeth Countesse of Rutland," Jonson praises her father, Sir Phillip Sidney, and his poetry, which Jonson describes as "that most masculine *issue* of his braine [emphasis mine]" (l. 6).[22] Indeed in another epistle to Sidney's daughter in *The Forrest*, Jonson refers to the life-giving "pen," the possibilities of stories of antiquity before "Ajax, or Idomen, or all the store, / That Homer brought to Troy," but "yet none so live: / Because *they lack'd the sacred pen*, could *give / Like life unto 'hem* [emphasis mine]" (ll. 54-57). The granted life of the phallic "pen," enables the creative birth as a kind of immortality. In

---

[21] What Maus calls "These half-analogical, half literal relationships" must have been "reinforced by intimate causal connections between the brain, in which Galen had located mental functioning, and the womb" (Maus 197). See also Parker on puns between the maternal body and text.

[22] References to Jonson's poetry are quoted from *Poems of Ben Jonson*, edited by George Burke Johnston (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968).

praising "Clement Edmonds, on his Caesars commentaries observed, and translated," Jonson notes that Edmonds's "learned hand, and true Promethean art / (As by a new creation)" enables the rebirth of Caesar, "T'all future time, not onely doth restore / His life, but makes, that he can dye no more" (ll.17-18, 21-22). When Jonson writes an "Elegie on my Muse," the "Lady Venetia Digby," upon her death, he writes of her that "was my Muse, and life of all I sey'd, / The Spirit that I wrote with, and conceiv'd" (ll. 2-3), seeming to make reference to a crucial female component in conception, but later speaks of "He that shall be our supreme Judge" (l. 148) who "best he knew her noble Character, / For 'twas himselfe who form'd, and gave it her / And to that forme, lent two such veines of blood / As nature could not more increase the flood / Of title in her!" (ll. 155-159), emphasizing the masculinized Creator's formation of her. Jonson speaks of language in his *Timber: or Discoveries* as "spring[ing] out of the most retired, and inmost parts of us, and is the image of the parent of it, the mind" (2515-2518).[23] According to Maus, it is in these lines that Jonson "manages simultaneously to employ and disavow the childbirth metaphor," as the use of "parent" is purposefully "divested of its gendered specificity" (although, according to Maus, "it functions like a mother") (Maus 195).[24] However, Jonson's descriptions match, to some extent, the distinction that medieval medical writers made in terms of sex difference, attributing "greater activity and power in generation to men than to women," by "describing paternity in terms of creating and begetting and maternity in terms of birthing and nurture" (Park 141). Jonson uses both, but his emphasis on, for example, the "fathers face…in

[23] References to Jonson's *Timber* are quoted from *The Complete Poems*, edited by George Parfitt (London; New York: Penguin Books, 1996).

[24] Maus observes that while Jonson (and Sidney) "identify…with a pregnant female body," significantly, she points out, "labor and delivery occur *without impregnation*" [emphasis mine] (Maus 194). According to Maus, "Jonson often associates his claims to a womb with quasi-stoic assertions of independence: he gives birth to his work in proud solitude, his labors unattended" (Maus 192).

his issue" subscribes to much of the anxiety-prone assertions of the ancient authorities that the father's role was the active role to the woman's passivity: Park notes the "Aristotelian precept that anything reproducing itself tries to create the most exact likeness of itself possible," and thus the reproductive function as "the male seed stamp[ing] the father's impression on the mother's menses like a seal on soft wax" speaks to the goal of "the father reproduc[ing] himself, literally (at least in theory), using the mother's body as his tool" (Park 142).[25] The reproductive fears and concerns that stem from a masculinized field of gynaecology thus inform the characteristics of "womb envy" evident in a masculinized idea of poetic birth, a network of reproductive metaphors in which the feminine womb and maternal generation are appropriated and transmuted, as convenient, into the male creative faculty.

But the metaphor of the womb would not influence only literary production—it founded an entire art and science that not only drew upon reproductive metaphor for its language but used it as a basis for replicating the reproductive process: the field of medieval and early modern alchemy. Alchemy was primarily referred to as a science: as summarized in *The Mirror of Alchimy*, attributed to Roger Bacon and reprinted in English in 1597, alchemy was defined as

> a Corporal Science simply composed of, one and by one, naturally conioyning things more precious, by knowledge and effect, and conuerting them by a naturall commixtion into a better kind…. a Science, teaching how to transforme any kind of mettall into another: and that by a proper medicine, as it appeareth by many Philosophers Bookes. Alchimy is therfore is a science teaching how to make and compound a certaine medicine, which is called *Elixir*, the which when it is cast vpon mettals or imperfect bodies, doth fully perfect them in the verie proiection. (3)

The author, in summarizing alchemy as a science, thus describes one of its most prominent goals: the production of a "certaine medicine, which is called *Elixir*," which also goes by other names,

[25] See also Cadden.

such as the Philosopher's Stone. The creation of this medicine, however, involves a process that is described in the terms of sexual reproduction and attempts, literally, to imitate it. Alchemy as a discipline thus takes a step beyond poetic birth in appropriating reproductive metaphor; where scholars have examined the metaphor of the male poetic birth and the "various economic, scientific, and medical circumstances" that contributed to its prominence (Harvey 80), I examine how alchemy and the metaphorical language in which it is rooted enabled, it was believed, the possibility, through replication, of generation without women.

While most if not all intellectual endeavors were male-dominated in the early modern period, alchemy was an especially masculinist endeavor, both in terms of restricting alchemical knowledge and, significantly, with the ways in which alchemy is predicated on the re-creation or replication of human sexual reproduction, but under male control—complete with replicated artificial wombs and processes analogized using the terms and concepts of reproduction.[26] A connection already existed between literature on women's secrets and alchemy, as information on the former was included in and circulated with natural philosophical texts of interest to alchemists.[27] In alchemy the "female principle" was "valued for its generative power" and subsequently "appropriated by the male alchemist" (Hughes 140), who "created in his laboratory a feminine world of vessels and water" (Hughes 143). Additionally, if men in medicine routinely referred to the bodies of women as vessels,[28] alchemy enabled their actual artificial

---

[26] Alchemy as a science "saw heterosexual intercourse as essential to stabilizing both women and the body politic, which was conceived as female when unstabilized" (Hughes 148).

[27] See Green, *Making* 211; note 26.

[28] Hughes notes that "The traditional Hippocratic view was that the womb, or matrix, the uterus and vagina, was one organ, like an upturned (weaker) vessel" (Hughes 147). Park also brings attention to the fact that medically and religiously, men referred to the bodies of holy women, especially in relation to dissection, as "holy vessels" (Park 35).

reconstruction; reproductive metaphor and analogy provided the impetus for the actual, physical manifestations of, for example, the artificial womb in alchemical glass vessels. In this way, the alchemist "created in his laboratory a feminine world of vessels and water" (Hughes 143).

In particular, the female womb, a source of mystery and fascination as the hidden site of women's secrets, was conceptualized and replicated in the alchemist's laboratory through his materials. The narrative in medieval alchemy was that the "generation of mettals" in the earth imitated the generation of life in the womb, wherein "the imperfect matter…must be chosen and made perfect" (R. Bacon 4), work that Bacon notes "is verie like to the creation of man" (R. Bacon 10). Metals were believed to lie in the womb of the earth, and some, like gold, "reached maturity while others did not," informing the alchemical analogy that "that the womb of the earth could be created artificially within the laboratory": "The model was the female body, the earth that provided the warmth and nutrition necessary for the birth of the stone" (Hughes 141).[29] The glass vessel or alembic that alchemists would use, placed in furnaces for heat, was thus described as "a matrix or womb" (Hughes 143). George Ripley, whose *The Compound of Alchymy* was reprinted in English in 1591, explains the work within the alembic "in terms of the sexual restlessness and fulfilment of the womb" (Hughes 143); as a warning to the male alchemist working towards obtaining the Philosopher's Stone, Ripley notes that "thou shalt neuer come by our stone" if treating the alembic "Matrix" like "strumpets," who "seldome haue children of them ybore," treat their wombs (Ripley E3r). Correspondingly, to produce the stone, the alchemist must be sure "That after she once haue conceiued of the man, / Her Matrix be shut vp

[29] "If therefore wee intend to immitate nature," Bacon posits, alchemists must have a source of "continual heate," and a vessel that can be "close shutte, containing in it the matter of the stone: which vessell must be round, with a small necke, made of glasse or some earth, representing the nature or close knitting togither of glass" (Roger Bacon 11).

from all other than" (Ripley E3r). If, as Hughes notes, the female was the "elemental principle," her "menstrue, like lead, was seen to be essential to the commencement of the work," which, "Elusive in its virgin state, it could be controlled only by making it breed" (Hughes 142).

The womb and corresponding female secrets could, then, be dissected in alchemy and artificially constructed in the laboratory; generation, and preservation, could be divorced from the female by means of artificial replacement; and thus, under male control, the secrets to generation—and to immortality—could be produced: the ultimate goals of birthing the matured, perfect metal of gold, or the regenerative Philosopher's Stone, or even the possibility of generating life anew in the form of the man-made man, the homunculus. In his *De rerum naturae* (1537), Paracelsus describes "the generation of Artificial men," to answer the primary question of "Whether it were possible for Nature, or Art to beget a Man out[side] of the body of a Woman, and naturall matrix?" (Paracelsus 8; quoted. in Campbell 11).[30] It was Paracelsus's homunculus that "was notorious in Jonson's day for its instructions on how to create an actual person" (Eggert 158).[31]

---

[30] Paracelsus additionally provides his recipe:

> Let the Sperm of a man by itself be putrified in a gourd glasse, sealed up, with the highest degree of putrefaction in Horse dung, for the space of forty days, or so long untill it begin to bee alive, move, and stir, which may easily be seen. After this time it will be something like a Man, yet transparent, and without a body. Now after this, if it bee every day warily, and prudently nourished and fed with the *Arcanum* of Mans blood, and bee for the space of forty weeks kept in a constant, equall heat of Horsedung, it will become a true, and living infant, having all the members of an infant, which is born of a woman, but it will be far lesse. This wee call Homunculus, or Artificiall [Man?]. (Paracelsus 8; qtd Campbell 11-12).

Paracelsus refers to this as "one of the greatest secrets that God ever made known to mortall, sinfull man," calling it also "a miracle, and one of the great wonders of God, and secret above all secrets" (Campbell 12). Simon Forman also provides a brief description of a homunculus; see Ashmole MS 1494, 579. Forman's enigmatic "recipe" describes a homunculus that while different in constitution, it would seem, from Paracelsus's, also describes a being that physically conforms to a little man.

[31] Katherine Eggert looks at Jonson's response to Paracelsus's homunculus in *Mercury Vindicated from the Alchemists at Court* (1616), which "ends with Nature worrying that the ladies at court are not inclined to do their part in generating human beings the old-fashioned way: ''Tis yet with them but beauty's noon, / They would not grandams be too soon' (206-7)," which Eggert explains: "If the women will not do their reproductive duty, Pseudo-Paracelsus's artificial offspring may be the only alternative" (158).

John French, in a chapter called "The famous Arcanum, or restorative Medicament of Paracelsus, called his Homunculus" his *Art of Distillation* (1653), clarifies that the production of the "Homunculus" referred to three distinct but related realities: the first referred to "a superstitious image made in the place or name of any one," but the second specified that it referred, indeed, to "an artificiall man, made of *Sperma humanum Masculinum*, digested into the shape of a man, and then nourished and encreased with the essence of mans bloud" and the third, that it was "a most excellent *Arcanum* or Medicament extracted by the spagyricall Art" (French 115). In other words, the concept of generating artificial new life took the form of both an actual living artificial man as well as perhaps a reference to the Philosopher's Stone or Elixir itself as the great alchemical medicine (French 115). French describes the process, taking place within an alchemical glass, during which "the matter will be turned into a spagyricall bloud, and flesh, like an Embryo" (French 115). The result draws upon the alchemical and reproductive language of generation: the "two former sperms, *viz*. of the man and woman, the parents of the *Homunculus*" are "closed up together in a glazen womb sealed with *Hermes* seals for the true generation of the *Homunculus* produced from the spagyricall Embryo" (French 117). This, he concludes, is "the *Homunculus* or great Arcanum, otherwise called the nutritive Medicament of *Paracelsus*" (117). If the homunculus, the man-made man, artificially conceived life, one of the goals of alchemy, is actually another name for the medicine alternatively called the Philosopher's Stone, this would

mean that, once again, reproduction, generation, and the secrets formerly relegated to women are under the complete control and purview of men in the alchemical context.[32]

Thus the "womb envy," and the corresponding attempts at bringing generative potential under masculine control, that informed early modern poetic creation and alchemical science form the backdrop against which Jonson's "menstrues" signify powerfully—physiologically/ biologically, alchemically, poetically. I've described the scientific and medical context of menstrual blood in order to show how alchemical menstrues and, I argue, Jonson's poetic "menstrues," respond to the context of women's bodies and their reproductive potential. Menstrues represented gendered debates about generation, that underlay "womb envy," especially appropriate here with regards to Jonson and his *The Alchemist*, precisely because of how Jonson connects poetic creation and alchemical aspiration, which were both intimately conceptualized in terms of female birthing.

The Alchemist's Menstrues

Because the major issue at stake with menstrual blood was its potency, it is not surprising that the sixteenth century witnessed a new definition of "menstrue" as the substance and term became, in English, appropriated into alchemical analogy. Menstrue, and menstruum, as terms referring primarily to women's menstrual discharge, originate from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in English language use, and it is not until the sixteenth century that the use of either term comes to be applied to alchemical processes; the *OED* lists 1550 as the first use of

[32] Eggert notes that masculine parthenogenesis "has a considerable hold on the early modern mind as a workaround for the seeming feminine mastery of the reproductive process" (158). At the same time, Eggert adds that "alchemy's reputation for folly can be deployed to expose the parthenogenetic dream as folly, too," which she sees playing out when "writers like Jonson both air and mock the fantasy of male parthenogenesis in terms of alchemy" (158). I agree in the main with Eggert, but I am interested here in examining these underlying anxieties that are present even when Jonson's satirizes alchemy.

"menstrues" alchemically, 1559 for "menstruum."[33] Green cites alchemical texts in which the term *menstrues* is "*used neutrally* to refer to a precipitate of a mineral or chemical" [emphasis mine] (Green, "Flowers" 61). By becoming alchemical metaphor, menstrues could be stripped of their reproductive and generative potential or significance and managed/controlled to signify based on how useful they would be for male alchemists.

Menstrues thus signify fittingly for Jonson in *The Alchemist* not only because of their echoes to the reproductively generative substance, but for their alchemical role, which draws upon their use as nutriment as well as a kind of waste product—as an intermediary substance that can be, or is *meant to be*, discarded. The alchemical use for "menstrues" derives from the idea that menstruation, apart from its generative concerns, "purified the blood of female" or that it "removed from their bodies an excess of blood" (Crawford 50); in other words, menstruation was a process of purification or a process of waste removal—or, it was both. Menstrual blood was "referred to as an excrement" (Crawford 49), and was regarded as "blood that should not be retained by the nonpregnant woman" (Paster 71), a continuation of the early modern conception of menstrual blood as defiled or dangerous. Sixteenth-century distiller and translator John Hester aligns women's menstrue with (dead) waste in a recipe for his "Oyle of Time" which "expelleth the secondine and dead fruite from the Matrix: it prouoketh menstrue, and dissolueth clotted and congeled blood in the bodie" (Hester C6v). Physician Joseph Du Chesne also uses the term to refer to dead waste, side-by-side with references to alchemical menstrues; his medicinal recipes reference the metaphorical *menstrua* for aiding literal menstrua in an oil that "being drunke with conuenient liquors proueketh *Menstrua*, and bringeth foorth the after burthen, the dead fruite and

[33] "† menstrue, n. and adj." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2016. "menstruum, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2016.

vnnatural birth" (Du Chesne, *A Breefe Avnswere*, 40-41). Menstrual blood was thus thought to be a waste product, a kind of detritus, if a kind of a "special, though recurrent, instance of plethora…one of the body's natural forms of evacuation" (Paster 71). Alchemical menstrues thus drew upon menstruum as an intermediary substance and as waste. But perhaps just before it became waste, menstrues played its most useful role in purification: according to Aristotelian theory, "a woman excreted the impure menstruum leaving a pure substance from which the embryo was made," and it was through this process of purification that the foetus was "made by the male's seed *from the menstrual blood* [emphasis mine]" (Crawford 51). It is for this reason that "the term 'menstruum' (which primarily means menstrual blood)" additionally became a term "used in alchemy to refer to the medium which facilitated the change of matter from base metal to a precious one, in the same way that menstrual blood was thought to facilitate the change of matter of a man's seed into a foetus" (Read 19-20). It was this reproductive concept that, according to Read, influenced the alchemical turn of the term "menstruum," referring to "the medium which facilitated the change of matter from base metal" to precious, like how "menstrual blood was thought to facilitate the change of matter of a man's seed into a foetus" (Read 20).[34]

The alchemist's menstrues thus appear in receipts for alchemical medicines, including those of *aurum potabile*, or drinkable gold. In a receipt by Francis Anthony (1550-1603), published as *Aurum-Potabile: or the Receit of Dr. Fr. Antonie. Shewing, His Way and Method, how he made and prepared that most Excellent Medicine for the Body of Man*, in *Collectanea Chymica: a collection of Ten Several Treatises in Chymistry* (1684), Anthony refers to the use of

[34] See also Ashmole's *The Way to Bliss* (1658), in which he writes of food and nourishment for life, using "menstrues" to illustrate the process by which one can attain long life.

the "menstruum" in the process of attaining the goal of producing drinkable gold. In the process of creating a distilled water, eventually, Anthony writes, "you shall have of this Water the *Menstruum* sought for" (Anthony 171). Stanton Linden notes that menstruum was defined as "'the mercurial solvent of the philosophers…the means by which the alchemists dissolve metals into the prima materia, and by which they ripen their matter into gold' (*DAI* 124)" (Linden 171). In this alchemical context, then, "menstruum" undergoes a shift from something close to a prima materia, the matter that constitutes the embryo, to the solvent that dissolves metals into the prima materia, and "by which they ripen their matter into gold"—that is to say, the menstruum is used to *ripen* matter into the final product before it is discarded, having fulfilled its purpose.[35]

And this is precisely how we see menstrues being used in Jonson's *The Alchemist*. With the backdrop of what menstrues signified in the early modern period, culturally, religiously, medically, and intellectually, and how they spoke to larger masculine anxieties about the primacy of women's role in generation, I analyze here Jonson's uses of menstrues as intentionally downplaying or avoiding their potent generative viability and privileging instead, at least on the surface, their "use" in alchemy as nonthreatening solvent. Menstrues for the most part are seemingly used in their role as alchemical metaphor—alchemical deadweight—which, in the process of becoming a metaphor in alchemy, is stripped of its generative power. It is but a solvent to be used *in process*.

We see this playing out in subtle but complex ways in *The Alchemist*, in which Jonson explicitly uses the term "menstrue" and its variations six times, as well as makes reference to

---

[35] In a fascinating note in the text itself, it is written that "The Bishop gave Dr. *Anthony* 30 s. for a quart of *Menstruum*" (Anthony 171), demonstrating that menstruum had become a commodity to be bought and sold for its use—and for its experimentation, presumably.

other metaphors used to represent actual women's menstrues—flowers, terms, monthlies, etc. In other words, Jonson appears to acknowledge this body of gynecological knowledge that surrounds the term "menstrue" and is always present contextually in its use, even if the term is used alchemically. The reference to gynecological context alongside the explicitly alchemical uses of "menstrue" juxtaposes the various significances of menstrues while at the same time emphasizing what, on the surface,Jonson intends it to mean: alchemical deadweight. Given Jonson's own tendencies towards "womb envy," and his interest in a masculine idea of fertility and (poetic) generation, Jonson's uses of the term and its variations attempt to repress the female generative role by emphasizing menstruation *as* process and waste. But what appears to be the strict rigidity of a neutral alchemical role is complicated by Jonson's gestures to the gynecological and reproductive significances of the alchemical process, when Jonson's "menstrues" are used pivotally at moments in the play during which our main trio, the venter tripartite, renews or restages their alchemical performances.

Dol's first mention of "menstrue," with which I began, occurs in the opening scene of *The Alchemist*, in which Dol steps in to break up the introductory scuffle between her two male co-conspirators, Face and Subtle. As the two males quibble about their role in the other's success, they speak using the terms and processes of alchemy. In the midst of their fight, Dol attempts to intervene, interjecting, "We are ruin'd! lost! Ha' you no more regard / To your reputations? Where's your iudgement? 'Slight, / Haue yet, some care of me, o' your *republique*" (1.1.108-110).[36] Dol's attempt to bring their attention and care to the greater good, by bringing care to herself, and thus to the larger republic, does no good. Subtle and Face, paying

[36] I have taken the spelling and wording here from Jonson's 1616 *Workes* specifically for the significant stage directions during this scene.

Dol no heed, continue bickering, until Dol at last takes action: she "*catcheth out Face his sword*," telling Face "You'll bring your head within a cocks-combe, will you?" before directing her attention to Subtle, scolding him: "And you, sir, with your *menstrue*, gather it vp" as she "*breakes Subtle's glasse*" (1.1.115-116). Dol refers explicitly to Subtle's "menstrue," presumably here an alchemical solvent that he holds in a glass vial, and, as the stage directions indicate, proceeds to dash it out of his hands, presumably breaking or cracking the vial and spilling the menstrue on the floor, which Dol then commands to "gather them up."

In this introduction to "menstrue," and our introduction to the play, Jonson depicts on stage a kind of gender reversal. While the physical menstrue on stage is meant to be alchemical, contained in an alchemical glass vial,[37] Dol's specific mention of the fluid and her corresponding action in breaking the glass bring attention to the reproductive metaphor that the alchemical substance and apparatus represent: the menstruum in the (glass) womb. But more specifically, Dol points out, for us and to Subtle, "you, sir," that it is "your menstrue," and the accompanying stage direction details that she breaks "*Subtle's*" glass or vial.[38] The menstruum and the glass womb are, here, Subtle's, the male alchemist's. Even as a fake alchemist, Subtle is a member of the masculinist alchemical endeavor to appropriate female reproductive forms and functions under male control. Dol, as the sole female representative, literally deconstructs this on stage: she cracks open the alchemist's womb and spills the menstrue which is otherwise to remain in

[37] Houlahan explains that the glass is "something like a modern test tube, borne out of the back room from whence the quarrel erupts as the play begins, and containing most likely some kind of weirdly viscous liquid, with which Subtle earlier in the scene threatens Face to 'gum your silks | With good strong water an you come' (1.1.6-7)" (Houlahan 172).

[38] The modern edited version reads that Dol "*dashes* Subtle's *vial out of his hand*" (1.1.116); see Harp.

the enclosed womb/vessel in order to be, quite literally, productive. In other words, Dol intervenes in the alchemical/reproductive process and prevents it from coming to fruition.

Dol's role as the sole female representative here signifies additionally with regard to her status as a prostitute; the name Jonson gives her, Dol Common, was a "generic name for a prostitute" (Harp 200). In the context of the science and medicine of reproductive theory, Dol's body, as a prostitute, represents the womb that will not, or cannot, close and thus cannot reproduce. Thus, Dol's on-stage action when she breaks open Subtle's glass vial to release the menstrue it contains to the floor transforms the enclosed artificial womb into that represented by the sexually promiscuous woman who is incapable of enclosing her womb long enough to produce a child. In a sense, Dol replicates her own status, or enacts her status onto the metaphorized alchemical womb and menstrue.

Dol's action of spilling the menstrue on the ground to be "gathered" back up by Subtle additionally has echoes of the biblical spilling of the seed. The charged action derives from an episode from Genesis 38 in which Onan, second son of Judah, is put to death by God for having "spilled [his seed] on the ground" (Gen. 38:9). Interpretations for Onan's punishment, for spilling his seed on the ground, have read his act as that of autoeroticism or masturbation, or "coitus interruptus," resulting in Onan's refusal to fulfill the obligation of impregnating his brother's wife to enable the production of an heir. Whatever sexual act preceded Onan's spilling of the seed was condemned because it did not fulfill the rightful end goal of sexual activity: procreation and, thus, the "ensuring the continuation of his brother's line and inheritance."[39] Once again, the

[39] "Onan." *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

resonances of this first action on stage, with the spilling of the menstrue, breaks the mandate of procreation: the "purpose" of sexual reproduction as the procreated product.

The significance of the alchemical repercussions of disrupting the process and spilling the menstrues, or spilling seed, and, furthermore, cracking open the womb, is that the process by which the end goal is produced—that is, the elixir as the great medicine and Philosopher's Stone—is interrupted and, in being interrupted, thus aborted. Alchemical work once disrupted cannot be continued, in theory, much in the same way a miscarriage or an aborted foetus is not an interruption from which a process can be resumed, but must begin anew.

It is in a long episode detailing the alchemical process central to the production of the Philosopher's Stone that we hear of its preservative significance. Upon Sir Epicure Mammon's coming, Subtle articulates to Dol that "This is the day I am to perfect for him / The magisterium, our great work, the stone; / And yield it, made, into his hands" (1.4.13-15). Alternately referred to as "the stone," "the Great Med'cine" (2.1.37), the "flower of the sun, / The perfect ruby, which we call elixir" (2.1.52-53), the artificially procreated alchemical product promises that it,

> by its virtue,
> Can confer honour, love, respect, long life;
> Give safety, valour, yea, and victory,
> To whom he will. In eight and twenty days,
> [the bearer of the elixir will] make an old man of fourscore, a child…
> Restore his years, renew him, like an eagle,
> To the fifth age; make him get sons and daughters,
> Young giants, as our philosophers have done,
> The ancient patriarchs, afore the flood. (2.1.54-58, 61-64)

In a list of the virtues of the stone, or the elixir, Sir Epicure describes the renewing—and time-reversing—capabilities that it has upon an old man, bringing him back to youth and to a stage in his life where he can "get sons and daughters." In other words, the preservative, and restorative,

properties of the elixir are depicted with an end goal of enabling invigorated reproduction in men who are in reproductive decline, resonating with the preservative goals of biological reproduction in which the creation of offspring preserves the family legacy.

The description of the elixir's promised reproductive enhancements is prefaced by a description of the elixir in its current state, in process. When Sir Epicure comes to the stage, Face, disguised as a servant named Lungs, greets him and announces the current alchemical status of the expected elixir in its crimson state, a state described in terms that refer both to blood and, more specifically, gesture to correspondences with menstrual blood. Face/Lungs recounts, "You haue colour for it, crimson: the red *ferment* / Has done his office" (2.2.3-4). Sir Epicure asks, "Blushes the *bolts-head*?" (2.2.8-9), referring to a long-necked vessel, the "top of which turns red ('blushes') at the height of the process" (Harp 225). Face/Lungs finishes Sir Epicure's spoken line with his own response, "Like a wench with child, sir" (2.2.9). Sir Epicure continues to ensure that "lastly, / Thou hast descryed the *flower*, the *sanguis agni*?" (2.2.27-28), and that "Th'art sure, thou saw'st it *bloud*?" (2.2.40), the latter of which Face, again, finishes the very same line by affirming "Both *bloud, and spirit*, sir" (2.2.40). In this exchange, Sir Epicure and Face make reference to the crimson state of the alchemical process, but one in which they both borrow from a number of terms for the "menstrues" and "women's terms," that will be articulated explicitly later on. Here, thus, Face begins with a reference to the "red *ferment*," which calls to mind another early modern interpretation of menstruation as a process of fermentation, like that of "wine or malt liquors, in the process of which the liquid 'flings up to the Surface a sort of Scum abounding with Air'" (Crawford 50). Sir Epicure's reference to the blushing bolt's head is made into a gendered and reproductive comparison by Face: "Like a

wench with child." Sir Epicure then makes reference to the term "flower," and "sanguis agni," using metaphors that correspond not only to blood more generally but also echo the euphemism "flowers" for menstrual blood. And finally, with the explicit mention of blood, if as metaphor, the combination of blood and spirit with which Face ends recalls not only the combination that was thought to constitute blood in the body, but additionally, in the context of the other reproductive mentions, the blood and spirit that combined—menstrual blood and semen—to produce a child.

The reproductive, and menstrual, descriptions of the elixir's current alchemical state, and its proposed future reproductive possibilities as a final product thus provide the context for Subtle's and Face's explicit use of "menstrue," now reconciled by the united aim of imitating alchemical process to deceive Sir Epicure. It is in this public-facing enactment of the alchemical process that Subtle inquires "Are you sure you loosed them / In their own menstrue?" (2.3.71-72), in response to what the duo play out as another interruption in the alchemical/reproductive process, in which "'tis not perfect… / That work wants something" (2.3.69-70). The menstrue here is thus used in the act of performance by the two main cozeners, Face and Subtle, for their audience, Sir Epicure and Surly, but furthermore is framed as the crux upon which the production of the elixir seems to depend. In this menstrual stage in their performance of alchemical process, Subtle and Face note an obstacle which, it can be assumed, will lead to a failed outcome. The menstrues in the hands of these men will come to no fruition; they remain, here, nonviable alchemical deadweight.

Following the failed alchemical process that Subtle and Face perform, Surly, the skeptic of the play, responds with a speech detailing for the audience all of the various terms, metaphors,

and processes that constitute the art and science of alchemy, thus far used by the other characters but only now provided in an organized and methodical way. Surly, who serves as skeptic, announces that "*Alchemie* is a pretty kind of game, / Somewhat like tricks o' the cards, to cheat a man, / With charming" (2.3.180-182). If charming, "The operation or using of charms; the working of spells; enchantment, incantation" to produce its effects (*OED*),[40] depends on the power of language, what Surly suggests is that alchemy's power depends significantly on the allure of alchemical language—and metaphor— and what they promise and depict. In this context Surly critiques the range of terms that alchemy thus uses—"all your termes, / Whereon no one o' your writers grees with other" (2.3.182-183)—and lists them out in his speech:

> your *elixir*, your *lac virginis*,
> Your *stone,* your *med'cine*, and your *chrysosperme*,
> Your *sal*, your *sulphur*, and your *mercurie*,
> Your *oyle of height*, your *tree of life*, your *bloud*,
> Your *marchesite*, your *tutie*, your *magnesia*,
> Your *toade*, your *crow*, your *dragon*, and your *panthar*,
> Your *sunne*, your *moone*, your *firmament*, your *adrop*,
> Your *lato*, *azoch, zernich, chibrit, heautarit*,
> And then, your *red man,* and your *white woman*,
> With all your broths, your *menstrues*, and *materialls*,
> Of pisse, and egge-shells, womens termes, mans bloud,
> Haire o' the head, burnt clouts, chalke, merds, and clay,
> Poulder of bones, scalings of iron, glasse,
> And worlds of other strange *ingredients*,
> Would burst a man to name? (2.3.184-198)

It is here that Jonson pairs "your menstrues" and "womens terms" in adjacent lines—we cannot fail to note the link. Surly's speech here brings attention to the range, and, ironically, his mastery, of alchemical terms, terms that range from the symbolically powerful metaphor to the viscerally literal matter that constitute the art and science of alchemy, the mastery of which depended upon

[40] "charming, n.1." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2016.

the alchemist's understanding of these metaphors. Surly's list also gives us a "downward" progression, or regression, of alchemical materials, starting with the rarest, refined—and elusive—goals, the holy-grail products of the *elixir*, the *lac virginis* (virgin's milk), [philosopher's] *stone*, the *medicine*, and the *chrysosperm* ("seed of gold"), all of which were often used interchangeably; the key alchemical metals of *sal[t]*, *sulphur*, and *mercury*; metaphors like the "*tree of life*," down to, presumably, crude materials themselves, introduced by "*menstrues*, and *materialls*," and including "womens termes" amidst "pisse, and egge-shells,…mans bloud, / … merds," as examples of "strange *ingredients*" used in alchemy. Surly's critique, linking "all [the alchemist's] termes" (and I suggest here, interpreting "terms" another way, the alchemist's menstrues) and "womens termes," addresses the linguistic richness of alchemical language and the material richness of alchemical process alongside what would otherwise be perceived as the ludicrousness of naming and using ingredients of excrement—the base matter, among which is included said "womens termes"—alongside the lofty alchemical aims of the elixir brought forth by the intermediary "menstrues, and materialls." Additionally, by linking the terms, signifying both menstrual matter and words or language, Jonson suggests a connection between alchemical language and the reproductive matter upon which form is imposed in the process of procreation; language, in other words, is being compared to the matter that Jonson, as poet and as artificer, imposes form.

Surly then cycles back to Dol in relation to alchemical "menstruum." He responds incredulously to Sir Epicure's change of heart upon seeing Dol, wherein Sir Epicure pretends to recognize her and becomes victim to his own literally reproductive interests. When Sir Epicure inquires after Dol, Face describes her in alchemical terms that "can be understood to apply to a

whore" (Harp 237): "She'll mount you up, like quick-silver, / Over the helm" (2.3.254-255). In other words, Dol is presented in terms of her sexually reproductive role, but one that again gestures to her status as a prostitute. Sir Epicure, as if to confirm, asks, "Is she in no way accessible?" (2.3.258), a question that nods to an understanding of the distinction between the closed up womb of the virtuous woman-turned-mother and, conversely, the unclosed (and uncloseable) womb of the prostitute. The alchemical process thus intersects here with the literal reproductive process. In response, Surly exclaims his surprise that Sir Epicure, "a grave sir, a rich, that has no need…should thus, / With his own oaths and arguments, make hard means / To gull himself" (2.3.279-282), which Sir Epicure does, Surly notes, by transforming his alchemical goals into literally reproductive ones, transferring his alchemical ambitions and intentions to Dol:

> An this be your elixir,
> Your *lapis mineralis*, and your lunary,
> Give me your honest trick yet at primero,
> Or gleek; and take your *lutum sapientis*,
> Your *menstruum simplex*! (2.3.282-286)

The "menstruum simplex" Surly mentions here, while referring on the surface to the alchemical solvent, refers to Dol (Harp 238). Thus, Dol is again conceptualized in alchemical terms, but also in reproductive terms, reduced to her *menstruum simplex* while promising the effects of the elixir, a product of the sexual consummation that restores, renews, and enables reproduction. When aligned with Dol as the essential female representative, Jonson's menstrues retain their efficacy.

Jonson's references to menstrue continue as Subtle, Face, and Dol continue to imitate the alchemical process, but escalate to include the trio's alchemical ties to the church. Again in the middle of that process, between Face and Subtle during their "alchemical" work, Jonson

references “menstrue” as Subtle and Face renew their alchemical performance for Ananias, a deacon, who enters the scene. Upon Ananias’s entrance, Subtle tells Face to

> Take away the recipient,
> And rectify your menstrue from the phlegma.
> Then pour it on the Sol, in the cucurbite,
> And let them macerate together. (2.5.1-4)

The alchemical phenomenon described refers to the moment of consummation represented by sexual reproduction and its effects in the womb: the menstrue, in its double meaning as alchemical solvent and metaphorical women’s blood, is poured on the “Sol,” in alchemical terms the male substance or component, after which they “macerate together,” or “soak together” (Harp 241). It is this return to the menstrue-in-process, and the corresponding gesture to the elixir or stone that lies just beyond the current state of the menstrue, that constitute the matter of the trio’s alchemical performance and staging. In other words, “menstrue,” now in its repeated performative use, serves here as the matter to which the trio returns, to perform anew the state of being in potential, mid-process, just as menstrues as generative matter represent the embryo-in-potential.

Ananias, who has just witnessed the renewed “menstrual” performance by Subtle and Face, returns to Tribulation, the pastor of Amsterdam, who then proceeds to refer to the menstrual by placing it back in it reproductive, and thus religiously corruptive, sense. In this case, the reference takes the form of “the menstruous cloth and rag of Rome” (3.1.33), in a speech delivered by Tribulation during the clergymen’s discussion of the production of the philosopher’s stone by Subtle and the alchemist’s own nature. Tribulation argues for the virtue of Subtle’s work as alchemist:

> When as the work is done, the stone is made,
> This heat of his may turn into a zeal,
> And stand up for the beauteous discipline,
> Against the menstruous cloth and rag of Rome.
> We must await his calling, and the coming
> Of the good spirit. (3.1.30-35)

In its final instance, therefore, Jonson's menstrue is an adjective derived from literal menstrual blood to refer to a corresponding waste product, the "menstruous cloth and rag," and to connect to the term's religious connotations. Here, the reference to menstruation via the soiled feminine rag is distinctly negative in tone, aligned with Roman Catholicism, and placed in opposition to Subtle's potential zeal, which, it is suggested, results from his alchemical work once "the stone is made"; in other words, when the alchemical process has come to fruition, Subtle would be inspired by a zeal to "stand up for the beauteous discipline"—the Puritan religion "established by John Calvin" (Harp 249). While the comparison of the "beauteous discipline" of Puritanism against "the rags and tatters of Rome (i.e., Roman Catholicism)" (Harp 249) was "a standard feature of Puritan rhetoric," here Jonson explicitly details the rags and tatters of Rome as, specifically, "menstruous," thus invoking the added layer of negative significance that menstrual blood contributes. The use of "menstruous" is thus couched in its powerful cultural and religious significance of pollution and corruption, recalling the poisonous, dangerous interpretation of a woman's menstrues reiterated by Pliny and the various monotheistic religious. Additionally, this last menstruous image is significantly one of waste: the rags to be thrown away upon being tainted by the menstrue, which in itself is physical and visual evidence of menstrual fluid as waste. In its form as blood staining feminine cloths, the menstrual blood depicted here is that blood which has not been used reproductively to provide matter to create the foetus nor to feed

the foetus that has been formed, as was believed in the generation of the embryo; it has thus leaked out and is in need of discarding. By invoking both the powerfully destructive and the powerfully repulsive connotation of women's menstrual blood in this final use of a menstruous term, Jonson caps off his take on the complex uses "menstrues" have for him: even while seeming to limit menstrue to it alchemical deadweight in the course of the play, as an intermediary and necessary but nonthreatening solvent, Jonson appropriates the reproductive aspects of menstrue in its viable and nonviable forms, at the last emphasizing both the dangerous pollutant interpretation of menstrue as women's reproductive fluid as well as its interpretation as discardable waste. In other words, Jonson seems to map out an interpretation of his menstrues as either explicitly deadweight or dangerous—and either way, discardable—but without effectively eliminating the truly threatening theories of the feminine-coded menstrue as powerfully generative and integral to creation.

By making menstrues a primarily alchemical metaphor, Jonson would appear to take away their transmutative, or generative, power. But Jonson's alignment of this nonthreatening, neutral, deadweight menstrue with his satire of alchemical practice gives us pause when considering how menstrue signifies for Jonson. Jonson satirizes alchemy as a barren science; the ever-deferred goals of alchemical process in *The Alchemist* bespeak Jonson's take on the fruitlessness of alchemical endeavor, corresponding not only to an alchemically neutral idea of menstrue, but ultimately a barren and nonviable one. But *The Alchemist*'s menstrues are depicted at the heart of the venter tripartite's renewed and renewing alchemical performance. If alchemical menstrue is matter stripped of any generative properties of its own, Jonson's menstrues complicate this by playing a role as matter from which performance can be

regenerated. This enables Jonson to work through his distinctions between matter and forming power, informing his theory of poetics and his self-image as a poetic creator. If scholars have located Jonson among the male Renaissance poets whose investment in their own male poetic creativity reveals an underlying womb envy, I show additionally that Jonson's use of menstrues demonstrates how he navigates a troubling female generative power, at times diminishing, at other times drawing upon, that female power as it serves to inform his goals for poetic production and preservation. In a sense, Jonson's menstrues reiterate the masculine paranoia around creation, drawing upon, but anxious about, the contemporaneous medical and scientific debates that portray female generativity as necessary, and, sometimes, problematically central, in order to reshape their significance for him in the world of *The Alchemist*.

Conclusion: Waste and Legacy

"Is all lost, Lungs? Will nothing be preseru'd / Of all our cost?" Sir Epicure asks Face in Act 4, scene 5, in the face of the "failed" alchemical project (4.5.71-72). "Faith, very little sir," Face replies, "A peck of coales, or so, which is cold comfort, sir" (4.5.72-73). By the end of his play, Jonson leaves his viewers with this "cold comfort," that "nothing [will] be preseru'd / Of all our cost," except "A peck of coales"—that is to say, what is preserved is detritus, material remains, waste. In a play founded upon the early modern fascination with the alchemical science (and art), it might be easy to dismiss Jonson's turn to waste as simply the natural form his satirical tendencies would take; the lofty and philosophical goals of Renaissance alchemy are thrown aside to reveal a farce made evident by the waste that remains.[41]

[41] See also Boehrer, "Lower Bodily Stratum" and *Fury of Men's Gullets*, on waste in relation to the excremental and alimentary in Jonson's works.

But I argue that the menstrues that have shaped Jonson's anxieties about generation and renewal, and therefore preservation, give us a means by which we can read the waste productively, with implications for how Jonson ends his play. Though *The Alchemist* ultimately depicts a satirical deception in which nothing comes to fruition, Face, or Jeremy, concludes Jonson's play with these words:

> And though I am cleane
> Got off, from Svbtle, Svrly, Mammon, Dol,
> Hot Ananias, Dapper, Drvgger, all
> With whom I traded; yet I put my selfe
> On you, that are my countrey: and this pelfe,
> Which I haue got, if you doe quit me, rests
> To feast you often, and inuite new ghests. (5.5.160-166)

We end, fittingly, with "pelfe"—a term originally referring to stolen goods, spoil, and material possessions, but in the sixteenth century evolving into a term that meant "trash, rubbish," or "Refuse, detritus" (*OED*).[42] In other words, the "pelfe" that remains, with Face at the end of the play, is basically waste, much like the discarded and discardable excremental matter of menstrue. Yet this final image of "pelfe" remains, nonetheless, "To feast you often, and inuite new ghests." In other words, the waste with which Jonson effectively ends the play is gestured to as that which remains to provide sustained, and renewed, nourishment. Face's, and Jonson's, invitation in conclusion to "feast" often with "new ghests" draws upon the broader early modern trope of plays as feasts, and the spectators guests, but in combination with both the regenerative goals of alchemical performance and Jonson's insistent "menstrues," the final "pelfe" that remains is at once waste and nourishment/nutriment and source of renewal—a complex combination of roles

[42] "pelf, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, June 2016.

remarkably similar to those embodied by the female menstrual matter and, associatively, alchemical menstrue.

If Face's "selfe" and "pelfe" constitute what remains on stage in the end, the materials that rest to begin anew, they represent and embody the materials by which Jonson's play is brought to life on stage. In grappling with the ultimately fruitless but ever-promising alchemical project of immortality through metaphorized sexual reproduction, as well as with the menstrues that signify as a primary point of intersection between alchemical production and biological procreation, Jonson produces a play that experiments with the feminine generative/waste model that both supports and complicates his parthenogenetic desires, a parthenogenesis that underlies his poetics of preservation for his legacy and his creative work.

For a poet who conceptualized the legacy of his poetry through printing, manifested in his control over the 1616 definitive printing of his works for posterity, what role did performance play? This is where I see Jonson's "menstrues" signifying most effectively the complexity of his goals for poetic preservation and his ideas of legacy and immortality. On the one hand, Jonson's obsession with the printing of his poetic work echo certain "theories of generation" that menstrue invoked, in which generation was "described in terms of the stamping of form (from the father's semen) on matter (the blood in the mother's uterus), as a seal makes an impression on soft wax" (Park 66); imprinting/printing is thus aligned with the father's contribution, his role in dictating form, his role as artificer. In a culture in which books were considered an author's "offspring," Jonson's anxiety about leaving a legacy centered on fixing his poetry in print. But *The Alchemist*, in playing with these reproductive analogies through and about performance and tapping into the menstrues that constitute the center of contemporary reproductive debates,

betrays the anxiety at the heart of Jonson's theory of poetic conception and creation: what roles do matter and artificer play in the creation of art? If we return to the conflicting theories of conception and the reproductive debates surrounding the role of menstrual blood, the defining difference between matter being used for generation vs. matter having the power, itself, to generate is the significantly larger threat of the latter: that this theory of generative matter undercuts the masculinely-coded formative ability of the artificer. In other words, by reducing menstrue, or generative matter, to mere alchemical deadweight, in real life a substance that provided matter for generation, Jonson would be able to give himself as the male poet a more significant or truer power to generate and, thus, to create a lasting legacy—in other words, at stake is Jonson's own control over generativity and the ability to make a legacy for himself. The role of, and his role as, artificer speaks to Jonson's anxieties about preservation—about preserving himself and his work for posterity and, specifically, his abilities as a poet who is remembered for his ability to form anew from matter, whether poetic matter inherited from antiquity or the matter which his current culture, "Our…London," provides: "No clime breeds better matter for your whore, / Bawd, squire, impostor, many persons more, / Whose manners, now call'd humours, feed the stage" (Prologue, 5, 7-9).

The model Jonson depicts in *The Alchemist* thus complicates the poet's print-based model of preserving legacy by addressing the concept of renewal or generation, one that relies on a menstrual/menstruous interpretation of matter particular to dramatic work and performance. If Jonson's parthenogenetic leanings privilege printing in order to control or ensure (the significance of) his contribution, regardless of the generative or renewing/renewable properties of the matter/material itself, how, then, does his conception of performance fit in with his desire

for creative control? If the printed version of Jonson's playtext can be seen to parallel the imprinting of the father's form upon his matter, the performance of his work troubles that control by giving the matter a life of its own, beyond his reach. When Jonson ends *The Alchemist* with a reference to feeding new guests, the gesture belies an anxiety about future performances. Jonson, a male poet obsessed with his poetic creation(s) and his poetic legacy, thus uses his sophisticated knowledge of a womb-envious, reproductively-charged pseudo-science, alchemy, to produce a play and a renewable performance in which nothing comes to fruition (plot-wise), but in which that barrenness/unfruitfulness can be regenerated (performed again and again), in addition to being preserved/fixed in print. The matter, or "pelfe," remains, but fixing the form in print evinces the limits of Jonson's control over what will be re-played and regenerated anew. *The Alchemist*'s ending, then, paradoxically combines the barrenness of alchemical process, which has formed the matter of the play, with the renewability of a play's performance to construct a poetics of preservation wherein the poetry, as end product, does not generate nor regenerate, but rather preserves, and the performance regenerates and may generate anew but from the printed matter: form has been fixed upon the matter of the play, which nourishes, renews, and is discarded ad infinitum.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

A Closet for Ladies and Gentlevvomen, Or, The Art of preseruing, Conseruing, and Candying. With the manner howe to make diuers kinds of Syrups: and all kind of banqueting stuffes. Also diuers soueraigne Medicines and Salues, for sundry Diseases. London, 1608.

Allott, Robert. *Wits Theater of the Little World*. London, 1599.

Alsop, Vincent. *Melius inquirendum, or, A sober inquirie into the reasonings of the Serious inquirie wherein the inquirers cavils against the principles, his calumnies against the preachings and practises of the non-conformists are examined, and refelled, and St. Augustine, the synod of Dort and the Articles of the Church of England in the Quinquarticular points, vindicated*. 1678.

A. M. *Queen Elizabeths Closset of Physical Secrets, With certain approved Medicines taken out of a Manuscript found at the dessolution of one of our English Abbies: and supplied with the Child-bearers Cabinet, and Preservative against the Plague and Small Pox*. London: Printed for Will Sheares Junior…, 1656.

The Anatomie of the Inward parts of Woman, very necessary to be knowne to Phisitians, Surgians, and all other that desire to know themselues. London, 1599.

Anthony, Francis. *Aurum Potabile: or the Receit of Dr. Fr. Antonie. Shewing, His Way and Method, how he made and prepared that most Excellent Medicine for the Body of Man.* In *Collectanea Chymica: a collection of Ten Several Treatises in Chymistry*. London, 1684. Included in *The Alchemy Reader: From Hermes Trismegistus to Isaac Newton*. Ed. Stanton J. Linden. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 170-173.

Aristotle. *Generation of Animals*. In *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Ed. Jonathan Barnes. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.

Aristoteles Master-Piece, Or, The Secrets of Generation displayed in all the parts thereof. London: Printed for J. How…, 1684.

Ashmole, Elias. *The Way to Bliss*. 1658.

Bacon, Francis. *The Masculine Birth of Time*. In *The Philosophy of Francis Bacon*. Trans. Benjamin Farrington. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964.

Bacon, Roger. *The Mirror of Alchimy. Composed by the thrice-famous and learned Fryer, Roger Bachon, sometime fellow of Martin Colledge: and afterwards of Brasen-nose Colledge in Oxenforde.* London, 1597.

Birnie, William. *The blame of kirk-buriall, tending to persvvade cemiteriall ciuilitie First preached, then penned, and now at last propyned to the Lords inheritance in the Presbyterie of Lanerk, by M. William Birnie the Lord his minister in that ilk, as a pledge of his zeale, and care of that reformation.* 1606.

Bonham, Thomas. *The chyrugian's closet*. London, 1630.

Brumwich, Anne (and others). Wellcome MS 160/92. c. 1625-1700.

Catchmay, Lady Frances. Wellcome MS 184A/36. c. 1625.

Clinton, Elizabeth. *The Countesse of Lincolnes Nurserie*. 1622.

Corlyon, Mrs. Wellcome MS 213/28. 1606.

Culpeper, Nicholas. *Catastrophe magnatum, or, The fall of monarchie*. 1652.

de Villanova Arnaldus. *Regimen sanitatis Salerni. This Booke teaching all people to gouerne them in health, is translated out of the Latine tongue into English, by Thomas Paynell*. London, 1597.

Du Chesne, Joseph. *A Breefe Avnswere of Iosephvs Qvercetanvs Armeniacus, Doctor of Physick, to the exposition of Iacobus Aubertus Vindonis, concerning the original, and causes of Mettalles. Set foorth against Chimists.* London, 1591.

Elyot, Thomas. *Castel of Helth*. 1547.

Estienne, Charles. *Caroli Stephani, De Nvtrimentis, ad Baillyum, libri tres*. Paris, 1550.

French, John. *The Art of Distillation.* London, 1653.

Fuller, Thomas. *Good Thoughts in Worse Times Consisting of Personall Meditations, Scripture Observations, Meditations on the Times*. London, 1647.

Galen. *On the Natural Faculties*. Loeb Classical Library. Trans. Arthur John Brock. Cambridge, Mass; London, UK: Harvard University Press, 2006.

Galen. *On the Properties of Foodstuffs: De alimentorum facultatibus*. Trans. Owen Powell. Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Goulart, Simon. *Admirable and Memorable Histories containing the wonders of our time. Collected into French out of the best authors. By I. [sic] Goulart. And out of French into English. By Ed. Grimeston*. London, 1607.

Hester, John. *The first part of the Key of Philosophie. Wherein is contained most ex- [sic] excellent secretes of Phisicke and Philosophie, deuided into twoo Bookes.* London, 1580.

Holinshed, Raphael. *The first volume of the chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande conteyning the description and chronicles of England, from the first inhabiting vnto the conquest: the description and chronicles of Scotland, from the first original of the Scottes nation till the yeare of our Lorde 1571: the description and chronicles of Yrelande, likewise from the first originall of that nation untill the yeare 1571*. London, 1577.

Jacob, Elizabeth (and others). Wellcome MS 3009/73. 1654-c. 1685.

Jackson, Jane. Wellcome MS 373/108. 1642.

Jonson, Ben. *The Alchemist*. In *Ben Jonson's Plays and Masques*. Ed. Richard Harp. New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001.

Jonson, Ben. *The Complete Poems.* Ed. George Parfitt. London; New York: Penguin Books, 1996.

Jonson, Ben. *Poems of Ben Jonson.* Ed. George Burke Johnston. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968.

Jonson, Ben. *The Workes of Beniamin Jonson*. London: Will Stansby, 1616.

Jorden, Edward. *A Briefe Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother*. Lonon 1603.

le Loyer, Pierre. *A Treatise of Specters or Straunge Sights*. London, 1605.

Magnus, Albertus. *Boke of Secretes*. London, 1599.

[Manuscript]. British Library. Stowe MS 1077.

Middleton, Thomas (attributed). *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*. Ed. Anne Lancashire. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978.

Milton, John. *Areopagitica.* In *Complete Poems and Major Prose.* Ed. Merritt Y. Hughes. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003. 716-49.

Milton, John. *Complete Poems and Major Prose*. Ed. Merritt Y. Hughes. Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003.

The Miracvlovs and Happie Vnion of England & Scotland; by how admirable meanes it is effected, how profitable to both Nations, and howe free of any inconuenience either past, present, or to be discerned. Edinburgh, 1604.

Muffet, Thomas. *The Theater of Insects: or, Lesser living Creatures, as, Bees, Flies, Caterpillars, Spidrs, Worms, &c. a most Elaborate Work*. London, 1658.

Paré, Ambroise. *The workes of that famous chirurgion Ambrose Parey translated out of Latine and compared with the French.* London, 1634.

Parkinson, John. *Theatrum botanicum: The theater of plants. Or, An herball…* London, 1640.

Pliny. *Natural History.* Ed. and trans. H. Rackham et al. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1942.

Purchas, Samuel. *Purchas his pilgrimage*. London, 1613.

Riolan, Jean. *A Sure Guide, or, The Best and Nearest Way to Physick and Chyrurgery: That is to say, The Arts of Healing by Medicine, and Manual Operation. Being An Anatomical Description of the whol Body of Man, and its Parts, with their Respective Diseases, demonstrated from the Fabrick and Vse of the said Parts. In Six Books… Written in Latine, by Johannes Riolanus, Junior; Doctor of Physick…Englished by Nich. Culpeper, Gent. and W. R. Doctor of the Liberal Arts, and of Physick.* London, 1657.

Ripley, George. *The Compovnd of Alchymy. or The ancient hidden Art of Archemie: Conteining the right & perfectest meanes to make the Philosophers Stone, Aurum potabile, with other excellent Experiments*. London: Imprinted by Thomas Orwin, 1591.

Ross, Alexander. *Arcana microcosmi, or, The hid secrets of man's body discovered in an anatomical duel between Aristotle and Galen concerning the parts thereof : as also, by a discovery of the strange and marveilous diseases, symptomes & accidents of man's body : with a refutation of Doctor Brown's Vulgar errors, the Lord Bacon's natural history, and Doctor Harvy's book, De generatione, Comenius, and others : whereto is annexed a letter from Doctor Pr. to the author, and his answer thereto, touching Doctor Harvy's book De Generatione / by A.R.* 1652.

[Seventeenth-century manuscript of cookery and medicinal recipes]. Folger Shakespeare Library. MS V.a.562.

[Seventeenth-century manuscripts]. Wellcome Library. MS.761, MS.762.

Shakespeare, William. *Antony and Cleopatra*. Ed. David Bevington. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Shakespeare, William. *Mr. VVilliam Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies Published According to the True Originall Copies*. London, 1623.

Shakespeare, William. *The Winter's Tale*. Ed. Mario DiGangi. Boston; New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008.

Sharp, Jane. *The Midwives Book. Or the whole Art of Midwifry Discovered. Directing Childbearing Women how to behave themselves In their Conception, Breeding, Bearing, and Nursing of Children. In Six Books, Viz. By Mrs. Jane Sharp Practitioner in the Art of Midwifry above thirty years*. London, 1671.

Stanhope, Philip. Wellcome MS 1026/114. 1692.

Totelin, Laurence. "Curdled Milk in the Breast: Take II." *The Recipes Project*. 18 June 2013. recipes.hypotheses.org.

Townshend Family. Wellcome MS 774/22. 1636-1647.

Tuke, Thomas. *A discourse against painting and tincturing of women*. London, 1616.

Webster, John. *The Duchess of Malfi*. Ed. Brian Gibbons. London: A & C Black Publishers Ltd., 2001.

Webster, John. *The White Devil*. Methuen Drama, 2008.

Wecker, Johann Jacob. *Eighteen Books of the Secrets of Art & Nature, Being The Summe and Substance of Naturall Philosophy*. London, 1660.

Secondary Sources

Adelman, Janet. *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays,* Hamlet *to* The Tempest. New York and London: Routledge, 1992.

Albala, Ken. *Eating Right in the Renaissance*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

Apps, Lara and Andrew Gow. *Male Witches in Early Modern Europe*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003.

Ashton, Sally-Ann. *Cleopatra and Egypt*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008.

Baker, David J. *Between Nations: Shakespeare, Spenser, Marvell, and the Question of Britain*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.

Baker, David Weil. "'Master of the Monuments': Memory and Erasure in Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*." *English Literary Renaissance* 31.2 (2001): 266-287.

Barbour, Reid. *Sir Thomas Browne: A Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Barkan, Leonard. "'Living Sculptures': Ovid, Michelangelo, and the *Winter's Tale*." *English Literary History* 48.4 (1981): 639-667.

Bayne, Emma. "Womb envy: The cause of misogyny and even male achievement?" *Women's Studies International Forum* 34 (2011): 151-160.

Bevington, David, ed. *Antony and Cleopatra*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Boehrer, Bruce. "*The Alchemist* and the Lower Bodily Stratum." In *The Alchemist: A Critical Reader*. Eds. Erin Julian and Helen Ostovich. London: Bloomsbury, 2013. 150-170.

Boehrer, Bruce Thomas. *The Fury of Men's Gullets: Ben Jonson and the Digestive Canal*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997.

Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.

Brook, Peter. *The Empty Space: A Book About the Theatre: Deadly, Holy, Rough, Immediate*. New York: Touchstone, 1996.

Buckley, Thomas and Alma Gottlieb. "A Critical Appraisal of Theories of Menstrual Symbolism." In *Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Menstruation*. Eds. Buckley and Gottlieb. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. 3-50.

Cadden, Joan. *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Callaghan, Dympna. *Shakespeare Without Women: Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage*. London; New York: Routledge, 2000.

Camille, Michael. "The corpse in the garden: mumia in medieval herbal illustrations." *Micrologus* 7. Turnhout: Brepols, 1999.

Campbell, Mary Baine. "Artificial Men: Alchemy, Transubstantiation, and the Homunculus." *Republics of Letters: A Journal for the Study of Knowledge, Politics, and the Arts* 1.2 (2010): 4-15.

Campbell, Mary Baine. "Maculophobia: Blackness, Whiteness and Cosmetics in Early Imperial Britain." In *Multicultural Europe and Cultural Exchange in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*. Ed. James P. Helfers. [Turnhout]: Brepols, 2005.

Chamberlain, Stephanie. "Fantasizing Infanticide: Lady Macbeth and the Murdering Mother in Early Modern England." *College Literature* 32.3 (2005): 72-91.

Clericuzio, Antonio. "Chemical and mechanical theories of digestion in early modern medicine." *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* (2011), doi: 10.1016/j.shpsc.2011.10.025.

Counts, Derek B. "Regum Externorum Consuetudine: The Nature and Function of Embalming in Rome." *Classical Antiquity* 15 (1996).

Crane, Mary Thomas. "Roman World, Egyptian Earth: Cognitive Difference and Empire in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*." *Comparative Drama* 43.1 (2009): 1-17.

Crawford, Patricia. "Attitudes to Menstruation in Seventeenth-Century England." *Past & Present* 91 (1981): 47-73.

Dowd, Michelle. *Women's Work in Early Modern English Literature and Culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Earle, Rebecca. *The Body of the Conquistador*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Eggert, Katherine. *Disknowledge: Literature, Alchemy, and the End of Humanism in Renaissance England*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015.

Elliott, Dyan. *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999.

Enterline, Lynn. "'Hairy on the In-side': The Duchess of Malfi and the Body of Lycanthropy." *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 7.2 (1994): 85-129.

Finucci, Valeria. “Introduction: Genealogical Pleasures, Genealogical Disruptions.” In *Generation and Degeneration: Tropes of Reproduction in Literature and History from Antiquity through Early Modern Europe*. Eds. Valeria Finucci and Kevin Brownlee. 1-14.

Floyd-Wilson, Mary. “English Epicures and Scottish Witches.” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 57.2 (2006): 131-161.

Floyd-Wilson, Mary. *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Floyd-Wilson, Mary. *Occult Knowledge, Science, and Gender on the Shakespearean Stage*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Floyd-Wilson, Mary. “Transmigrations, Crossing Regional and Gender Boundaries in *Antony an Cleopatra*.” In *Enacting Gender on the English Renaissance Stage*. Eds. Viviana Comensoli and Anne Russell. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999.

Gillies, John. *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Green, Monica H. “Flowers, Poisons and Men: Menstruation in Medieval Western Europe.” *Menstruation: A Cultural History.* Eds. Andrew Shail and Gilliam Howie. Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. 51-64.

Green, Monica H. *Making Women’s Medicine Masculine: The Rise of Male Authority in Pre-Modern Gynaecology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Habib, Imtiaz. *Shakespeare and Race: Postcolonial Praxis in the Early Modern Period*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000.

Hammond, Gerald. *Fleeting Things: English Poets and Poems, 1616-1660*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990.

Hampton, Bryan Adams. “Purgation, Exorcism, and the Civilizing Process in *Macbeth*.” *SEL* 51.2 (2011): 327-347.

Harp, Richard, ed. *Ben Jonson’s Plays and Masques*. New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001.

Harvey, Elizabeth. *Ventriloquized Voices: Feminist Theory and English Renaissance Texts*. London; New York: Routledge, 1992.

Hayes, Nancy. "Negativizing Nurture and Demonizing Domesticity: The Witch Construct in Early Modern Germany." *Maternal Measures: Figuring Caregiving in the Early Modern Period*. Eds. Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh. Aldershot, UK; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000. 179-200.

Hindson, Bethan. "Attitudes towards Menstruation and Menstrual Blood in Elizabethan England." *Journal of Social History* 43.1 (2009): 89-114.

Hirsch, Brett D. "An Italian Werewolf in London: Lycanthropy and The Duchess of Malfi." *Early Modern Literary Studies* 11.2 (2005): 21-43.

Hobday, C. H. "Why The Sweets Melted: A Study in Shakespeare's Imagery." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 16 (1965): 3-17.

Houlahan, Mark. "Waiting for the End? Alchemy and Apocalypse in *The Alchemist*." In *The Alchemist: A Critical Reader*. Eds. Erin Julian and Helen Ostovich. London: Bloomsbury, 2013. 171-190.

Hoy, Cyrus. *Introductions, notes, and commentaries to texts in the dramatic works of Thomas Dekker*. Cambridge, UK: New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

Hughes, Jonathan. "Alchemy and the Exploration of Late Medieval Sexuality." *Medieval Virginities.* Eds. Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans, and Sarah Salih. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003. 140-165.

Jeanneret, Michel. *A Feast of Words: Banquets and Table Talk in the Renaissance*. Trans. Jeremy Whiteley and Emma Hughes. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Johnson, Michael. "Science and Discipline: The Ethos of Sex Education in a Fourteenth-Century Classroom." In *Homo Carnalis: The Carnal Aspect of Medieval Human Life*, Acta XIV. Ed. Helen Rodnite Lemay. Binghampton: SUNY Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1990. 157-72.

Johnson, Sarah E. *Staging Women and the Soul-Body Dynamic in Early Modern England*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2014.

Jones, Prudence J. "Cleopatra's Cocktail." *Classical World* 103.2 (2010): 207-20.

Karim-Cooper, Farah. *Cosmetics in Shakespearean and Renaissance Drama*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006.

King, Helen. *Hippocrates' Woman: Reading the Female Body in Ancient Greece*. Routledge, 2002.

Knapp, James. *Image Ethics in Shakespeare and Spenser*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Linden, Stanton. *The Alchemy Reader: From Hermes Trismegistus to Isaac Newton*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Loomba, Ania. "The Theatre and the Space of the Other in *Anthony and Cleopatra*." In *Shakespeare's Late Tragedies: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Susanne L. Wofford. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1996. 235-248.

Love, Heather. "Macbeth: Milk," in *Shakesqueer: A Queer Companion to the Complete Works of Shakespeare*. Duke University Press, 2011.

Martin, Dale B. "Contradictions of Masculinity: Ascetic Inseminators and Menstruating Men in Greco-Roman Culture." In *Generation and Degeneration: Tropes of Representation in Literature and History from Antiquity to Early Modern Europe*. Eds. Valeria Finucci and Kevin Brownlee. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 81-108.

Matchinske, Megan. *Women Writing History in Early Modern England*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Maus, Katharine Eisaman. *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Mazza, Stefano and Yoshikatsu Murooka, "Vinegars Through the Ages." In *Vinegars of the World*. Eds. Lisa Solieri and Paolo Giudici. Milan: Springer-Verlag Italia, 2009. 17-39.

McAdam, Ian. "New Directions: Staging Gender: Masculinity in *The Alchemist.*" In *The Alchemist: A Critical Reader*. Eds. Erin Julian and Helen Ostovich. London: Bloomsbury, 2013. 127-139.

McCracken, Peggy. *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero: Blood, Gender, and Medieval Literature*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.

Meads, Chris. "Narrative and Dramatic Sauces: Reflections upon Creativity, Cookery, and Culinary Metaphor in Some Early Seventeenth-Century Dramatic Prologues." In *Renaissance Food from Rabelais to Shakespeare: Culinary Readings and Culinary Histories*. Ed. Joan Fitzpatrick. Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010. 145-166.

Muir, Kenneth, ed. *Macbeth*. Arden Shakespeare: London, 2005.

Muir, Steven and Laurence Totelin. "Medicine and Disease." In *A Cultural History of Women in Antiquity*. Ed. Janet H. Tulloch. London: Bloomsbury, 2013.

Nevalainen, Terttu. "Shakespeare's New Words." In *Reading Shakespeare's Dramatic Language: A Guide*. Ed. Sylvia Adamson. London: Arden Shakespeare, 2001. 237-55.

Noble, Louise. *Medicinal Cannibalism in Early Modern Literature and Culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Ott, Sandra. "Aristotle among the Basques: the 'cheese analogy' of conception." *Man* (1979): 699-711.

Owens, Margaret E. "John Webster, Tussaud Laureate: The Waxworks in The Duchess of Malfi." *ELH* 79.4 (2012): 851-77.

Park, Jennifer M. "Navigating Past, Potential, and Paradise: The Gendered Epistemologies of Discovery and Creation in Francis Godwin's *Man in the Moone* and Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World*." *Gendering Time and Space in Early Modern England.* Eds. Katherine R. Larson and Alysia Kolentsis. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* 35.1 (2012): 113-138.

Park, Katharine. "The Life of the Corpse: Division and Dissection in Late Medieval Europe." *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 50.1 (1995): 111-132.

Park, Katharine. *Secrets of Women: Gender, Generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection*. New York: Zone Books, 2006.

Parker, Patricia. *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property*. New York: Routledge, 1987.

Paster, Gail Kern. *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England*. Ithaca; New York: Cornell University Press, 1993.

Parolin, Peter A. "'A Cloyless Sauce': The Pleasurable Politics of Food in *Antony and Cleopatra*. In *Antony and Cleopatra: New Critical Essays*. Ed. Sara Munson Deats. London: Routledge, 2005. 213-229.

Poitevin, Kimberly. "Inventing Whiteness: Cosmetics, Race, and Women in Early Modern England." *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 11.1 (2011): 59-89.

Pollard, Tanya. *Drugs and Theater in Early Modern England*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Pomata, Gianna. “Menstruating Men: Similarity and Difference of the Sexes in Early Modern Medicine.” In *Generation and Degeneration: Tropes of Representation in Literature and History from Antiquity to Early Modern Europe*. Eds. Valeria Finucci and Kevin Brownlee. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 109-52.

Preus, Anthony. “Galen’s Criticism of Aristotle’s Conception Theory.” *Journal of the History of Biology* 10.1 (1977): 65-85.

Purnis, Jan. “The Belly-Mind Relationship in Early Modern Culture: Digestion, Ventriloquism, and the Second Brain.” In *Embodied Cognition and Shakespeare's Theatre: The Early Modern Body-Mind*. Eds. Laurie Johnson, John Sutton, and Evelyn Tribble. Routledge, 2014.

Read, Sara. *Menstruation and the Female Body in Early Modern England*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Rider, Catherine. *Magic and Impotence in the Middle Ages*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Roach, Joseph. *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

Royster, Francesca T. *Becoming Cleopatra: The Shifting Image of an Icon*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Rutter, Carol Chillington. *Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare’s Stage*. New York: Routledge, 2001.

Schneider, Rebecca. *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2011.

Shapin, Steven. “‘You are what you eat’: Historical Changes in Ideas about Food and Identity.” *Historical Research* 87.237 (2014).

Singh, Jyotsna. “Renaissance Anti-theatricality, Antifeminism, and Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*.” *Renaissance Drama* 20 (1989): 99-121.

Snook, Edith. “‘The Beautifying Part of Physic’: Women’s Cosmetic Practices in Early Modern England.” *Journal of Women’s History* 20.3 (2008): 10-33.

Sparey, Victoria. “Identity-Formation and the Breastfeeding Mother in Renaissance Generative Discourses and Shakespeare’s Coriolanus.” *Social History of Medicine* 25.4 (2012): 777-794.

Stallybrass, Peter, Roger Chartier, John Franklin Mowery, and Heather Wolfe. "Hamlet's Tables and the Technologies of Writing in Renaissance England." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 55.4 (2004): 379-419.

Stead, Jennifer. "Necessities and Luxuries: Food Preservation from the Elizabethan to the Georgian Era." In "*Waste Not, Want Not": Food Preservation from Early Times to the Present Day*. Ed. C. Anne Wilson. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991.

Stevens, Andrea. *Inventions of the Skin: The Painted Body in Early English Drama, 1400-1642*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013.

Sugg, Richard. *Mummies, Cannibals and Vampires: The History of Corpse Medicine from the Renaissance to the Victorians*. London and New York: Routledge, 2011.

Sutton, John. "Spongy Brains and Material Memories." In *Embodiment and Environment in Early Modern England*. Eds. Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett Sullivan. Palgrave, 2006.

Swinburne, Layinka M. "Milky Medicine and Magic." *In Milk: Beyond the Dairy: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery, 1999*. Devon, UK: Prospect Books, 2000.

Thomasset, Claude, ed. *Placides et Timéo ou Li secrés as philosophes: Edition critique avec introduction et notes*. Geneva: Droz, 1980.

Trubowitz, Rachel. "'But Blood Whitened': Nursing Mothers and Others in Early Modern Britain." In *Maternal Measures: Figure Caregiving in the Early Modern Period*. Eds. Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh. Aldershot, UK; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000. 82-101.

Wall, Wendy. "Distillation: Transformations in and out of the Kitchen." In *Renaissance Food from Rabelais to Shakespeare: Culinary Readings and Culinary Histories*. Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010. 89-104.

Wall, Wendy. "Jell-O: Mortality and Mutability in the Kitchen." *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* 6.1 (2006): 41-50.

Wall, Wendy. *Staging Domesticity: Household Work and English Identity in Early Modern Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Whigham, Frank. "Sexual and Social Mobility in *The Duchess of Malfi*." *PMLA* 100.2 (1985): 167-186.

Wilson, C. Anne, ed. *"Waste Not, Want Not": Food Preservation from Early Times to the Present Day.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991.

Wolfe, Jessica. *Humanism, Machinery, and Renaissance Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Zigarovich, "Preserved Remains: Embalming Practices in Eighteenth-Century England." *Eighteenth-Century Life* 33.3 (2009): 65-104.

Zimmerman, Susan. *The Early Modern Corpse and Shakespeare's Theatre*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005.