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EXCREMENTAL ECOFEMINISM: UNEARTHING WASTE'S FEMININE AND
NARRATIVE AGENCY IN EARLY MODERN LITERATURE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Courtney A. Druzak

August 2021

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Courtney A. Druzak

2021

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ABSTRACT

EXCREMENTAL ECOFEMINISM: UNEARTHING WASTE'S FEMININE AND NARRATIVE AGENCY IN EARLY MODERN LITERATURE

By

Courtney A. Druzak

August 2021

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Danielle St. Hilaire

This project seeks to understand the role of forms of waste in early modern literary texts. It both offers up a theory—known as early modern excremental ecofeminism—for reading period specific texts in relation to waste and articulates how we may do so through close analysis of Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the elegies of Mary Sidney Herbert, the sonnet sequence *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* by Mary Wroth, John Evelyn's *Fumifugium*, and finally, William Shakespeare's play *Antony and Cleopatra*. It chooses a variety of genres across texts from the 1580s to the 1660s both to interrogate the applicability of early modern excremental ecofeminism and to conceptualize the role of waste in literature across the period. In so doing, this project also argues for waste as an agentic, feminine and feminizing, compositional, and hybridizing material in early modern literature. It also speculates on ways in which such readings can help us to rethink and address contemporary issues such as pollution, racism, gender, class, ecology, and sexuality.

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INTRODUCTION: The Early Modern, the Ecofeminist, and the Excremental

The Introduction's Introduction, or the Pre-Excremental: Consumption

A search for the term “potty humor” in the *Oxford English Dictionary* immediately redirects to the phrase “toilet humor” instead, defined as “crude humor centering on the excretory functions” (toilet, *n.*, C2). Although both potty humor and toilet humor are listed by the *OED* as phrases first used in the mid-twentieth century (1969 and 1942, respectively), laughing—and gagging—at excretion has a long history in English literature, identifiable as far back as Chaucer,¹ and likely even farther. It would be easy to assume that potty humor, or discussions outside of medical texts of the body expelling its waste products, is a crass, modern invention and that our elders were also our betters. But as any careful reader of early texts knows, this was not at all the case. Early modern English writers, who composed during the period from the early 1500s to 1680, seem to be oddly enamored with waste, titillated even as they, and their readers, cringe. Writing about excretion—as humorous, as disgusting, as terrifying, as debasing, as powerful—is anything but a modern invention.

Even poet and playwright William Shakespeare, easily the most recognizable writer of the period, displays a simultaneous desire for and repulsion toward waste. For example, in Sonnet 129, part of the Dark Lady sequence, the Bard writes,

Th'expense of spirit in a waste of shame

Is lust in action; and till action, lust

¹ I am specifically referring here to “The Prioress’s Tale” from *The Canterbury Tales*, which details the murder of a Christian child by the Jewish community. The boy’s body is thrown in the public lavatory, and then miraculously begins to sing the *Alma Redemptoris*, leading to his corpse’s discovery. Although anti-Semitism and murder are far from humorous material, the sheer ludicrousness—which is passed off as miraculous-ness—of the tale strays so far into the territory of ridiculous that it threatens to become comedic.

Is perjured, murd'rous, bloody, full of blame,
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust,
Enjoyed no sooner but despised straight,
Past reason hunted, and no sooner had
Past reason hated as a swallowed bait
On purpose laid to make the taker mad;
Mad in pursuit and in possession so,
Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme;
A bliss in proof and proved, a very woe;
Before, a joy proposed; behind, a dream.
All this the world well knows, yet none knows well
To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell. ²

As Marline E. Blaine notes, one way to read this poem is to interpret the “waste” the poet refers to as the “waist” of a woman. Thus “Th’expense of spirit” becomes ejaculated male seed released during intercourse; or, as Blaine argues, “The fluid meant in Sonnet 129, of course, is semen,” and is representative of loss of both male bodily self and of intangible, yet activating, spirit (240).³ Here, the female body becomes a sort of sexualized and objectified privy into

² From *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., ed. by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus. W. W. Norton & Company, 2008, p. 1990.

³ Blaine’s article specifically explores Shakespeare’s Sonnet 129 through the lens of Galatians 5, a biblical text written by Paul. He concludes, “although Shakespeare, like Paul, is denouncing the destructive effects of lust, his parody of Pauline language is brutal and blasphemous. ‘Spirit,’ arguably the most important term in Paul’s theology and the redemption and restoration of human beings’ primordial integrity, becomes merely that which is ejaculated in a ‘waste’-ful, destructive process. The rhetorical force of the poem derives in large part from this reinscription” (241).

which a male expels part of the self. This action, characterized by sexual intensity and (loss of) control, is represented by a series of cacophonous and harshly stressed adjectives: “murd’rous,” “bloody,” “extreme,” “rude,” and “cruel,” which culminate in a line of disgust: “Enjoyed no sooner but despised straight.” The female body as privy and the action of releasing male seed— itself an evacuated material, and therefore a form of waste—are simultaneously disgusting and erotic. This dual emotive response is why sex with women is for the speaker an effort “Mad in pursuit and in possession so,” a “heaven that leads men to this hell.” Or, per Blaine again, “hell” is a potential reference “not only for post-coital remorse but also...for the female genitalia” (242).⁴ Caught in the throes of wasteful pleasure, the speaker is also overwrought with disgust at his love for forms of expulsion. The tension and stresses of the poem mirror this delightful and disgusted sexual action as bodies are penetrated, fluids are swapped, and the speaker is caught up in paradoxical sensations. There is no safe and purifying removal of waste in this poem, for it always allures and haunts. Even as the speaker tries to classify his waste experiences, the “waste” / waist of the woman always threatens to elude the scratching of his pen.⁵

Alongside Shakespeare, those like Ben Jonson, John Evelyn, Edmund Spenser, Mary Wroth, Margaret Cavendish, John Milton, Mary Sidney Herbert, John Donne, Edward Topsell, and a slew of other early modern English writers all wrote, to greater or lesser extent, about forms of excremental waste. Despite its widespread presence in early modern literature, such excremental enjoyment is rarely commented upon by scholars of the period. This scholarly gap is likely due to the awkwardness of writing about shit, urine, phlegm, menstrual blood, or other

⁴ Chapters 1 and 3 take up this idea, exploring the relationship between forms of excremental waste and hell, which is linked throughout the period to both the anus and the female body.

⁵ For more on the force of lust in Sonnet 129, see Carol Thomas Neely’s article “Detachment and Engagement in Shakespeare’s Sonnets: 94, 116, and 129.”

such products in a professional setting,⁶ and a holdover of the old guard, those critics who insist on literature as a kind of elevated expression of human achievement and enlightenment that is fixated on plundering the depths of human experience.

It just so happens that one of those depths for Shakespeare and his contemporaries may be the anus.⁷

Why Waste?: Digestion, Part 1

One scholar who does not flinch away from writing about the messiness of waste is Susan Signe Morrison; in her book *The Literature of Waste*, she asks, “If ‘storied matter’ has ‘narrative agency,’ what story does *waste* tell, as opposed to what story *we* tell *about* waste?” (124). Morrison asks this question from the theoretical perspective of ecofeminism—which is concerned with how the oppression directed toward women and the natural world frequently aligns, especially at the hands of patriarchal forces bent on exploitation and domination—and in so doing, she gestures toward an answer in which the human subject is decentered and the natural, or more-than-human, is given room for its own acts of agency. This query, as posed by Morrison, is one of the guiding questions of this project in its entirety, partially the inspiration—alongside the question of “Why on earth is Caesar wistfully remembering Antony drinking *horse pee*?” in Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*⁸—for an exploration of waste in early modern

⁶ With, of course, some notable exceptions, like the excellent work of Gail Kern Paster. But more on scholars who have tackled waste below.

⁷ See Jonathan Goldberg’s article “The Anus in *Coriolanus*” for both an exploration of Shakespearean anal focus and a writer who openly questions scholarly dismissal and disgust towards explorations of waste in the early modern period.

⁸ Notably, my fourth chapter—which explores feminine excremental waste as embodied by Cleopatra in Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*—does not answer this question. My engagement with waste in Shakespeare’s play was first prompted by Caesar’s nostalgia for a warlike Antony who “didst drink / The stale [urine] of horses” (1.4.61-62), but ultimately, Cleopatra is the focus of excremental representations in the play, shifting my attention from this

English literature. It is a premise this project both accepts and interrogates across readings of early modern English literature to see if waste does—and if so, how successfully—tell, or narrate, its own story in agentic manners. But to allow something like waste this kind of agency risks an encounter with an unseemly other which Mary Douglas in *Purity and Danger* (1980) has warned us works in chaotic and disorderly forms. Thus, attempting to capture a reading of waste in language—a system typically governed by order so it may be legible—is a difficult task, both for myself and the writers whose work I explore throughout this project.

Part of allowing waste to “speak” or “write” is to engage with waste studies, which, according to Morrison, offers ethical potentials as it insists upon the recognition of the materiality of forms of waste (*Literature of Waste* 8). Or, as she writes earlier in *Excrement in the Late Middle Ages: Sacred Filth and Chaucer’s Fecopoetics* (2008), waste studies “cultivate[s] a new sense of our bodies, modeled on a sense of embodiment that allows for an ethical relationship between self and waste” (154). In Morrison’s estimation—one with which, again, I wish to align myself—it is therefore *unethical* to refuse an acknowledgement of waste and how intimately all bodies, human and more-than-human, are a part of this waste. Waste studies, when paired with ecofeminism, can root us in the materiality of interconnection and mutual recognition so that we *must* think about all the implications of how we interact with waste, and thus how we interact with a larger natural world that is both feminized and exploited. Excretory waste specifically—ingested bodily material that is consumed, processed, and then expelled back into an exterior world—is an odd yet useful form of waste to explore as a potential answer to Morrison’s questions. In crossing bodily barriers, excretory waste intimately connects

one odd moment to a fuller exploration of agentic—in part because of its narrative force—feminine waste.

the human to the more-than-human, demonstrating their inseparability and opening pathways to ethical environmental action and activism.

But while waste studies has begun to solidify as a field, very little of this new offshoot of ecocriticism is applied to texts from the early modern period. There are some scholars—such as Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World* (1968), Norbert Elias in *The Civilizing Process* (1978), Gail Kern Paster in *The Body Embarrassed* (1993), David Inglis in *A Sociological History of Excretory Experience* (2000), Will Stockton in *Playing Dirty* (2011), and Jeff Persels and Russell Ganim in their edited collection *Fecal Matters in Early Modern Literature and Art* (2016)—who have undertaken the daunting and mucky task of unearthing the excretory aspect of waste studies in early modern English literature, art, and history. However, these studies are all either psychoanalytic or New Historicist in their theoretical approaches to the study of early modern excretory waste. Indeed, useful and important works like Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* (1982), Dominique LaPorte's *History of Shit* (1978), and Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger* (1966) are all grounded in psychoanalytic theory in relation to waste and excretory experience. Morrison's two texts stand as the sole book-length projects dedicated to exploring waste from an ecofeminist perspective, and even then, she either focuses on medieval literature or waste studies, broadly defined, with only brief interludes in which the early modern period is considered. We can find ecofeminist readings of early modern waste in the articles "Brown" by Steve Mentz (2013) and "'The Nobleness of Life': Spontaneous Generation and Excremental Life in *Antony and Cleopatra*" by Edward J. Geisweidt (2011), but these articles appear to be outliers, and cannot offer us sustained ecofeminist discussions. We should most certainly not reject psychoanalytic or New Historicist readings of waste and excrement in early modern literature—the work of the scholars listed above is smart, playful, and thought-provoking—but

an exploration of these excremental substances is incomplete without a perspective that is thoroughly grounded in the materiality of these substances through a dual feminist and ecological lens. Eco-material and ecofeminist readings can offer us useful avenues through which to explore the social and cultural implications of representations of feminized forms of waste throughout early modern literature, thus revealing a more full and accurate understanding of both the early modern English world and the period's texts. And, what we uncover may help us to conceptualize—and possibly change, in more ecologically sustainable ways—the roots of our contemporary engagements with waste in the Western world.

Consequently, I wish to present this project as one solution to the gap identified above. I argue that the literature of the early modern period is a space in which we can rethink our relationships (past, present, and future) to waste and allow waste to tell its own story. Indeed, the period may offer us fruitful ways to understand waste, for the term “waste” itself was a signifier for a multitude of signifieds, pointing toward the bodily / humoral, to land, to water, to the feminine, and even to the textual. Because this project is ecofeminist in nature, it understands forms of excremental waste as substances that are either feminized or aligned with the female body, and that simultaneously have ecological implications within the textual ecologies in which forms of waste appear. Many of the readings ask how, if we read through a lens simultaneously composed of ecofeminism and waste studies, we can reinterpret entire texts. This project is also concerned with excremental agency, or the ability of forms of waste to have a kind of narrative power in texts which disrupts or determines the outcomes of a poem, a storyline, a life, or a city. The work contained herein is thus an unabashed excremental encounter with early modern English literature.

Early Modern Waste, Defined: Digestion, Part 2

“Waste” summons a wide variety of signifieds: the unused, trash, excrement, the expelled, and problematically, sometimes humans or other living beings, including both flora and fauna. As I have sought to make apparent thus far, this project is mainly concerned with those excretions of a body, substance, or entity—human, mud, coal—that we prefer to ignore, or if we do address them, only do so in certain contexts. However, one type of waste cannot be cleanly separated from other forms, so we might ask, what exactly counted as waste in the early modern period?

Bakhtin offers a useful starting point. Waste emerges in Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and His World*—in which he explores the early modern notion of folk humor, Carnival, and their resulting lowering laughter—most clearly in relation to his concept of grotesque realism, in which “the bodily element is deeply positive” and is depicted as “representing all people.” Further, “The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body” (18-19). Grotesque realism is marked by the lower bodily stratum: stomach, genitals, anus, and “therefore relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth” (21). In its mixing and meshing of the reproductive and the destructive, grotesque realism further eliminates hierarchies by breaking binaries, showing them to be two sides of the same coin, intimately connected and always linked in repetitive cycles. Bakhtinian waste is both human and more-than-human, represented by the masses of people during Carnival as an amusing material that challenges forms of authority in a world turned topsy-turvy. It is governed by orifices and places of corporeal crossings, and in its relation to reproduction, takes on the marks of the feminine and the fecund.

Usefully, Paster picks up where Bakhtin leaves off, adding new depth and dimension to waste in relation to Galenic humoralism: in *The Body Embarrassed*, for instance, she writes about humoral secretions and excretions of the early modern body upon the stage. She finds that bodies are experienced, and this experience is naturalized, within the governing paradigms of their cultural moment; for the early moderns, this frequently meant Galenic humoralism, in which the body is a vessel for the four liquids yellow bile, black bile, blood, and phlegm. Particularly useful for defining waste are her ideas on incontinence in scatological comedy, in which she examines, among other things, the maternal / parental action of ensuring the “child” shits as a form of purgative evacuation in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Thus, Paster’s engagement with waste is concerned with expulsions of the early modern body—a body in which the feminine looms, for it is either a feminine figure who expels, or who elicits, expulsion.⁹ These purgative waste materials are multiple, as the liquids of the early modern humoral body were fungible and thus “not only did blood, semen, milk, sweat, tears, and other bodily fluids turn into one another, but the processes of alimentation, excretion, menstruation, and lactation were understood as homologous” (9). Waste is then bodily material, rooted in one of the governing medical paradigms of the period. As such, waste is shameful yet unavoidable, a part of the daily lived expulsive experience for early modern peoples.

But the term “waste” was also tied to different types of ecological environments. For example, the *OED* indicates that “waste” often meant “A piece of land not cultivated or used for any purpose, and producing little or no herbage or wood. In legal use *spec.* a piece of such land not in any man’s occupation, but lying common” (2). The ocean was also a waste, for as

⁹ There are potential homoerotic dimensions to this action as well; see Will Stockton’s previously mentioned work *Playing Dirty* for a discussion of homoerotic excrementality.

ecocritical Shakespearean Dan Brayton notes in *Shakespeare's Ocean: An Ecocritical Exploration*, “the sea is defined...by an asocial savagery that permeates the waters and threatens to infect those humans who dare to cross it. Thus, the deep-rooted cultural tendency to define the ocean as a waste space to be traversed, not as a place of human habitation, has a widespread intellectual legacy” (28). Here, land and ocean as waste are defined by their uselessness, or even their danger to, humans. These features of the world are not quite antithetical to all that is human, but seem unable to fit into an established order of the world, and therefore contain the markings of chaos. They are therefore also, per another *OED* definition of waste, “in vain, to no purpose” (5e) and are hence *wasteful*.

This idea of wasted land and water is also carried over into the early modern notion of spontaneous generation, in which land and water—and a bit of sun—mix to produce a myriad of squirming excremental pest-like creatures, such as toads and snakes. In her article “‘Bred Now of Your Mud’: Land, Generation, and Maternity in *Antony and Cleopatra*,” Susan C. Staub explores reproduction in various forms to show that “the trope of spontaneous generation allows Shakespeare to expand his interrogation of procreation in the play, blurring gender boundaries as he does so” (68). For Staub, Cleopatra is both the muddy landscape of Egypt and the flowing Nile, making her the site of spontaneous generation; as a result, Cleopatra is both the matter from which life is generated, and the generated excremental material as well. Her reading dovetails nicely with Geisweidt’s own exploration of spontaneous generation in Shakespeare’s play in “‘The Nobleness of Life’: Spontaneous Generation and Excremental Life in *Antony and Cleopatra*.” Geisweidt writes that “for the early moderns, excrement could be living,” as evidenced by spontaneous generation. This fact was reiterated for early moderns in the belief that hair from either humans or animals could transform into excremental beings (91). Consequently,

humans and more-than-humans—animals, plants, excremental life—are all related to / constituted by waste, and as such, cannot be differentiated in ways that hierarchically places any one being or thing above any other. In “Creeping Things: Spontaneous Generation and Material Creativity,” Karl Steel also offers an interesting addition to these ideas of spontaneous generation, emphasizing that the entities produced by spontaneous generation, if they can be gendered at all, may be gendered female, which is “a sign of absolute otherness and formlessness” (224). These scholars indicate that via spontaneous generation, waste becomes specifically excrement, and that this excrement crosses boundaries so thoroughly as to blur the categories of human, plant, and animal into one amalgamative vision. Further, excrement as both source and product of spontaneous generation grounds early modern waste thoroughly in the material and reproductive, and again, in the feminine.

When thinking about early modern waste, I wish to emphasize how the definitions explored above are analogous, whether that waste is human or more-than-human. In writing about types of waste, I therefore use the terms like shit, effluvia, excrement(al), and the expelled to signal the same kind of substances: those which are evacuated from or generated by a body / substance / entity and, whether human or more-than-human, are typically denigrated or ignored as mere gross bodily materials. Yet I also use terms purposefully to signal different types of waste: shit as that which is evacuated from some anus-like thing; effluvia as liquid seepages; excrement as an umbrella term for many types of human and non-human waste forms that are stinky and disgusting *and* potent, particularly in their fecundity; and the expelled to indicate those types of waste which are cast out, whether that be shit from the anus, Satan from Heaven, or smoke released from burning coal. These substances are part of material reality and remind us—as they did early moderns—that our bodies are not hermetically sealed, but always exist in

dialogue with a vibrant exterior world. They are bodily border crossers physically—at anus, vagina, nose, mouth, eyes, and more—and categorically—inner vs. outer, male vs. female, self vs. other, human vs. nature, pure vs. degraded, culture vs. nature, mind vs. body. Excremental substances thus firmly insist that we recognize interconnection when we recognize them. Indeed, the fungible nature of humoral liquids in early modern medical paradigms, with their ties to purging, evacuation, and birthing, demonstrate viscerally the border crossing capabilities of excrement, for humoral bodies are porous bodies that both release into the outer world, and threaten to take this outer, excremental world back into the self, compounding excrementality. This process can turn the body and the world topsy-turvy, challenging hierarchies and rearranging reality. These materials are powerful, able to influence identity, character, plot, and meaning, making them—particularly when textually represented—compositional. Shit / effluvia / excrement / the expelled exist whether we like them—or acknowledge them—or not, always working, even in the background, to influence how we know and define human, nature, feminine, masculine, sexuality, materiality, the body, and more. Ultimately, I define early modern waste as a hybrid substance, simultaneously human and natural. Early modern waste is a type of materiality that reveals the already eroded the distinctions between categories, past and present, in an ecologically ethical framework.

As a final note on defining waste, the anxiety I mentioned above is taken up in gruesome detail by psychoanalytic scholar Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Kristeva defines the abject as neither the other nor an object; instead, it is “that of being opposed to *I*,” as “It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated” (1). The abject is somehow a part of the self; but the self, as Kristeva explains, insulates itself by casting the abject out, seeing it as beyond the “other,” as “Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A ‘something’ that I do not

recognize as a thing,” because “if I acknowledge it, [it] annihilates me” (2). Kristeva notes that this process of abjection—a kind of fearful distancing to maintain the integrity of the subject—occurs with some everyday objects, such as food, corpses, excrement, or other forms of waste. This means that the abject—like Douglas’s dirt and waste in *Purity and Danger*—is an entity which “disturbs identity, system, order. [It] does not respect borders, positions, rules. [It is] [t]he in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (4). This final statement rings true of the ways in which early modern scholars have defined waste; it seems appropriate, then, to understand early modern waste as containing abject qualities. This figuration applies even to the gendered aspects of waste, for the abject is frequently feminized and related, throughout Kristeva’s text, to the child’s separation from the mother as a way of engaging in selfhood and subjectivity, but also to reproduction / procreation. Her work implies that the maternal body is both the first and ultimate source of abjection, the abject from which one must escape—yet to which one always wishes to return. It is a body which, in its ability to procreate, always threatens to overrun boundaries. Subsequently, early modern excrement is an abject, feminine substance that elicits fear and repulsion even as it allures—much like the Dark Lady of Shakespeare’s sonnet 129.

Critical Methodology: Digestion, Part 3

As noted above, this project explicates the ways in which early modern English texts portray waste through ecofeminism. As a critical methodology, ecofeminism is used to understand how early modern excremental waste is frequently feminized, the disruptive and gross agency of this feminized excrement, and further, how this feminized excrement exists in larger ecologies of interconnection. By “ecologies,” I mean systems which are full of various vibrant entities, human and more-than-human, which affect and are affected in turn; these systems are never completely sealed off from other systems, but the entities that inhabit each

individual ecology are heavily reliant upon one another. Thus, when one part of the ecological system moves, so too do the others, and possibly other systems as well. A good excremental example is your own body, which is always taking in, processing, reacting, and expelling. For instance, changes in the airscape of the city you inhabit affects your respiration, particularly when more fine dust particles, or fossil fuel emissions, saturate the air. Inhaling too much dust or smoke inhibits your ability to breathe, especially if you exercise outdoors. You may find yourself gasping for air more often, needing to take more frequent breaks, and, if you have allergies, blowing your nose. This nasal expulsion into a tissue then creates another waste product that you discard in a trash can, and will end up in a dump somewhere as part of yet another ecological system.¹⁰ Further, because the ecofeminist dimensions of this project are caught up in these kinds of expulsive material engagements with the world, this project also considers the physicality of the act of textual creation itself, and understands texts as kinds of ecologies. Ecofeminism also lends this project an ethical dimension, asking how rethinking waste through early modern English literature can help us to address issues of gender, race, sexuality, and ecological degradation in our contemporary moment. This project is not comprehensive but rather speculative, and I hope that it will inspire further work on this topic—both my own and that of others.

In my use of ecofeminist theory, I rely heavily on the work of a few key seminal ecofeminist scholars throughout this project: Val Plumwood, Stacy Alaimo, and Jane Bennett. These scholars provide a framework for understanding the excremental as a feminine, material, and ecological substance that can erode dualisms, challenge the hierarchical ordering of the

¹⁰ This exact kind of interrelation of ecological systems based on excremental traces of coal in the airscape, which in turn affects human bodies, will be explored in Chapter 3. This example is also specific to my own allergy problems; fine dust and smoke wreak havoc on my system.

world, insist on human connection to and immersion within nature, become compositional, and act as a powerful entity or “thing” with its own agency. They help us, in short, to theorize what I term early modern excremental ecofeminism, discussed at more length below.

Plumwood’s book *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* seeks to “develop...a critical ecological feminism” (1) that considers the mutually constituting and oppressive issues of race, gender, class—and nature. By adding “nature” as an axis of intersection, Plumwood believes that oppression and resistance can be more clearly conceptualized, for “the oppressed are often both feminised and naturalised” (18). To resist this oppression, she argues for “conceiv[ing of] human identity in less dualistic and oppositional ways; such a critical ecofeminism would conclude that both women and men are part of both nature and culture...[and therefore] fully recognise[] human identity as continuous with, not alien from, nature” (35-36). Plumwood calls for the elimination of the separation of the human from nature and the erosion of dualisms. This act would not erase difference—an act akin to colonization—but would erase hierarchies in a more just vision of equality. Her idea of continuity is useful in retaining a sense of self—or difference—while simultaneously understanding that all borders are crossed between the self and all that is in existence, and that existence is governed by a spectrum of similitude. Excremental waste is a highly visceral method of recognizing this kind of crossing and similitude.

In her philosophical text on ecofeminism, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*, Alaimo offers new possibilities for feminism to resist the nature / culture binary within the scope of ecological studies. This resistance can occur through an understanding of trans-corporeality, in which human and nature are always and already engaged in a series of interconnections that eliminate distinctions between inside and outside, human and other, and destabilize the boundedness that is key to human subjectivity. Trans-corporeality focuses on the

notion of *trans* as movement between / across bodies until categories of separation are so thoroughly broken down that we are faced with the fact that our own composition and selves are dependent upon multiplicity. This realization leads to an “unraveling of the human” that can be disquieting: recognition of the existence of trans-corporeality “makes it difficult to pose nature as mere background” to human culture, and invites us to engage in the very materiality of the self and the larger world (3). Like Plumwood, Alaimo imagines that the human is so intricately embroiled in the natural world via the openness of the trans-corporeal self that delineation is like an after-image, fleeting, sometimes present, but many times unclear or not there at all.

Alaimo’s modern trans-corporeal self is even reminiscent of the Galenic paradigm of early modern medicine, which—as noted above—was governed by the four humoral liquids and cast the body as a sponge or a sieve, open at various orifices to take in the external world or transport the internal into the outer environment. Early modern excrement—such as feces, urine, tears, (menstrual) blood, sweat, hair, nails—demonstrated the ability of the self to become coextensive with exterior surroundings. Meanwhile, the material, natural world—winds / airs, waters, words, smells, sights, food, drink—all traversed the porous boundaries of the body to corporeal interiors. This material, exterior world reconfigured the internal, and could in turn cross back from the inside to the outside in very visceral forms of excrement. Ingested food, for example, was likely grown in manure-ridden soil, purposefully soaking up the nutrients of animal dung only to be redeposited in and then expelled by the human body. Thus, a human self and an exterior world made up of many lively beings may still exist, but early modern paradigms reinforce Plumwood’s point: we are governed by degrees of continuity, and are trans-corporeally intermeshed, just as Alaimo argues. In addition, when we see excrement as an aspect of all things in existence, we endow excrement with power, start to accept the assemblages that Galenic, early

modern selves underscored in their porosity, and can begin to alter our contemporary paradigms to engage in more ethical responses to other beings based upon our interconnections.

One implication of understanding waste as feminized, compositional, ubiquitous, and an inherent part of the human self, is—as I have already noted above—to extend agency to excrement. It is to take up Jane Bennett’s call in her text *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010), in which she encourages humans to consider the world around them a highly material plane made up of lively things that exude agency with, against, and in conjunction with human actions. As Bennett notes, this reconsideration unmoors distinctions between subject and object, questioning the entire Western notion of subjecthood as endowed only upon humans. Further, she contends that this reconceptualization questions if humans are really in charge of the world around us, for things / objects have “thing-power” and can “exceed their status as objects...to manifest traces of independence or aliveness” (xvi). When thing-power is utilized to recognize myriad actants exerting agency all at once, we encounter an “assemblage,” which stresses that “The locus of agency is always a human-nonhuman working group” (xvii). When we see waste as an aspect of all things in existence, we endow waste with thing-power, start to accept the assemblages that Galenic, early modern selves underscored in their porosity, and thus can begin to alter our paradigms to allow us to engage in more ethical responses to other beings based upon our interconnections. Thus, what I call for is a paradigm shift in how we understand what it means to be human, what it means to the natural, and how we value (as compared to demean) waste, for this shift holds the potential for us to engage in more ethical ecofeminist practices of relating to the larger world and the beings that inhabit it.

However, as any astute reader will notice, the theoretical underpinnings of this argument’s bedrock are marked by a fault line that threatens to shake up, and possibly break

down, one important point of my overall claim and the ecological theories that inform it: that expulsive waste materials are inherently feminine, but also that waste allows and encourages us to engage in the elimination of dualisms. Such elimination potentially includes the destruction of the male / female dichotomy to more accurately depict and understand individuals of a variety of genders. Why, then, do I repeatedly and emphatically insist upon early modern forms of waste as *feminized* material, both here in my discussion of my theoretical framework and throughout the chapters that follow? The reason is twofold: first, it is practical in a historical and socio-cultural sense within the context of the early modern period, and second, it is theoretically necessary.

I have attempted to demonstrate that forms of waste are cast in the role of the feminine in early modern English society and culture; as this project goes on to highlight, this fact can be rendered more visible through an analysis of the literature of the period. For instance, “waste” as landscape is allied with the feminine, as landscape is often imagined as an inert object ready for colonization in Western patriarchal culture, an idea underscored by early modern England’s rising focus on colonial enterprises. Many bodily forms of waste—menstrual blood, tears, and breast milk—were categorized as inherently feminine in a culture that relies upon a two-gender model. The moistness of many waste materials makes them feminine too: the female body was said to be humorally phlegmatic, or liquid, reminiscent of materials like excrement (a material that, while said to be “solid,” is often understood as wet too), or mud that spontaneously generates slimy serpents and toads. Waste, from which early modern writers depict themselves and others cringing away, also allures, a position which accurately sums up part of the role of women in early modern society: they are the lesser, undercooked form of men, but can be desirable in forms that run the gamut from maternal / reproductive to erotic. Forms of waste are

therefore understood as feminine throughout this project because the early modern period itself often classifies them as feminine.

Ecofeminist theory also attunes us to the importance of understanding waste as a feminized material. For instance, while Plumwood does see what she terms ecological feminism as encouraging the erasure of dualisms, she nonetheless maintains, again, that “the oppressed are often both *feminised* and naturalised” (my emphasis, 18). Waste is a material mainly treated—both past and present—with disgust, especially because it threatens a patriarchal culture which has sought to distance itself from “both [the] feminised and naturalised.”¹¹ And Plumwood underscores that difference is important within an overall conception of continuity; the male / female dichotomy is a source of considerable mistreatment and violence against those who identify as female, but the role of the feminine nonetheless has the capability to be both transgressive and progressive, a subject position within which many individuals happily locate themselves. Contradictory as it may seem, understanding waste as a border crosser that connects entities and eliminates dualisms means embracing its feminine capacities to offer alternative modes of agency that cause discomfort to the dominant portion of society.

But it is the work of ecofeminist early modern scholar Lynne Bruckner that proves most instructive when understanding my insistence that waste is a feminine material in an ecological paradigm. In her chapter “N/nature and the Difference ‘She’ Makes,” Bruckner interrogates the ecofeminist use of the term N/nature, arguing for its usefulness as feminine, particularly when studying early modern English texts. Her own words convey her meaning—and my own—best:

¹¹ There are, of course, also practical reasons to distance ourselves from types of waste: it can be a pollutant or a source of disease.

An ecofeminist reclamation of N/nature must take into account the often troubling and gendered supplementary that this word carries. While some (radical) ecofeminists have celebrated the alignment between woman and nature, more have found the connection (and the notion of Mother Nature itself) damaging, as such gendering underwrites the exploitation and othering of both women and nature. While I have long been of the latter camp, I know think that, without being essentialist, we can recuperate the historic bond between the feminine and nature in a productive and inclusive way...My key point is that in recuperating N/nature we can also reclaim and transform the historic alignment of women and nature, not in an essentialist way but rather with the intent of locating a (feminine) subject position, which all humans can occupy. Such a subject position would view humans as part of nature, productively blurring (or even reconstructing) the separation of the human and nonhuman that occurs with the seventeenth-century rise of science. (17)

The alignment of the feminine with the natural, or with waste, is therefore a powerful position that can allow us to engage in multiple kinds of critiques of contemporary treatment of the material world and analyze early modern representations of it. For Bruckner—and for myself—N/nature (or, as this project is concerned, types of waste) as feminine “provide a viable subject position...for all humans to share with nature.” This position can “disrupt[] the human / nature or reason / nature dualities that remain culturally in place” to this day, a leftover in Western society from the early modern, and earlier, periods. And, significantly, this “reclamation of N/nature also restores the notion of nature as a multivalent, complex, interrelated living system” (30)—a role that this project seeks to extend to types of waste. Indeed, in understanding nature and waste as

feminized material, and embracing this as a role that all humans, regardless of identity markers, can adopt, we can more closely align ourselves with the natural world and use this as a lens through which to explore how contemporary practices have detrimental effects on a multitude of ecologies and the agents who occupy them. This idea is important to the overall intention of this project and my own development of a methodology based on understanding waste as a feminine and agentic material that connects through continuity and trans-corporeality, and is key to the creation of narratives.

Toward this end, this project is guided by a set of principles—the start of an excremental and ecofeminist methodology—for engaging with the expelled in early modern English literature. As a brown entity, (1) excremental waste can move us beyond narrow green visions of the world, in which so much ecocriticism, early modern ecofeminism, and current ecological activism is, in a limiting matter, rooted. Instead, via brown excremental waste—or, as I call it in Chapter 4 of this project, excremental ethics—we can engage several ecological, feminist, race-, class-, and sexuality-based issues, for that labeled as brown has frequently been subject to debasement by, in the words of Plumwood, the Western master-model. Consequently, when we (2) extend agency to waste as a new way to engage in ethical paradigms, we will realize that the excremental feminine was always a source of power; we can adopt the role that Bruckner advocates and that I endorse. Further, excrement as feminine also directs us to the early modern period’s understanding of female bodies and excremental substances and entities as hellish pollutants, an important concept for understanding religious, medical, and gendered paradigms of the period. Types of waste are therefore dangerous to a cohesive sense of a (masculine) self; this is because (3) waste as excrement is a border crosser that hybridizes, and hence reminds us of our continuity with, and our trans-corporeal enmeshment in, the natural world. This recognition

can allow humans to grasp that we are never really separate from the larger, exterior world. This act is an extension of agency that can allow us to (4) understand that waste in its multitudinous—but especially its excremental—forms “speaks,” or narrates itself and other beings. Finally, (5) we can then accept that writing is a form of waste. This fact indicates how writing is always self-referential, frequently discussing (perhaps *agonizing* over) the expelled. Writing is just another form of expulsion, albeit an expulsion of the mind as conveyed through the mouth or digits. To write about waste is then to write about waste *using* waste.

As a final point here, I want to stress that writers may write about waste, but waste always speaks back, its material ooziings expanding beyond syntax, grammar, and bounded pages. Even as I write about waste here, try to track its margins, contain its meanings, and explore its possibilities, it will always slip away from me, signaling more than I can ever fully indicate. It is, per Douglas and Kristeva, disorderly and chaotic; it can turn the world, in the words of Bakhtin, topsy-turvy in useful ways that can help us to challenge dominant culture and forms of authority. Ultimately, to confront waste—especially excremental early modern waste—is to confront the paradoxes of our embodied, material selves.

Project Outline: Excretion, At Last

Each of the four chapters contained within this project makes use of the work of either Plumwood, Alaimo, or Bennett, in isolation or in concert, to read the different forms of waste that I explore in early modern English texts. Their work is how ecofeminism is grounded throughout this project. Further, each chapter takes up one or more of the five tenets of early modern excremental ecofeminism I defined above, understanding them as the result of using ecofeminism to explore the excremental in early modern texts. Thus, this project undergoes sustained close readings as it simultaneously conceptualizes how early modern excremental

ecofeminism can exist as its own particular methodology. The work contained herein is then both an argument for paying attention to the excremental in early modern literature and an articulation of how we may do so.

Chapter 1, titled “*The Faerie Queene* and *Paradise Lost*: Expulsive Female Leakage, Ecological Continuity, and Christian Masculinity,” reads Edmund Spenser’s 1590 edition of Book I of *The Faerie Queene* in relation to John Milton’s epic from almost a century later, *Paradise Lost*. There is a long and rich scholarly history of reading these two texts together, for Milton was a fan of Spenser and directly noted this in some of his papers. With this fact established, I ask how we can understand the connections between the two poets in relation to the excremental. I posit that Error and Duessa are excremental lizard-women hybrids and precursors to the excremental horror of Sin. These lizard-women disrupt patriarchal Christian forces in their respective texts, threatening masculine characters with enmeshment into the material muck of the world. And they are startlingly—albeit only temporarily—successful; Error and Duessa cause Redcrosse Knight to stray from Una, and Sin manages to slither into Paradise as Adam and Eve share the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. These alluring and disgusting villainesses demonstrate the power of the feminine excremental and are key to shaping the narrative of both texts.

In Chapter 2, I depart from epics to turn to women’s mourning poetry, specifically Mary Sidney Herbert’s elegiac verse for her brother Sir Philip Sidney, and Mary Wroth’s love sonnets in her sequence *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*. A reading of these poets in tandem indicates that it is the written product itself that becomes a vehicle both for emotional expression and for the excremental, for each writer imagines their verse as outpourings of melancholic tears—a kind of expulsion. In this chapter, titled “Melancholic Expulsions: The Feminine Text as Excrement in

the Work of Mary Sidney Herbert and Mary Wroth,” I also use parts of Robert Burton’s massive text *The Anatomy of Melancholy* to understand how these women are writing within a framework in which the text functions as a form of purged melancholy and thus also as a form of feminized excrement. This line of inquiry suggests important ways to understand the production of texts in the early modern period, especially by women, who were frequently looked down upon in the literary marketplace; indeed, Sidney Herbert and Wroth both published their work, an act that—at least for Wroth—was particularly scandalous for women.

Chapter 3 turns to John Evelyn’s political treatise *Fumifugium; or The Inconveniencie of the Aer and Smoak of London Dissipated. Together with Some Remedies Humbly Proposed*, to explore how Evelyn represents of coal smoke as a kind of excremental pollution. To make this argument, Evelyn ties coal smoke to hell¹², a commonplace in the period that allows him to cast smoke as a feminized and feminizing agent. London and its citizens threaten to be eroded and tainted by this excremental and feminized pollutant until the city itself becomes synonymous with hell. This is especially true of the monarchy, as embodied by Charles II, who had only recently retaken the throne after the disastrous English Civil War and the parliamentary rule of Oliver Cromwell. Charles, who was already portrayed as a loose, feminine figure, is threatened in Evelyn’s text with a full descent into excremental femininity that would erode the stability of the monarchy, and thus the English nation. Relying on Alaimo’s idea of trans-corporeality, “Excremental Pollution: Hell, Smoke, and a Whorish London in John Evelyn’s *Fumifugium*” notes, as previous chapters do, the power of the excremental while simultaneously recognizing its real-world polluting effects.

¹² Throughout this project, I use “Hell” to refer to the specific location of damnation, and “hell” to indicate the concept of something being demonic / terrible / unpleasant / of Hell.

Finally, Chapter 4, or “Serpent of Old Nile”: Love, Shit, and the Lizard in Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*,” turns to the plethoric excrementality of Shakespeare’s oldest heroine. Cleopatra, through her connection to land- and waterscapes and spontaneously generated lizard-like critters, is characterized by the play as actual excrement. However, this characterization is not a simple demonization of Cleopatra; it instead makes her a powerful entity, at once a source of titillation and disgust as she demonstrates the myriad agency of ecological assemblages and, through her suicide, determines the outcome of the entire play. She embodies, as do Error, Duessa, and Sin, the feminine, excremental kinds of agency that can shape narrative. This chapter then considers how an excremental Cleopatra can be read against the grain to uncover and discuss gendered, raced, and ecologically important issues in the play and in the present.

Ultimately, I write about early modern waste so that we can begin to understand the story it tells, and to recognize that this story is key to our understanding and interpretations of English literature from the period. But this type of reading is also *fun*, particularly in its overt naughtiness. Reading waste in the literature of the early modern period can help us to better understand the rich cultural context in which texts were written, and can even help us to recover and better understand excrement’s power as a source of agency, threat, and amusement.

CHAPTER 1: *The Faerie Queene* and *Paradise Lost*: Expulsive Female Leakage, Ecological Continuity, and Christian Masculinity

Introduction

In *Areopagitica* (1644), John Milton makes the bold claim that the “sage and serious Poet Spenser” is “a better teacher then Scotus or Aquinas” (27). Milton was referring to Edmund Spenser, author of the late-sixteenth-century epic *The Faerie Queene* (1590 and 1596), a text that greatly influenced Milton’s own epic, *Paradise Lost* (1667, rev. 1674). Both poets imagined themselves as teachers, their epics the platform through which lessons were revealed to their reader.¹³ As a result, scholars have long argued for the influence of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* on John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Thomas E. Maresca explores this very topic in *Three English Epics*, as does Maureen Quilligan in *Milton’s Spenser* and Christopher Bond in *Spenser, Milton, and the Redemption of the Epic Hero*; all three texts are to some degree concerned with the lineage of allegory and epic which stretches from Virgil, through Spenser, and on to Milton. Both poets also explore what I refer to throughout this chapter as the danger of the excremental feminine, embodied in Spenser’s Error and Duessa, and Milton’s Sin. These abject female entities threaten the hierarchical dualism of Christian masculinity in *The Faerie Queene* and *Paradise Lost* through the characters of Redcrosse and Adam, respectively. An exploration of the excremental—the impure, the dungy, the material, the ecological, and the feminine—is both a useful way to understand the links between these poets and conceptualize the role of excrement

¹³ For example, when Edmund Spenser presented the 1590 version of his epic poem *The Faerie Queene* to his friend and fellow courtier Sir Walter Raleigh, he indicated in an attached letter that “The general end therefore of all the book is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline.” The model to which Spenser’s presumed male audience should aspire is Prince Arthur, who “before he was king, [embodied] the image of a braue knight, perfected in the twelue priuate moral vertues” (714-715). This allegorical text continually relies upon religious imagery to “fashion,” or teach, its reader these “moral vertues.”

in early modern English literature as a material substance that stresses connection to, rather than hierarchical separation from, the more-than-human. Consequently, a kind of poetic continuity arises between Spenser and Milton, for in the words of A. C. Hamilton, Spenser “served as midwife to...Milton” (2), particularly in how he reconfigured his own villainous Sin to simultaneously embody—albeit in a more tragic manner—Spenser’s Error and Duessa. Milton’s rehashing of Spenser’s material is not just an homage, but a continued exploration of the danger of the expelled feminine. This poetic continuity expresses a kind of perverse pleasure in mapping the ability of Christian masculinity to fall to that which is debased.

I interpret the excremental links between Spenser’s and Milton’s texts, and their male heroes’ downfalls, through the work of Val Plumwood, who in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* outlines her ecofeminist concept of ecological continuity. To resist the dualism which reinforces hierarchical divisions¹⁴ and the oppressive normalization of “*masculine* and *human* character,” she argues for “conceiv[ing] human identity in less dualistic...ways.” In so doing, we can “fully recognise[] human identity as continuous with, not alien from, nature” (29, 35-36). Such reconceptualization enables us to see nature as agentic, not as passive background material that exists only for human exploitation. Or, as Plumwood herself notes, recognizing the continuity of the material world “extend[s] concepts of autonomy, agency and creativity to those who have been denied them under the Cartesian division of the world”—such as women and the excremental. For Plumwood, this rethinking does not mean denying difference, but instead “requires both that we reconceive ourselves as more animal and embodied” (124) and embrace a “recognition of...interconnectedness” (128). While much of the morality represented in the case

¹⁴ Some examples of the dualisms considered by Plumwood include male / female, human / nature, and mind / body, with male, human, and mind all occupying more valued, and thus higher, positions in a traditionally rationalist and hierarchical understanding of the world.

of Redcrosse and Adam is concerned with demonstrating for a presumed Christian audience the threats of the sinfully material world,¹⁵ Plumwood suggests that it is within the very same material world that a radically different form of morality emerges. And, as a frame of interpretation, continuity can help us to unpack the connections which exist between *The Faerie Queene* and *Paradise Lost*, particularly in how Milton understands Spenser as his predecessor and relies upon the prior writer's work for an exploration of Christian masculinity and dangerous feminine excrementality as an entity capable of leaving male heroes continuous with a sinfully material world.

With both Plumwood's continuity in mind, in this chapter I explore Errour and Duessa from Book I of *The Faerie Queene* and Milton's Sin from *Paradise Lost*. Numerous scholars have argued for Spenser as source material for Milton, and I engage in this conversation by understanding the leaking female bodies of Errour and Duessa as the fetid compost heap from which Sin springs. Interestingly, all three female characters contain bodies that, in their excremental dimensions, overflow their boundaries to become continuous with their environments and thus inseparable from the stuff of the world. As rotting material of evil, these

¹⁵ It could be argued that in the case of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost*, Christian morality hinges on the characters' engagement with an excrementally sinful ecological world. This is because, as the Son and God the Father note in their discussion concerning the fate of humankind in Book III, "Man should find grace" through "sin to foul exorbitant desires," as it will allow the Father, through the sacrifice of the Son, to place humans "On even ground against his mortal foe" and ensure "his deliv'rance" (145, 177, 179, 182). In other words, true redeeming grace cannot occur through Christ without the Fall and all the excrementally sinful ties to the physical plane this Fall entails. Such an interpretation is part of the Christian history Milton explores. However, when read in relation to *The Faerie Queene*, we can also understand the actions of Adam as a warning to Christian readers of the latter seventeenth century, who exist after the redeeming grace of the Son and must, therefore, shun the pleasures of materiality to join with Christ. Adam thus stands as *both* "historical" figure elaborating Milton's own interpretation of theology and as a dire warning for a Christian audience.

women represent sources for the downfall of the Christian masculine self. As a result, the female body creates space for excremental agency—and sinful transgressions—as Error, Duessa, and Sin challenge Christian male selfhood by threatening to make it continuous with the ecological world, for these women are key figures in moving forward or arresting the plot due to their leaking continuity. In its early modern femininity, the expelled proves itself a source of dangerous and alluring power.

The Early Modern Christian Male Self

Male selfhood in the early modern period is a fraught topic, one clouded by modern ideas of masculinity that tinge the way in which we interpret the past, and the materials available for these interpretations. Nonetheless, the scholars whose work I summarize below overwhelmingly argue for an early modern male self that anxiously and violently defines itself against the other in a (frequently false) vision of mastery or control of both the self and this other. This early modern masculine paradigm is historically contingent, existing between a medieval past, a colonizing present, and an industrial future.

For example, Mark Breitenberg's work is concerned with how the early modern man was imagined or may have imagined himself. In *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* Breitenberg argues that "Masculinity is inherently anxious" because it is based off an unattainable "[patriarchal] order, in which hierarchical relationships and circumscribed, individual identities are securely in place" (2, 1).¹⁶ Such masculine anxiety is destructive *and*

¹⁶ This ordering of "hierarchical relationships" was represented by the household structure. More specifically, the husband is at the top of the family structure, below him is a modest yet fruitful wife who runs the household well, below them are the educated and well behaved children, and further below are servants instructed by the housewife, loyal to the family, and diligent in their duties. There is much to this ideal structure that reads as a pipe dream. For more on the importance of the housewife in this carefully ordered hierarchy, see Antonia Frasers's *The*

creative, for it “reveals the fissures and contradictions of patriarchal systems and, at the same time...enables and drives patriarchy’s reproduction and continuation of itself” (2). This tenuous dynamic relied on a “construction[] of woman as other,” particularly sexual or erotic women, who functioned as a lure or trap for men (11, 17-21). When interpreted alongside Julia Kristeva’s ideas of woman (particularly as maternal, leaking, and hence excremental) as abject (71), we can understand Breitenberg’s formulation of early modern masculinity as dependent upon an anxiety which polices the borders of the patriarchal order, and which arises due to the fear of being polluted by female sexuality.¹⁷

In *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England*, Alexandra Shepard also stresses the importance of the other to the project of early modern masculinity. Although masculinity “was enormously diverse, contingent and contradictory,” “Normative manhood was primarily defined through comparison with a broad range of deviant ‘others’,” and could be sustained and “enforce[ed]” through violent acts—like, for instance, Guyon’s destruction of The Bower of Bliss at the end of Book 2 of *The Faerie Queene*. Shepard further contends that texts about early modern manhood “sought to define manhood in broadly patriarchal terms of discretion, reason, moderation, self-sufficiency, strength, self-control, and honest respectability,” even if individuals did not meet this patriarchal ideal. This ideal was again representative of anxiety, particularly when considering whether men could achieve this ideal “through controlling women” (1, 9-10).

Weaker Vessel (1984), which charts the lived experiences of various women in comparison to dominant ideals of femininity in the early modern period.

¹⁷ Kristeva’s abject is neither the other or an object; instead, it is “that of being opposed to *I*,” as “It lies there, quite close, but...cannot be assimilated” (1). The abject must be rejected from the self to retain the self. As Kristeva notes, it is “Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A ‘something’ that I do not recognize as a thing,” because “if I acknowledge it, [it] annihilates me” (2). This description quite accurately sums up human—both early modern and contemporary—engagement with things of waste.

Mastery of self and others, whether achieved or not, is in Shepard's estimation the dominant mode of early modern masculinity.

On masculinity in *The Faerie Queene*, Stephen Greenblatt and Joseph Campana prove instructive, stressing that violence is key to Spenser's image of the masculine. In *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Greenblatt defines the titular self-fashioning as "an increased self-consciousness [in the sixteenth-century] about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process...Christianity brought a growing suspicion of man's power to shape identity" (2). Greenblatt is particularly interested in Guyon's destruction of the Bower of Bliss at the end of Book II of *The Faerie Queene*, arguing that the Bower is destroyed in a moment of violent coalescing of the self: "We can secure that self only through a restraint that involves the destruction of something intensely beautiful; to succumb to that beauty is to lose the shape of manhood and be transformed into a beast" (175). This destruction is an attempt to mediate the sexual pleasure Acrasia represents, as she threatens a "breakdown of [Guyon's, or a man's] carefully fashioned identity" (176). Ultimately, "The fashioning of a gentleman then depends upon the imposition of control over inescapably immoderate sexual impulses that...must constantly recur," for "the discriminations upon which a virtuous and gentle discipline is based are forever in danger of collapsing" (177). Spenser's "fashioning of a gentleman" is, for Greenblatt, a kind of self-fashioning dependent upon the suppression of female sexuality via male violence, or perhaps a Christian insistence on sexual moderation for the sake of procreation, not pleasure.¹⁸ By contrast, in *The Pain of Reformation* Campana explores how Spenser's *Faerie*

¹⁸ As Greenblatt himself notes, there existed "a widespread medical belief in early modern Europe that for conception to take place, both the male and the female had to experience orgasm"—but there were detractors who argued that procreation should involve little to no pleasure at all (176).

Queene shows the poet grappling with the Reformation, which at the end of the sixteenth-century still caused upheaval in England. Campana indicates that because “the violence of religious schism became a part of the fabric of life in England,” Spenser accordingly “makes vulnerability central to his idea of virtue...Masculinity, or manliness, must then be reformed to accommodate vulnerability and an openness to the pain of others” (3-4). In other words, the enduring violence of the Reformation causes a reformation of the masculine self, which Spenser imagines as a self that must, during turmoil, be open to the experiences of others (11). Such a reading of Spenser is in direct contrast, as Campana notes, to Cynthia Marshall’s *The Shattering of the Self*, in which she argues for texts as staging violent actions—such as the removal of Gloucester’s eyes in *King Lear*—as centering the audience on their own vulnerability while simultaneously eliciting a pleasure in their own potential shattering. While their understanding of what an early modern masculine self might be is greatly varied, these scholars clearly indicate that violence is a key ingredient to the creation—or dissolution—of this masculine self.

While Spenser cannot be understood without the context of the Reformation, his disciple Milton must be read in relation to the enduring violence of the English Civil War. In *Literature, Gender, and Politics During the English Civil War* (2005), Diane Purkiss contends that early modern masculinity underwent “repetitive construction” to “prevent its collapse into formlessness.” Such “repetition” is initiated by the male child’s “separation from the mother, which was culturally perceived as the moment at which masculinity was conferred.” The stress placed on this moment’s “importance culturally” then “create[s] a male psyche constantly subject to destabilising fantasies of its loss” (10). Campana also devotes time to Milton’s epic, finding that, for Milton, “Spenser is a militant defender of Christian, indeed Protestant, virtue and the defense of that virtue required violence.” Thus for Milton, “virtue requires an armed encounter

with evil”—in other words, violence is needed to elicit good Christianity, especially as represented in the “heroic ideal” (2-3). Violence and women—particularly mothers—are necessary ingredients in Milton’s depictions of the masculine subject.

Indeed, violence and women are key to *both* Spenser and Milton in their framing of the male self. After all, isn’t Eve’s temptation of her husband and her ability to get him to cast away the armor of his faith simply a more literal depiction of Redcrosse laying aside his cross-embazoned armor before dallying with Duessa? Although speculative, we might even imagine that Milton saw Redcrosse’s encounter with Duessa and then his imprisonment in the hellish dungeon of Orgoglio as a kind of template for Adam’s downfall and the subsequent emergence of Sin and Death into the world. The shattering, to borrow Marshall’s term, of both Redcrosse and Adam is predicated on the sinful otherness represented by sexually charged female figures who cause the masculine self to become coextensive with materiality. With such threats lurking about, it is no wonder, as Breitenberg tells us, that masculinity is an inherently anxious state of self, and one which attempts to shore up this self with violence. Early modern Christianity is therefore defined both by and against the otherness of women, those agents of sin who resist the control of men or religion and instead await the chance, with their lickerish female wombs, to make their male targets coextensive with multitudinous excrement. Once coextensive, this early modern Christian male must desperately seek to restore his own self, by cutting himself off from the carnal physicality of the world through penitence—just as Redcrosse experiences in the House of Holiness or awaits Adam as he is cast out of the garden by God. To do otherwise is to take sinful pleasure in wading around in feminine muck.¹⁹

¹⁹ As useful as attempting to define masculinity may be, it is also necessary to note the limitations of such an endeavor. Male selfhood, or masculinity, in the early modern period—or in any period—was an amalgamation, its contours difficult to detect. If gender is a

Spenser's Stinking Women

Redcrosse Knight, the hero of Book I of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, is constructed as such a figure of Christian masculinity in the opening lines of Canto i. Bedecked in accoutrements meant to allegorize Redcrosse as a Christian male knight, these physical objects are also meant to preserve the bounded integrity of his bodily and spiritual self. The sword is to engage in a defeat of evil, the shield to turn it back—the cross daubed on it a kind of warding talisman—and the armor, of course, separates him from the outer world, enclosing his body and functioning as a barrier between the knight and worldly sin. Significantly, however, Redcrosse's armor is dented and old, well used prior to the knight acquiring it (I.i.1-2).²⁰ The armor's appearance suggests that Redcrosse, a new and untested knight, may therefore be unaware of how to adequately use these tools to protect himself from the exterior world—a fact later exploited by Duessa.

Once clothed in allegory, Redcrosse experiences the first test to his Christian masculinity in the form of Error, herself an allegorical rendering of female corporeality. Wandering aimlessly with Una and the Dwarf, Redcrosse chooses the “path” that “beaten seemd most bare,” and “brought them to a hollowe caue, / Amid the thickest woods” (I.i.11). Una warns Redcrosse away from this cave, but Redcrosse, “full of fire and greedy hardiment,” ignores her advice and

performance—a stage set with mannerisms, characteristics, actions, speech patterns, items of clothing—then any “true” notion of masculinity is already defunct. Definitions of masculinity offered for any period are therefore likely to be incomplete, only telling part of the story of what it means to be a man. It is also important to recognize the differences between dominant and marginalized performances, which are determined by age, class, race, marital status, and a whole range of other factors. As Breitenberg reminds us, there is an important difference between the ideal and reality, or the patriarchal paradigm and the actual practice of masculinity (1-2). It is therefore necessary to recognize the limitations of any text to fully and neatly explain male selfhood and masculinity.

²⁰ This, and all subsequent quotes from *The Faerie Queene*, come from the Routledge edition of the text, ed. by A. C. Hamilton, Hiroshi Yamashita, Toshiyuki Suzuki, and Shohachi Fukuda, 2nd ed., 2013.

“forth vnto the darksome hole he went” (I.i.14). Such a “beaten path” represents, in the larger Christian allegory, the wide and frequently traveled road to Hell, or in this case, the temptation to sin because Redcrosse’s “fire and greedy hardiment” prompts him to explore the cave and prove his worthiness to bear arms. The trio’s stumbling upon Error is therefore constructed immediately as a test; she is the method whereby Redcrosse—and the reader—will be taught the first Christian lesson within the larger allegory of the epic poem.²¹ Part of this lesson is that women as material beings are inherently dangerous. Indeed, Error’s “hollowe caue” tempts the knight to prove his might within its depths because this cave is representative of erotic femininity. The cave is the vulva writ large, for it is lined with “thickest woods” that sprout like dense hairs and surround the “darksome hole” representative of a vaginal opening. When the cave as vulva and vagina is paired with the notion that Redcrosse has reached its location on a “beaten path,” the opening of the female body becomes indistinguishable from the opening into Hell. Redcrosse, both infant knight and infant Christian, then willingly enters a hellish and fleshy female body, that which since Adam and Eve has been the fall of all men.

It is in keeping with this pairing of women and Hell that Error is physically represented as half woman and half snake. She is an “vgly monster plaine, / Halfe like a serpent horribly displaide, / But th’other halfe did woman’s shape retaine” (I.i.14). Error is a creature that in her materiality defies clear boundaries; part woman, part snake, she is fully neither yet both at once. She is what a man finds when he enters the dark depths of the female body, which is always, as

²¹ For A. C. Hamilton in *The Structure of Allegory in The Faerie Queene*, this moment serves as the initiation of Redcrosse’s “spiritual pilgrimage” (33). Thomas E. Maresca in *Three English Epics* concurs, for he reads Redcrosse’s encounter with Error as setting a model for the entirety of *The Faerie Queene*: “The Red Crosse Knight’s encounter with Error initiates a gradual descent into darkness and an increasing obscurity of vision that leads inevitably to the primacy of delusion and equally inevitably to the dispelling of that delusion and the restoration of the sight of truth” (28-31, 63).

the next line in the stanza tells us, “loathsome, filthie, foule, and full of vile disdain” (I.i.14). She is the horror of the hungry womb slaving to suck the vital spirits ejaculated from a man during intercourse. Similarly, Error’s serpentine femininity threatens to render Redcrosse dead in a series of reflected meanings: dead physically, dead spiritually, and dead sexually in an orgasm. In melding together the figure of woman with the image of the serpent, Spenser casts Error as man’s original two enemies all at once, for she is Eve *and* Satan as snake combined to destroy Redcrosse, a newly forged knight of Christ. Or, as Zailig Pollock indicates, Error is part of “a tradition which represents the Satanic evil of Pride as a dragon-like monster and suggests the deceitful, tempting quality of this evil by linking the dragon to a seductive woman” (270).

It is in the description as “Halfe like a serpent” that Error’s excrementality is also first rendered visible, for in the early modern period snakes, lizards, toads, and other such pest-like, squirming creatures were imagined to be birthed from brown, smelly excrement or excrement-like things. In *The Historie of Serpents*, Edward Topsell notes that serpents can be birthed by different kinds of excrement: from the warmed, wet mud along the Nile’s shore in Egypt; from “the longe[s]t haire[s] of women;” from the blood of decapitated Gorgons, as noted by Ovid; and as “*Virgilius* [s]aith, that dung beeing laid in a hollow place, [s]ubject to receiue moy[s]ture, engendereth Serpents.”²² Their excremental status also means that serpents are cold and moist—much like the phlegmatic female body—and is why “they leaue behind them in their traine or path a [s]lymie humour” (6-7). Topsell also recounts the horrifying story of St. Margaret’s Day, when,

neere a Village called *Zich[s]a*, by the Riuer *Theo[s]e* in *Hungaria*, there were many Serpents & Li[s]ards bred in the bodies of men, very like to [s]uch as are

²² The shed bits of human bodies—like blood and hair—were believed to be excremental too.

bred in the earth, whereupon they fell into exqui[s]ite torments: and there dyed of that calamity, about three thou[s]and, & [s]ome of the bodyes being layde again[s] the Sunne gaping, the Serpents came foorth of theyr mouthes, and [s]uddenly entred into their bellies againe. (7)²³

Mud, shed hair, corpses, blood, and dung itself: all are excremental or expelled in some way and all, Topsell indicates, may potentially bring the snake into existence. Error, as a half-serpent woman, then belongs to a rich history of excremental beings in early modern thought. She is a doubly abject figure when she appears in the vaginal cave tucked into the hollows of the Wandering Wood, for she signifies both the alluring, haunting danger of the feminine and the excremental. Notably, Hell itself was female body *and* an anus—one which both consumed excrement and spit it back onto the earthly plane.²⁴ This excremental meshing of woman and snake is a deadly combination in Spenser's Error, which is compounded by her motherhood.

As her serpentine femininity suggests, the kind of motherhood Error represents is both monstrous and overly plethoric. As Redcrosse and readers alike gaze into the vaginal opening of the cave, the poet states,

...Of her there bred,
A thousand yong ones, which she dayly fed,
Sucking vpon her poisonous dugs, eachone
Of sundrie shapes, yet all ill faored:
Soone as that vncouth light vpon them shone,

²³ These descriptions, as become apparent in my analyses of the motherhood of Error and Sin, are highly reminiscent of these two serpent women.

²⁴ See also Piero Camporesi's exploration of Hell as anus and latrine in *The Fear of Hell: Images of Damnation and Salvation in Early Modern Europe*.

Into her mouth they crept, and suddain all were gone. (I.i.15)

Here, Error is staged as the uncontrollable fecundity of female flesh and the plethoric reproductive capabilities of excrement during spontaneous generation. Male knights like Redcrosse may enter the vaginal (and perhaps hellishly anal) opening of Error's cave, but none of these masculine figures have, even metaphorically, contributed to her fertility. Rather, Error showcases unchecked female reproduction without the presumed necessary component of any type of male seed.²⁵ It is this reproductive autonomy that initially marks her as monstrous, for her offspring number "A thousand," all "Of sundrie shapes," as plethoric as their mother, who is woman, snake, mother, and excrement simultaneously. Her monstrosity and plethora are unscored when the poet notes that her "yong ones" feed "vpon her poisonous dug." Rather than adhere to Galenic theory, which stated that breast milk was refined from the humoral mixture of blood retained by the female body during pregnancy, Error's maternity is corrupt through the poison she feeds her offspring. She is the unchecked female body, reproducing and leaking without end in a monstrous vision of maternity. Indeed, that she autonomously produces so many monstrous shapes taps into early modern fears of monstrous births, scripts that often placed blame upon women.²⁶

Such feminized monstrosity is also indicative of Error's abjection and continuity. She is more than the other; she is human enough from the waist up to be recognizable, but snake

²⁵ However, the ability to self-germinate is a mixed concept for Spenser, both positive and negative. For example, the ability to self-inseminate is celebrated at Venus's temple in Book IV, Canto x.

²⁶ For more on monstrous motherhood, see Marie-Hélène Huet's *Monstrous Imagination* (1993), Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's edited collection *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (1996), Susan C. Staub's *Nature's Cruel Stepdames* (2005), Marilyn Francus's *Monstrous Motherhood: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Ideology of Domesticity* (2012), and Jane Sharp's *The Midwives Book* (1671).

enough from the waist down to threaten to annihilate the human self. She is a distinct something which, in her horror, insists on the material reality of her existence and gives both Redcrosse and reader pause. She represents Kristeva's insistence that "if I acknowledge it, [it] annihilates me" (2), for her very physicality threatens to annihilate the human sense of self and to erode the hierarchical distinctions between human and animal. She forces the human subject to recognize their continuity with the non-human. It is the fear of acknowledging this abject existence that causes Redcrosse to strike the first blow, for Errorr seeks to retreat from his presence when he first enters her cave: "She lookt about, and seeing one in mayle / Armed to point, sought backe to turne againe" (I.i.16). Redcrosse needs, in other words, to annihilate Errorr to defer acknowledgement of her, which if allowed to continue unchecked would lead to his own annihilation.²⁷ Further, her continuity is represented when Redcrosse brings a little light with him into Errorr's cave and "Into [Errorr's] mouth [her offspring] crept, and suddain all were gone" (I.i.15). The gross physicality and abjection of Errorr is illustrative of her continuity, or of the human unraveling in the figure of a snake-woman whose porous body is never closed; it is additionally present in the threat to masculinity that arises in her very existence as autonomously and overly-fecund mother. The manner in which her offspring move freely in and out of the porous openings of Errorr's body is one of the most disquieting in her description, for it renders her body fully open, unclosed to the exterior world around it, easily taking in and expelling in a continuous exchange which threatens the bound unity of selfhood. It is this collage of factors—Errorr as test and serpent, as monstrous mother, as abject, and as a being of continuity—that comes to bear on the subsequent battle between the snake woman and Redcrosse, and that

²⁷ Notably, the need to annihilate can also be read as a form of acknowledgement.

determines her standing as a threat to Christian male selfhood by making it continuous with the ecological world.

In fact, the battle between Redcrosse and Error presents readers with an image of masculine authority and control that threatens to be destroyed by continuity. In response to Redcrosse's initial assault, Error maneuvers "her huge traine" to "All suddenly about his body wound, / That hand or foot to stirr he stroue in vaine: / God helpe the man so wrapped in *Errours* endless traine" (I.i.18). In the larger Christian allegory of *The Faerie Queene*, the depiction of Redcrosse trapped in Error's "endless train" of coils gestures toward the soul's own inability to avoid error and thus its continual temptation to sin. Here, the bodily feminine—the abject, in the words of Kristeva—battles the core sense of self that is at the heart of Christian masculinity. As Error's tail constricts around his body, Redcrosse threatens to be swallowed whole by the feminine form, or to be ingested back into the mother womb, into and out of which her grotesque offspring freely travel. He is threatened, in other words, with a dissolution of the masculine self in the face of overpowering feminine and abject continuity.

Such dissolution of the Christian, masculine subject is rendered in terms that seem determined to ground both Redcrosse and readers in the physical detritus of the larger world. Or, said differently, Error's reactions insist upon human continuity with an ecological world of sin through excrement. In fact, when Redcrosse attempts to choke Error,

Therewith she spewd out of her filthie maw
A floud of poyson horrible and blacke,
Full of great lumps of flesh and gobbets raw,
Which stunck so vildly, that it forst him slacke,
His grasping hold, and from her turne him backe:

Her vomit full of books and papers was,
With loathly frogs and toades, which eyes did lacke,
And creeping sought way in the weedy gras:
Her filthie parbreake all the place defiled has. (I.i.20)

Errour's vomit is an excremental expulsion, that which should be inside digesting spewed back into the outside world via the orifice through which it first entered her body. Vomit is always grotesque, but the snake-woman's is especially noxious; this single stanza says it is "A floud of poison horrible and blacke," it "stunk...vildly," and the world "filthie" is used twice to describe Errour's "maw" and her "parbreake." The dangerously miasmatic scents of her vomit insist on Redcrosse's embeddedness in the world as these scents enter his own body and elicit a visceral reaction. Indeed, the allusion to smell in this stanza insists that Redcrosse has already ingested Errour's excrement, the gross scent of her effluvia entering his body through his nasal orifices. Yet what is most disturbing is contained within the vomit: "loathly frogs and toades, which eyes did lacke." As David Lee Miller indicates, for Errour, "the act of vomiting [is]...a peculiarly unsavory image of generation" (247). As "birthed" beings, as vomited beings, and as spontaneously generated beings, the eyeless "frogs and toades" of Errour are a threat to Redcrosse's sense of fully contained, masculine, Christian self. They are the multitudinous, material, and excremental; they are a form of excrement that threatens to invade Redcrosse's body as he smells their stink, their gross materiality entering one of his porous orifices. This threat of smell is what "so sore annoyed...the knight," and causes him to be "choked with deadly stinke" until his manly "forces faile" so that he "can no lenger fight" (I.i.22). Errour, abject feminine excremental creature, has produced such grossly physical expulsions that Christian manhood threatens to be defeated and tainted by the excremental feminine and ecological

through toads, frogs, and snakes. When Errour's multitudinous offspring join the fight as well, Redcrosse's Christian masculinity seems poised to be swallowed whole, or dissolved, in this noxious excremental deluge.

Redcrosse thus experiences the kind of masculine anxiety both Breitenberg and Shepard describe because he is threatened with a loss of self-control and by a hierarchical rearranging in which the excremental feminine triumphs over a knightly patriarchal order. To shore up the bounded unity of his Christian male selfhood, he must turn to violence: "Halfe furious vnto his foe he came, / Resolud in minde all suddenly to win/ ...And stroke at her with more then manly force." It is this "manly force" that is key, for it is the only way to defeat this stinking, abject feminine being, and indeed, "from her body full of filthie sin / He raft her hatefull heade" (I.i.24). Masculinity—and specifically a masculinity shaped by Christianity, for "more then manly force" suggests that the "more" is an homage to God's force—is what is needed to triumph over Errour, to prove Redcrosse's worth and allow him to exit the vaginal, hellish cave in which she dwells. Thus Redcrosse's identity reflects forward in time to signify his future as St. George, a patron saint of England in what is a patriarchal, hierarchical, and Christian nation; this is evidenced when he later defeats the dragon that has besieged Una's kingdom. Indeed, this fight with the dragon acts as a corrective to Redcrosse's abysmal battle with Errour, bookending Book I with excremental snakes.

However, Redcrosse does not escape unscathed from his encounter with Errour, for this first test demonstrates the fragility of his Christianity and manhood when both he and the text are left covered in inescapable excrement, warning readers of human continuity with the more-than-human material world. When Errour's brood are unable to re-entered her riven head, they instead

flocked up all about her bleeding wound,

And suched vp their dying mothers blood...
Hauing all satisfide their bloody thirst,
Their bellies swolne he saw with fulnesse burst,
And bowels gushing forth... (I.i.25-26)

Redcrosse may have defeated Errour, but her offspring engorge themselves on her blood until they “with fulnesse burst” so that their “bowels gush[] forth.” In other words, the excremental children of the feminine abject feed upon the expelled blood of their mother until their excrementality is so compounded that we are left only with their “bowels gushing forth.” But Redcrosse only partially defeats Errour, for the explosion of “bowels” hints that cave, Redcrosse, and text are flecked with the detritus of this explosion and that they become incorporated into his allegorical knightly attire. Or, per Pollock, Redcrosse’s defeat of Errour is “inconclusive” (275). Redcrosse has won the battle but not the war; he stumbles from Errour’s cave effluvia-covered and stinking to return to Una. He will soon be confronted, in the figure of Duessa, with yet another image of dangerous feminine excrementality and continuity.

While Errour is forthright in the danger of her excremental femininity and continuity, Duessa more carefully crafts a disguise to entrap the knights of Faerie, those who represent the Christian male self. Duessa is shrewd; in her Fidessa disguise as “A goodly Lady clad in scarlet red,” she turns away in feigned fear after Redcrosse has killed Sansfoy, then presents him with a tearful story of her kidnap (I.ii.13, 21-22). Redcrosse, still flecked with the traces of Errour and her offspring, makes an error in believing anything the lady tells him. He falls right into Duessa’s trap, enchanted with her story, her physicality, her ostentatious dress, and how she is “Melting in tears” (I.ii.22). In other words, Redcrosse is immediately smitten with that which he only semi-successfully battled in Errour’s cave: the material and the excremental. Duessa as Fidessa signals

her materiality in her rich adornment, flirtations with Sansfoy, and lies to Redcrosse, and hints toward even more female excremental expulsions in the carefully crafted tears dropping from her eyes.

Indeed, Redcrosse is incredibly blinded to the true nature of Duessa; this can likely be attributed to his inability to fully defeat Errour, which leaves him continuous with both error and excrement. To the wayward knight of Christ, Duessa looks good on the outside, so this must reflect her inner qualities as well. The hinting and allegorizing at Duessa's true nature—that she is a witch who stands in for both Mary Queen of Scots²⁸ and the Whore of Babylon from the Book of Revelations—is so heavy handed in Book I that Spenser casts Redcrosse as the most blinded and ignorant of knights for nine cantos out of twelve. As a reader, it is difficult not to bemusedly chuckle at his stupidity, for Duessa seems anything but savvy in her disguises. Yet there may also be another layer of meaning here: that Christian masculinity is incredibly fragile, easily shattered and deceived, and therefore that one must be ever vigilant to avoid the entrapments and allure of feminine excrementality.²⁹

Duessa and Redcrosse's relationship reaches its peak—as does the erosion of Redcrosse's Christian male selfhood and his resulting alignment with sin through continuity—when the

²⁸ Scholars have long noted that Duessa is reminiscent of Mary Queen of Scots, a contender for the throne of England. In portraying Mary as Duessa, Spenser was offering a rather forthright critique of Mary's political exploits. This commentary may not have bothered Elizabeth, but it did ruffle James VI, son of Mary, current king of Scotland and, upon the death of Elizabeth I, king of England too. See Susan Carter's essay "Duessa, Spenser's Loathly Lady," Richard A. McCabe's article "The Masks of Duessa: Spenser, Mary Queen of Scots, and James VI," and Andrew Hadfield's book *Shakespeare, Spenser, and the Matter of Britain* for more on this topic.

²⁹ This idea is in direct contrast to Campana's argument concerning the necessity of openness and vulnerability in *The Faerie Queene* to the project of masculinity. Openness and vulnerability places knights like Redcrosse in danger, even as they are necessary to moving the plot forward. Thus, while Campana's ideas may be useful plot devices, Spenser as teacher instead uses such concepts to warn his reader against being too open and vulnerable. Vigilance, instead, is needed; for instance, consider again Guyon's infamous destruction of the Bower of Bliss in Book II.

knight is “Disarmed of all yron-coted Plate” (I.vii.2) when Duessa later finds him lounging beside a fountain. The lack of armor, which shined a bit of light into the cave of Errour, and of the shield, which bears “a bloodie Crosse... / The dear remembrance of his dying Lord” (I.i.2), signal that Redcrosse’s masculinity and religion are currently set aside. Lying upon the ground at Duessa’s feet, he is open and vulnerable, and has drunk from a fountain that, when ingested, makes the drinker “faint and feeble grow” (I.vii.5). The poem makes it clear that Redcrosse has become emasculated as a result:

Eftsoones his manly forces gan to fayle,
His chaunged powers at first them selues not felt,
Till crudled cold his corage gan assayle,
And chearefull blood in fayntnes chill did melt,
Which like a feuer fit through all his body swelt. (I.vii.6)

Redcrosse has turned liquid and cold, the typical humoral state for women in a Galenic medical paradigm. Without the heat, vigor, and accoutrements of his Christian masculinity, he is more open to excremental continuity—and thus sin—than ever.

Scholars debate about what occurs next, in stanza 7: does Redcrosse just flirt with Duessa, or is the moment more dangerous for Redcrosse—does he sexually engage with the witch in her beautifully disguised form?³⁰ We only have three lines to parse for evidence of what

³⁰ In “A Galenic Reading of the Redcrosse Knight’s ‘Goodly Court’ of Fidessa / Duessa,” James W. Broaddus argues that because Redcross is described as “crudled cold,” his semen lacks virility, and thus that Redcrosse would be unable to get it up to do the deed with Duessa. Nonetheless, Broaddus concludes that simple “goodly court” with Duessa—whether this involved actual sex or not—could “pose a danger to [Redcrosse’s] health,” for “According to early modern medical theory, the transmission of syphilis or gonorrhea...did not require the physical contact involved in sexual intercourse;” it could be caused simply by the stinkiness of her nether parts, later staged quite explicitly for characters and readers alike (194-198).

occurs between Duessa and an unarmed Redcrosse, who together lay prone upon the grass before the burbling fountain. Despite his cold, weary, and emasculated state, “Yet goodly court [Redcrosse] made still to his Dame, / Poured out in loosenesse on the grassy grownd, / Both careless of his health, and of his fame” (I.vii.7). It is the type of “goodly court” that is in question here, especially when Redcrosse is “Poured out in looseness.” Duessa, a creature Hell—she is a witch and, as Canto v demonstrates, easily traverses to and from the realm of damnation—seems to lead a loose and emasculated Redcrosse into the hellish caverns of her own vagina in their mutual “goodly court.” This would mean that what is “Poured out in looseness on the grassy grownd” is Redcrosse’s seed, his own evacuated, and excremental, bodily matter. I read this moment as one of Redcrosse sexually coupling with Duessa, for in engaging sexually with her Redcrosse himself is fully stripped of his Christian masculinity and made into a material, expulsive creature of the world. The excrement that is the female body causes the male body to expel and descend into—or become continuous with—excrement itself. What Error threatened elusively is more explicitly staged at this moment as Redcrosse’s body sexually meets Duessa’s and mingles in continuity through an exchange of sexual fluids.

This sexual coupling is further underscored by the appearance of a giant named Orgoglio, who, in his subsequent fight with Redcrosse, showcases the knight’s new inability to fend off the wasteful material muck of a sinful world. “The greatest Earth [Orgoglio’s] vncouth mother was,” impregnated by Aeolus’s winds until she “Brought forth this monstrous masse of earthly slyme, / Puft vp with emptie wynd, and fild with sinfull cryme” (I.vii.9). Redcrosse is left scrambling at the appearance of Orgoglio, unable to properly attire himself with armor, sword, and shield before the giant attacks with “a snaggy Oke³¹, which he had torne / Out of his mothers bowelles”

³¹ Oaks were traditionally associated with sturdiness and masculinity.

(I.vii.10). The excremental splatters in myriad forms across the pages that contain the opening stanzas of Canto vii: Duessa as Fidessa is excrement covered in fake gold, Redcrosse becomes an excremental body when he limply spills his seed upon the ground, and Orgoglio allegorizes earthly material itself, for he is a “monstrous masse of earthly slyme” who swings a weapon ripped from “his mothers bowelles.” Christian masculinity—particularly when that masculinity is already disarmed—cannot stand in the face of such overwhelming odds, and so Redcrosse slips and falls, doomed to the dark and dank of Orgoglio’s dungeon.³² Meanwhile, the giant makes Duessa his mistress and sets her upon a three-head snake in celebration of her alignment with excrement and spontaneously generated critters.³³ It is no wonder, then, that it is Spenser’s paragon of Christian malehood, Prince Arthur, who must come rescue Redcrosse once he is made continuous with sinful, feminized, and earthly excrement.

After the defeat of Orgoglio, Duessa is fully exposed as a creature of excremental continuity in a manner that erodes all boundaries and hierarchies that are, per above, so key to male selfhood in the early modern period. Una declares the false Duessa must be “spoile[d]...of her scarlet robe” (I.viii.45), and underneath is a truly horrifying sight:

Her crafty head was altogether bald,
And as in hate of honorable eld,

³² As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen’s work in *Of Giants* indicates, Spenser’s use of a giant here is particularly fitting. In medieval texts, giants represented the demarcations of the body, staged “the performance of masculinity,” and yet are also excessive beings in ways which mark giants as feminine (xii). Or, as Cohen goes on to say, “if the giant is sometimes made to represent the masculine body’s lost prehistory, that is precisely because he figures the dangerous instability of its present integrity. The giant reveals the limits of selfhood,” a kind of abject other at once familiar and unfamiliar (xv).

³³ This creature is a “Snake” who “vnderneath his filthy feet did tread, / The sacred thinges... / Upon this dreadfull Beast with seuenfold head / [Orgoglio] sett the false *Duessa*, for more aw and dread” (I.vii.17-18).

Was ouergrowne with scurfe and filthy scald;
Her teeth out of her rotten gummes were feld,
And her sowre breath abhominably smeld;
Her dried dugs, lyke bladders lacking wind,
Hong downe, and filthy matter from them weld;
Her wrizled skin as rough, as maple rind,
So scabby was, that would haue loathd all womankind.

Her neather parts, the shame of all her kind,
My chaster Muse for shame doth blush to write;
But at her rompe she growing had behind
A foxes taile, with dong all fowly dight;
And eke her feet most monstrous were in sight;
For one of them was like an Eagles claw,
With griping talaunts armd to greedy fight,
The other like a beares vneuen paw:
More vgly shape yet neuer liuing creature saw. (I.viii.47-48)³⁴

Like Errorr, Duessa is woman *and*—in this case, woman *and* fox, *and* eagle, *and* bear. She erases boundaries and makes what is old and decaying—signified through her scabby head, rotten teeth, and hanging breasts—appear young, supple, and enticing. Additionally, the excremental—originally hinted at by Duessa’s glistening tears—is here thrown in all its smelly,

³⁴ This “blazon of disgust” is, in the words of Miller, one of “Western literature’s grimmest mornings-after” (25, 85).

visual, and textual reality into the faces of those assembled. The “scurfe and filthy scald” represents flaking, decayed skin and hair grown by—and thus expelled by—the body, while the “filthy matter” that leaks from her breasts signals potential flowing pus or curdled breast milk. Spenser is even straightforward about Duessa’s dung encrusted form when he writes that her fox’s tail “with dong [is] all fowly dight.” There’s no need for barely contained allegorical subterfuge here; readers are meant to know that Duessa is a leaking, decaying, excrement-stained and expelling hag. She is excrement embodied, while Errorr was excrement compounded. In her undressing, Redcrosse gets a good look at how deep into the muck he has truly waded with these excremental hybrid lizard-women—and the dangerous, sinful continuity with which he is now endowed.³⁵

³⁵ As noted above—and explored in more detail below—Redcrosse’s fight with the dragon besieging Una’s kingdom at the end of Book I acts as a corrective to his disastrous encounter with Errorr, a potential triumph over an excremental, and feminized, snake. Such triumph is made possible only after Redcrosse has reached his lowest, and most sinful and continuous, point in Orgoglio’s dungeons and is brought by Una to the House of Holiness, where he undergoes penance and a masculine Christian education. However, the release of Duessa after her undressing in Canto viii is more complex, for it allows her to later return to pester Redcrosse and (falsely?) insist he is betrothed to her, and therefore cannot marry Una. Her release also allows her to wreck later havoc throughout *The Faerie Queene* until she is finally beheaded, like Mary Queen of Scots, by yet another representation of Queen Elizabeth in Book V. Even then, the danger Duessa represents—continuity, femininity, materiality, excrementality—is never fully eliminated from the text, just as these dangers are not erased when Redcrosse defeats Errorr and the dragon. The excremental feminine that threatens continuity is continuously respawned, albeit in new and surprising forms. Indeed, without these abject entities, the lessons Spenser wishes to impart to his reader would lack true force; they are integral to the story as it is told. And, as Plumwood notes in her discussions of continuity, dualisms—oppositions—cannot be defined in isolation; dualisms—good / evil, male / female, human / non-human—require their counterpart to define their existence. In other words, to write an allegorical epic praising knightly chivalry and the goodness of various stand-in Queen Elizabeths, their “opposites” must be included. This too may be why, when Redcrosse finally kills Errorr, the excremental critters of her vomit manage to slither away, escaping to function as reminders of continuity elsewhere in the text.

Milton's Shitty Sin

As noted in the introduction of this chapter, I read Milton and Spenser together because Milton was a student of the earlier poet, and a paired reading of these two poets is a useful method to explore the ways in which the excremental feminine functions as an agent of continuity in early modern English texts. Spenser's influence can be felt throughout *Paradise Lost*, particularly in the creation of Milton's foremost villainess, Sin. Maureen Quilligan notes that Milton's Sin is "model[ed]" after Error, and is "the most self-consciously Spenserian of Milton's characters" (80, 95). Both serpent-like women are used by Spenser and Milton to frame their allegories; they become the methods whereby each poet teaches his readers how to read his epic (84-85).³⁶ Additionally, John M. Steadman traces the identification of Sin's lineage from Error to Merrit Y. Hughes' 1935 edition of *Paradise Lost*, which contained footnotes linking the two serpent-women ("Tradition and Innovation" 94).

Error and Sin—and, I would add, Duessa³⁷—are also connected in their creators' reliance upon Greek and Roman myth. For instance, Judith E. Browning indicates that Ovid's Scylla is a source from "which Spenser's Error and Milton's Sin are late adaptations." Early modern depictions figured Scylla as half-woman, half-monster, all pollution, which "represents the archetypal conflict between reason and appetite" and "between virtue and sensuality" (137-139). As John M. Patrick notes, Scylla is also a template for Sin both in her appearance and allegorical meaning in the poem, for both feminine figures are "delightful to the senses and

³⁶ Quilligan's interpretation is rooted in the work of scholars such as John M. Steadman, Ann Gossman, and John M. Patrick, all of whom in the late 50s and early 60s published articles which gave credit to Spenser for Milton's Sin (Steadman "Tradition and Innovation" 93-94, Gossman 440, Patrick 385).

³⁷ Scholars also identify Spenser's Duessa as an influence on Milton, especially in her "fulsome sexuality" (King 151), and as a template for Eve's sexuality (Bond 19-20).

spur[] weak man to the act [of sin...they are] utterly revolting” (384-385). Patrick’s last point could apply to Spenser’s decaying witch as well when Una undresses Duessa after Redcrosse’s release from Orgoglio’s dungeon. Steadman, meanwhile, traces multiple precedents for Milton’s Sin throughout his footnotes in his article “Tradition and Innovation in Milton’s ‘Sin’: The Problem of Literary Indebtedness,” including Dio Crystostom’s Libyan tale in “The Fifth Discourse” (note 5, p. 94), Nonnos’ Campe from *Dionysiaca* (note 6, pp. 94-95), Apollodorus’ Delphyne from *The Library* (note 7, p. 95), and a snake-woman who demands Hercules sleep with her in Herodotus’ writings (note 9, p. 95). He also, of course, links Sin and Scylla (97). As these scholars make clear, Sin springs from a long line of sensually sinful woman and snake / lizard hybrids.³⁸ They are, like Error and Duessa, the fetid compost heap from which Milton’s Sin springs, ready to be the ultimate undoing of Christian masculinity.³⁹

Milton’s Sin is a fascinating character, at once dangerous and disgusting, terrifying and pitiful—and always, in ways reminiscent of Error and Duessa, excremental. Sin is first introduced in Milton’s epic when Satan, winding his way through the cavernous bowels of Hell, discovers her sitting at one side of the Gates of Hell. She appears “woman to the waist and fair / But ended foul in many a scaly fold / Voluminous and vast, a serpent armed / With mortal sting” (II.650-653). It is no wonder that scholars have long noted her similarities to Error, for like Spenser’s own lizard-woman, Sin is woman and serpent, human from the waist up and snake from the waist down, her sinuous tail ending in the same “mortal sting.” And, like Error, she is an overly fecund mother. As Sin explains to Satan, after she was “Out of thy head...sprung”

³⁸ Melusine is another figure from medieval continental Europe who fits these descriptions too, for she is cursed by her mother to transform into a hybrid serpent-women every Saturday. This curse has the added bonus of causing Melusine to birth monstrously deformed offspring.

³⁹ *The Faerie Queene* itself can be interpreted as a textual lizard or serpent, sliding between forms and spawning, in excremental manners, Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

(II.758) as Athena from the skull of Zeus, her own father was narcissistically enticed by “Thyself in me thy perfect image viewing.” Satan then “Becam’st enamoured,” and “such joy thou took’st / With me in secret that my womb conceived / A growing burden” (II.764-767). When she is placed at the Gates of Hell after Satan’s failed Heavenly war, this “growing burden”—or her fellow gate guardian, Death—is brutally birthed, for he “breaking violent way / Tore through my entrails, that with fear and pain / Distorted all my nether shape thus grew / Transformed” (II.782-785). It is the expulsive force of Death’s birthing—his savage clawing through his mother’s entrails and lower half to escape into the caverns of Hell⁴⁰—that leaves Sin deformed, her womb permanently permeable, her lower half that of the slithering serpent. Death—a reminder for readers of the corpse, which as Susan Zimmerman tells us, elicits responses similar to “the body’s by-products...excrement, menstrual blood” (4)—is expelled from Sin’s body and leaves her excremental, her body even more clearly permeable and therefore seeping, her lower half snake-like and thus excrement-like. Sin is then both excremental and excrement-producing in a series of expulsive images that leaves her as fetid, rotting, smelly, and yet as fertile as pools of spontaneously generating and earthly muck.⁴¹

Death only makes his mother more fecund, for immediately after his birth, she “fled, but he pursued” and

Me overtook, his mother, all dismay’d,
 And in embraces forcible and foul
 Engend’ring with me of that rape begot

⁴⁰ Death exits his mother’s body only to enter into Hell, escaping from the miniature, microcosmic hell of the feminine body (particularly the vagina and “entrails”) into the macrocosmic Hell writ large.

⁴¹ I engage in a more thorough examination of this idea in Chapter 4 with Shakespeare’s Cleopatra.

These yelling monsters that with ceaseless cry
Surround me as thou saw'st, hourly conceived
And hourly born, with sorrow infinite
To me. For when they list, into the womb
That bred them they return and howl and gnaw
My bowels... (II.790, 792-800).

Satan's family reunion is a gross and messy affair. It is a reunion predicated upon ongoing violence against Sin: first incest, then rape, and then unending, painful birthing. Sin has been treated like refuse, a thing to be used and then discarded; this is certainly true of Satan in his sexual treatment of his daughter—and the fact that he seems to have forgotten her entirely—but is also true of God, who ejected her from Heaven too. As a result of the violent actions Sin has experienced, her waist has transformed into the kind of “waste” Shakespeare fixates upon in Sonnet 129. As Sin's waist transforms into a waste, she becomes one of the snakes spontaneously generated by the Nile's flooding. But she is also like the banks of the Nile itself which, flooded and then inseminated with the nutrients of silt and water, spontaneously generates; after all, her many “yelling monsters” are “hourly born, with sorrow infinite,” a kind of echo of the “Ten thousand kindes of creatures” (I.i.21) which Spenser uses to describe both the Nile's banks and Error's own offspring. She is both product and mud, snake and woman, mother and daughter, embodiment of evil and victim. Sin is viscerally material and the multiple, as myriad as the many ways in which one can sin. As such, Sin is another being of continuity, her very self wrapped up with flora, fauna, and the excremental.

But to argue so, particularly from an ecofeminist perspective focused on material and feminized excrement, is to run counter to the work of Stephen M. Fallon in *Milton Among the*

Philosophers. Fallon argues that Milton's animist materialism—in which “All that exists, from angels to earth, is composed of one living, corporeal substance” (1)—must be understood in relation to ongoing seventeenth-century debates on metaphysics, particularly concerning materialism, God, and the connections between the mind and body (5-6, 16).⁴² In laying out this argument, Fallon turns his attention to Sin and Death, finding them to be mere allegorical manifestations of “insubstantial” (188) concepts, or “not additional beings in a monist universe, but the privation of being itself...[they are] nonbeings” (183). Fallon then goes on to depict Sin and Death as “metaphysical evil” that “unfold within Satan and other fallen creatures,” as “negative numbers in a universe created with positives only,” as “an aspect of Satanic psychology,” and as “palpably illusory” (185, 187). Thus, for Fallon, Sin and Death are immaterial, present only psychologically; they are a kind of allegory for an infection of the inner self that causes one to move further from God in a kind of cosmic subtraction. Or, in Fallon's own words, “As nonentities, Sin and Death cannot create or move anything; at most they measure the degrees from which free creatures undo created perfection” (190). Sin and Death are mere shades for Fallon; they are real, but not corporeal, for they do not come from God but are generated by Satan (188) and then become a kind of psychological plague that infects God's creation. We might then imagine Satan's discussion with Sin before the Gates of Hell as nothing more than an extremely intense delusion.

I would contend, however, that Fallon's argument is not based in a closely attuned analysis of the text of *Paradise Lost* itself, but is an unsuccessful attempt to fit Milton's vision of

⁴² Fallon also contends that for Milton body and soul are essentially one manifestation, so intricately tied as to be completely dependent upon one another: “The soul for Milton is a substantial, corporeal entity...While it is separable [from the body] after death, it separates only to dissolve, like the relatively more corporeal body, into its constituent elements” (100).

the Fall into a single, identifiable schema. If all is indeed “one living, corporeal substance” in *Paradise Lost*—a point on which I do agree with Fallon—then nothing that is created can exist outside of this “substance,” which is, again, “corporeal,” and thus *cannot* be composed of nonentities. If Sin and Death are manifested or created by Satan, then they are a growth generated by one part of the “corporeal substance,” which means they, like a tumor, are also a part of materiality. This fact holds true even if we argue that for Milton, God is all that is good, and nothing exists outside of God, because Sin and Death are *necessary* to God’s vision for the universe and the ultimate triumph of good through Christ. Milton himself is forthright about this fact when, in a discussion between God and the Son in Book X, God states, “I called and drew [Sin and Death] thither, / My Hell-hounds, to lick up the draff and filth / Which man’s polluting sin with taint hath shed / On what was pure” (629-632). The current reign of Sin and Death, he informs the Son, will only make the Son’s triumph over them later all the greater (633-639). Additionally, to debase Sin and Death for their allegorical resonances is meaningless if we understand Sin as the product of Spenser’s *Errour*. *Errour* is of course allegorical, but this does not make her any less material; indeed, the allegory of *The Faerie Queene* barely seems able to contain her excess. The same is true of Milton’s Sin and Death: they are of course allegorical, but they are also intensely real, material aspects of creation with which all creatures must deal after the Fall. Allegory does not preclude materiality or corporeality, and vice-versa. Indeed, the intent of allegory, we could argue, is to make the intangible tangible, the “insubstantial” substantial.⁴³ A close reading of Sin herself underscores this notion.⁴⁴

⁴³ See also Gordon Teskey’s discussion of materiality and allegory in *Allegory and Violence*, Cornell UP, 1996, particularly pp. 14-21.

⁴⁴ Fallon also states that “Sin and Death are ‘in body’ because they become accidents *in* man’s substance after they fall; they have no existence outside the fallen creature” (189). I agree with this idea—but only in that Sin and Death become a part of “man’s substance” through *continuity*,

Sin locates readers squarely in the material by relating the sexually traumatic experiences of a substantial being with a corporeal—and more specifically, continuous—form. Indeed, what I find to be one of Sin’s most compelling qualities is how Milton provides ample room throughout Satan’s sojourn at the Gates of Hell for her to narrate her own experiences. Unlike Error, who only the poet can describe, or Duessa, who has both poet and other characters map the contours of her being, Sin speaks for herself. And, not only does she speak for herself, but in addressing herself to Satan—and likely in Death overhearing her words—she also speaks back to her attacker(s). Death seems unaffected by any of her tales, but Satan, and by extension the reader with whom he is aligned during Sin’s self-narration, are taken aback by the visceral, grisly details of her experiences. To allow Sin to speak is to allow waste in its many myriad forms to speak; it is to grant compositional agency to the feminized excremental through narration. Excrement is not silent; Sin adds important details to our understanding of Satan, the Heavenly War, and her own existence.⁴⁵ She moves the plot forward, just as Error and Duessa do. The story may not be about these smelly and excremental lizard-like women, but the story also cannot be told without them. Yet significantly, Sin’s long soliloquys underscore her status as waste, for as her womb leaks, so too does the orifice which is her mouth; she is cast, like women generally throughout the early modern period, as expelling simultaneously at multiple orifices. Nonetheless, as feminine waste speaks back to her denigrators and oppressors, the reader may experience some sympathy with her conditions.

for they do indeed have “existence outside the fallen creature” that makes such continuity possible and even necessary. In fact, Sin is perhaps the ultimate abject figure, that which we may try vehemently to deny, but which nevertheless exists and thus threatens the selves of *all* beings in Milton’s depiction of God’s creation.

⁴⁵ Sin’s account does, however, clash with the angel Raphael’s narration of the War and Fall.

Such conditions, as stated previously, also include her placement at the anal Gates of Hell after Satan's defeat in the Heavenly War. As noted briefly in my analysis of *The Faerie Queene*, medieval and early modern thought both associated Hell with the anal and the excremental. In *Sin and Filth in Medieval Culture: The Devil in the Latrine*, which examines various ideas of excrement from the fifth century to first half of the early modern period, Martha Bayless gives waste its due weight, finding that it is more than just comedic, "For [in] the medieval world, excrement and dung were powerful moral and theological material" (xvii). The theological implications of excrement rested upon the image of the latrine; or, as Bayless indicates, "The latrine is the realm of filth and danger both material and spiritual. When the man purifies himself...the devil is cast out of [or into?] the privy. Both latrine and the man undergo purification: it is as if the man himself is a latrine, full of corruption and vulnerable to the devil." Such depictions even stretched into the early modern period (3). As Bayless's work suggests, this gross, impure human body—which must visit the latrine, and thus was anally associated with the devil—kept the immortal and immaterial soul from achieving union with the divine. The anus thus becomes, like the Gates of Hell, an entrance at which Sin awaits either to exit or enter in ways reminiscent of Error's permeable womb.

It is the threat of Satan's exit, and Sin and Death following in his wake, that offers the kind of threat to Christian masculinity in the text which I also identified Error and Duessa as presenting in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. Essentially, this triad of evil will threaten both the ability for mankind to obstinately avoid temptation and stick to God's path, *and* challenge the sanctity of marriage; they elicit, respectively, the loss of control so key to Greenblatt's self-fashioning and the anxiety of which Breitenberg warns. This threat is literalized, of course, in the downfall of Adam and Eve in the garden. It is no coincidence that Satan, sucked back from Hell itself—

which is the latrine—and up into the anus that is the Gate of Hell, comes in the form of excremental critters to Eve: first as a toad whispering in her ear as she sleeps (IV.799-809) and later, and most potently, as the speaking serpent. He is, like Duessa disguised as Fidessa, gold-covered dung, outwardly pleasing but inwardly rotting:

...carbuncle his eyes
With burnished neck of verdant gold erect
Amidst his circling spires that on the grass
Floated redundant. Pleasing was his shape
And lovely, never since of serpent kind
Lovelier (IX.500-505).

Milton makes it clear that Satan as a serpent is beautiful to behold, pleasing to the reader's gaze and to Eve's as well. His beauty, combined with his feigned "admiring" of her, "lick[ing] the ground whereon she trod," and "His gentle dumb expression" (IX.524, 526, 527) are coyly crafted, like Duessa's false story to Redcrosse after the Christian knight's defeat of Sansfoy, to excite, entice, and placate Eve. Some of the interest Eve then expresses in the serpent may even be sexual; scholars have noted, for instance, that Satan's penetration of Paradise and his disguise as a snake who sits "erect" and has "Eve seduced" (X.332) endows his temptations and flatteries with phallic qualities. For example, Jeffrey S. Theis finds that the "hairy sides" (IV.135) of the woods which surround Eden⁴⁶ "anthropomorphize this region and bring to mind the Spenserian and Shakespearean gardens of Venus and Adonis, where the mound of Venus and the garden figure for the sexualized female body." Consequently, Milton's "allusion" to the vagina-like

⁴⁶ The passage in its entirety describes Eden as surrounded "with a rural mound the champaign head / Of a steep wilderness, whose hairy sides / With thicket overgrown, grotesque and wild, / Access deni'd" (IV.134-137).

mounds and gardens of these earlier texts “heighten[s] the stakes of Satan’s invasion [of Paradise] by likening his seduction of Eve to physical rape” (265-266). If this is so, then Satan’s temptation of Eve is a transgression of her marriage with Adam, and therefore her willingness—or in Theis’s reading, lack thereof—to give in to the serpent’s words akin to an adulterous act.⁴⁷ Adam’s anxiety at Eve’s departure from his side earlier in the text is legitimized,⁴⁸ and he loses control over Eve’s sexuality, casting her as one of those women who, after experiencing sex, becomes voracious, hungry for more even beyond the marriage bed (Fraser 4). These factors would leave Adam cuckolded, wearing horns; it would undermine the Christian sanctity of the first parents’ union and call into question Adam’s very manhood through his inability to control his wife. This covert metaphor is made most manifest in Eve’s guzzling of the fruit, which once tasted, “Greedily she engorged without restraint” (IX.791), the orifice which is her mouth standing in for the vaginal opening.

However, it is not just Satan who slithers inside Eve and simultaneously the god-made world when Eve takes that first bite of the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, but Sin and Death as well.⁴⁹ Sin, who “feel[s] new strength within me rise, / Wings growing and dominion giv’n me

⁴⁷ Although Theis characterizes Eve’s potentially sexual interactions with Satan as a rape, Milton’s text points more toward adultery, highlighting Eve’s *choice* to sin. In a Christian framework, she is the first woman demonized for her sexual desires and choices; we’re all just following in her wake.

⁴⁸ When Eve wishes to go off on her own to care for the garden, Adam insists he attempts to “dissuade” Eve from leaving his side “to avoid / Th’ attempt [at transgression], intended by our Foe,” of which the angels have warned them. He further insists, “The enemy, though bold, will hardly dare” to tempt either of them when they are together, “Or, daring, first on me th’ assault shall light” (IV.293-295, 304-305).

⁴⁹ This portion of the argument begs the question of whether Sin’s exit from Hell and entrance to Paradise is the first instance of specifically feminized excrement appearing in the world. However, I would contend that the feminized excremental first appears in Paradise alongside Satan, who is coded both masculine and feminine—feminine particularly in his alignment with excrement and the danger he represents to Christian masculinity—throughout the text. Credit for

large / Beyond this deep” (X.243-245) rouses her son Death, emboldened and empowered by how Satan has broached the orifices of Paradise and Eve, and through them Adam, to introduce the first traces of the excremental into the god-created world. Indeed, the anus that is the Gate of Hell “Stood open wide, belching outrageous flame” (X.232). This gaseous expulsion soon pushes the excremental particles that are Sin and Death out too—back into the “body” from which they were expelled by God—and they pass “from out Hell gates into the waste / Wide Anarchy of chaos damp and dark” (X.282-283), and from there “right down to Paradise descend” (X.398). Through Hell’s anus, through Paradise, through Eve and then through Adam when he too eats the fruit, Sin and Death seep out into the world, ready to infect it with their deadly excrementality. Now that the Gate of Hell stands “Wide open and unguarded” (X.419), Sin and Death may “dwell and Reign in bliss” in the material world that God created and humans inhabit. They will, as their forebear Satan commands, “Dominion exercise... / Chiefly on Man, sole Lord of all declared: / Him first make sure your thrall and lastly kill” (X.400-402). The perfect bliss and obedience to the God of Paradise is over; now, “Man, sole Lord of all” will constantly be threatened with the feminized excrementality of Sin and her ravenous offspring, Death. Christian masculinity will forever be embroiled in an anxiety-inducing battle for its very existence, seeking control through violence—particularly violence directed against women.

Poetic, Excremental, and Ecological Continuity

Per the introduction of this chapter, Plumwood’s ecological concept of continuity resists both dualism and the notion of human (read: masculine / patriarchal) domination over nature. Continuity therefore “extend[s] concepts of autonomy, agency and creativity to those who have

first drawing my attention to the feminine dimensions of Satan goes to a former student of mine, Ben Fozard.

been denied them under the Cartesian division of the world.” This is not a denial of difference—think of continuity as providing us with a spectrum of relationality—but “requires both that we reconceive ourselves as more animal and embodied” in manners that underscore “interconnectedness” (124, 128).⁵⁰ In the face of Christian masculine authority, which is based upon opposition, control, violence, and dualism, the excremental instead reveals how an early modern self was deeply embroiled in the feminized and material muck of the world. While early modern culture may not have celebrated this fact, Plumwood’s continuity can allow us to reread these early modern texts to find excremental and feminine creativity and agency in manners that potentially re-empower these devalued identities or categories.

Plumwood’s notion of continuity is reminiscent—much like Stacy Alaimo’s idea of trans-corporeality, as I noted in the Introduction of this project—of the Galenic medical idea of porosity, an early modern concept in which the human body acts as a sponge, open at various orifices to take in the external world or transport the internal into the outer environment. Early modern excremental waste—such as urine, tears, (menstrual) blood, sweat, hair, nails—demonstrated the ability of the self to become coextensive with exterior surroundings. Meanwhile, the material, natural world—winds / airs, waters, words, smells, sights, food, drink—all traversed across the porous boundaries of the body to corporeal interiors. Garret A. Sullivan and Mary Floyd-Wilson say it best:

⁵⁰ Plumwood’s key method for understanding continuity and eradicating dualisms is through recognizing intentionality as a mind-like concept present in the more-than-human world. To see intentionality, we must be careful not to “show disrespect for the otherness of nature by inscribing that agency with the cast of the conscious human mind,” but instead “recognise in the myriad forms of nature other beings—earth others—whose needs, goals and purposes must, like our own, be acknowledged and respected” (136-137).

Scholars have emphasized the porousness of an early modern body that takes the environment into itself or spills out of its own bounds (or both). This criticism...has also alerted us to the ‘ecological’ nature of early modern conceptions of embodiment—the way in which the body is understood as embedded in a larger world with which it transacts (2).⁵¹

As Sullivan and Floyd-Wilson’s use of the word “transacts” suggests, the exchanges between larger world and interiorized human self were a two-way street; nonetheless, it was the human self which was always at jeopardy of the most change, or of being continuous with the exterior world surrounding the self. This threat occurs because transacting or exchanging (in transcorporeal manners, specifically) with one’s environment threatened to make the human self slide down Aristotle’s Great Chain of Being, or become more like flora and fauna, more ecological. But importantly—and much like continuity—difference is not entirely eroded under porosity. A human self will still exist in porous transactions with a larger, material world; it is simply that this larger world contains the powerful agency to elicit great change. Therefore the ideas of continuity and porosity demonstrate the fragility of what we refer to as “human.” A human self may still exist, and an exterior world made up of many lively beings may still exist, but early modern paradigms reinforce Plumwood’s point: we are governed by degrees of inescapable continuity. A masculine Christian self may posit humanity as set apart by God, unique amongst

⁵¹ Sullivan and Floyd-Wilson offer four different models of how the porous early modern body transacted with the exterior world: similitude, which is the idea that the body comes to mirror the world; exchange, which is dependent “upon that which crosses the threshold of the body, from within or without” so that “the body engages in active exchange with its environment;” counteractive, which poses “the body’s complexion is formed in opposition or through resistance to the environment;” and finally, dispersion or distribution, in which “the embodied mind extends across the environment in its functional reliance on culture and artifice” (4-6).

the created world and its inhabitants, but humans, like the world they inhabit, are still inherently material and corporeal. There is no escape from this fact, only acceptance or a continuous battle against it. *The Faerie Queen* and *Paradise Lost* both stage such battles.

It is the inescapability of the material and the fact that humans are continuous with their environments that forms the core anxiety of both *The Faerie Queene* and *Paradise Lost*. In *Errour* and *Duessa*, Redcrosse confronts his own bodiliness and capacity for error; in *Satan and Sin*, Adam, through Eve, falls, trapped for a meager lifespan in the reality of his own physicality.⁵² In consuming these texts, readers are also confronted with these realities. Indeed, it may be the unavoidable fact that humans are tied to the smelly, the slimy—the excremental—which explains why two such noteworthy epic poets from the early modern period both explore the threat of the ecological, feminine, and material. A kind of poetic continuity then arises between Spenser and Milton. Milton’s rehashing of Spenser’s material is not just an homage, but a continued exploration of the danger of the expelled feminine. This poetic continuity expresses a kind of perverse pleasure in mapping the ability of Christian masculinity to fall to that which is debased. The feminine as excremental material is so enticing that both poets give in to the temptation to write about it; the titillating and terrifying allure of *Errour*, *Duessa*, and *Sin* underscore this fact. However, the poets then must reinstate the hierarchical order that has dissolved in the texts, purging continuity from their heroes.

⁵² Usefully, Greenblatt argues that “Self-fashioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile. This threatening Other—heretic, savage, witch, adulteress, traitor, Antichrist—must be discovered or invented in order to be attacked and destroyed” (9). This idea ties into Breitenberg’s assertion that masculine anxiety in the face of such abject beings can be creative, or again, “enables and drives patriarchy’s reproduction and continuation of itself” (2). Thus Redcrosse must stumble across *Errour* and then *Duessa* in order to demonstrate how to journey into a godly life; *Sin* and *Death* must enter the human world for Christ to become the new, triumphant Adam.

As explored above, Redcrosse's journey into ecological and excremental continuity throughout Book I of *The Faerie Queene* begins both literally and allegorically with his encounter with Error. The text makes clear there is no need for Redcrosse to fight this snake woman; he seeks her out himself and voluntarily enters the vaginal cave she inhabits in a bid to prove himself worthy of both his arms and his Christian masculinity. It is through this fight, from which he emerges blood- and excrement-covered, that Redcrosse becomes embroiled in, or perhaps more accurately, continuous with, the allures of error through Error. She is, as Peter Remien has noted, a representative of "chaotic matter,"⁵³ which "Suggests...humanity's entanglement with the material world." For Remien, Error is the embodiment of the Latin *materia*, which "denies the ontological distinction between human and nonhuman: it is all simply matter," and Redcrosse's fight with Error is meant "to force the reader to confront his or her own entanglement in the material" (120-122, 133-134). We might then note that Error is error made physical, an outward manifestation of Redcrosse's loss of control of himself and an anxious battle against his own masculine frailty to fail, and fall, in ways that would make him less manly and more feminine.

It is therefore logical both ecologically and allegorically that Redcrosse is subsequently cozened by Duessa, unable to read through her heavy handed Fidessa disguise. As the stripping of Duessa after the defeat of Orgoglio and rescue of Redcrosse makes clear, Duessa is herself continuous with her environment. Again, we are told she has "A foxes taile," that one foot "was like an Eagles claw," and "The other like a beares vneuen paw" (I.viii.48). Duessa is continuous with animality, with fauna; per Susan Carter, "She is horrid both through human degeneration

⁵³ Such "chaotic matter" is staged quite explicitly in *Paradise Lost*'s conceptualization of God, the universe, and theology. See below for a discussion of this.

and beastliness” (11). In becoming continuous with Duessa in an exchange of fluids that threatens the Christian and masculine self in a humoral framework of porosity, Redcrosse then becomes continuous with the animals and waste she represents as well.⁵⁴ Therefore “his fame” is also in jeopardy, for as St. George, he is a celebrated figure of Christian masculinity in his (future) defeat of the dragon. But if Redcrosse / St. George is infected with sin, then the text threatens that he will never be able to achieve his historical, cultural, and religious legacy.

Because Redcrosse has become continuous with error, with animals, and with excrement in ways that make him read as Redcrosse *and*, he must purge these aspects of his bodily self which threaten his wholeness in their feminine and excremental capacities. Said differently, to regain his masculine Christian self, Redcrosse must eliminate the continuity he has erroneously and sinfully acquired. Consequently, Una brings her wayward knight to the House of Holinesse, where Fidelia teaches him to read the bible and, through this reading, allows him to mentally incorporate the godly into himself (I.x.18-19).⁵⁵ Additionally a doctor, or “Leach,” known as Patience comes to aid Redcrosse at Una’s request (I.x.23-24). Early modern doctors could prescribe bloodletting to reestablish the balance of bodily interiority, and Patience’s designation as a “Leach” underscores the notion that Redcrosse is bloodlet to purge some of the grossness he has incorporated. “But,” we are told, “yet the cause and root of all his ill, / Inward corruption, and infected sin, / Not purg’d nor heald, behind remained still” (I.x.25). Redcrosse’s body must

⁵⁴ Orgoglio placing Redcrosse in his dungeon is therefore no surprise; Redcrosse is detained in the bowels of Orgoglio’s castle and is finally excreted when Prince Arthur and Una come to his aid.

⁵⁵ As Pollock has demonstrated, it is important to also recognize that both Arthur and Fidelia are linked to serpent iconography: Arthur has a dragon on his shield, and Fidelia holds a cup displaying a serpent. But these symbols “represent[] the death impulse transformed into a force for good.” They signify the “mortification” of Redcrosse’s physical self to achieve greater spiritual perfection (279). They are, in other words, the corrective to the serpents of sin, femininity, and excrementality seen elsewhere throughout the text.

be further punished to remove this “Inward corruption”; he dresses “In ashes and sackcloth,” engages in “fasting euery day,” “pray[s] both early and eke late,” and is subject to iron hot pincers and an iron whip, eliciting wounds that are then doused with “salt water sore, / The filthy blottes of sin to wash away” (I.x.26-27). These restorative actions are a denial of, alteration to, or punishment of Redcrosse’s body; they aid him in escaping the material reality of his own flesh and his embroilment in material continuity until “Shortly therein so perfect he became” (I.x.45). He has, as Michael Schoenfeldt points out of Book II, the Legend of Temperance, managed to “impo[se]...order” on himself, for “The self is a seething mass of...infestations until properly constructed through the deliberate rigors of temperance” (69), or in Redcrosse’s case, through education, self-denial, and self-punishment. Redcrosse’s need to prove his masculine Christianity is what leads him to error and sin and traps him in earthly continuity, and it is only by rejecting his bodily self that his Christian self—that manhood—can be restored so that St. George may finally fight his dragon.⁵⁶

It is in this battle with the dragon that Redcrosse Knight fully—and this time, with preparation after his encounters at the House of Holiness—fights feminine excrementality as embodied by a lizard / serpent: the dragon who has plagued Una’s home kingdom. This dragon is Error made deadlier, the final foe in Redcrosse’s journey to achieve the triumph of Christian masculinity against the chaotic forces of the feminine and the excremental.⁵⁷ The poet states the

⁵⁶ Notably, Spenser’s playing with porosity and embeddedness of humans in the exterior, natural world is a continuous aspect of *The Faerie Queene*. As Gail Kern Paster has demonstrated, in Book II, Amavia’s death in a forest showcases how through bleeding, “Amavia’s body becomes a feature of the landscape in a process of dissolution that is clearly reciprocal.” Through her death, the epic stages the “reciprocal absorption of body by landscape and landscape by body” (142).

⁵⁷ Or, as Margaret Christian notes when she reads it alongside Frank Peretti’s 1995 bestselling Christian fantasy novel *The Oath*, Book I of *The Faerie Queene* reads “as an evangelical fantasy which urges its readers to grow in holiness by confronting their own sins” (350). The

dragon has a “body monstrous, horrible, and vaste, / Which to increase his wondrous greatnes more, / Was swoln with wrath, and poyson, and with bloody gore” (I.xi.8). And, when the dragon at last appears before Redcrosse, “his deepe deuouring iawes / Wyde gaped, like the griesly mouth of hell, / Through which into his darke abysses all rauin fell” (I.xi.12). This same serpentine nature is first identified with Errour, who similarly has “poisnous duggs” and feeds her numerous, grotesque offspring in a vision of maternal monstrosity (I.i.15). She is thus both “loathsome, filthie, foule, and full of vile disdain” (I.i.14) and reminiscent of Hell, as discussed above, in her body’s alignment with the cave in which she crouches, itself a metaphorical representation of the vulva. This same imagery applies to Duessa too, who, once exposed by Arthur and Una, has breasts leaking curdled—poisonous—milk and is identified throughout the poem as a creature of hell. As hellish, poisonous serpent, the dragon is another encounter with feminine excrementality for Redcrosse; the dragon is Errour and Duessa on a larger and more extreme scale, ready to infect Redcrosse with the poisonous taint of sin (like Errour) and swallow him whole into a body reminiscent of Hell (as Duessa accomplished in their sexual dalliance). Although the dragon is identified as masculine multiple times by the gendered pronoun “he,” the dragon’s alignment with these prior lizard women troubles—as Milton’s Satan does—this male pronoun. The dragon, while a “he,” nonetheless threatens Redcrosse with the same disgusting, dangerous female agency the knight encountered earlier in Book I.⁵⁸ Indeed, the mixing of

embodiment of these sins, both in Book I and in the Christian fantasy novel, is the dragon. Defeating the dragon plaguing Una’s kingdom is therefore Redcrosse’s ultimate triumph over both sin and everything the dragon embodies: femininity, excrementality, materiality, and chaos.⁵⁸ And, interestingly, the dragon is also a figure for Satan, cast as the whispering toad and flattering serpent by Milton in *Paradise Lost*. It is in this alignment with the devil that the dragon, as masculine, also takes on femininity: Satan, after all, reproduces Sin and in his alignment with excrement and hell—just like the dragon—is aligned with femininity in a troubling of the boundaries between male and female.

gender in the case of the dragon may reflect upon Redcrosse who, if he fails to defeat the beast, will be a sinfully gross, feminized man.

Redcrosse's—or, as is quite clear at this point in the poem, St. George's—battle with the dragon lasts the biblically relevant three days to reflect the triumph of masculine Christianity over the chaotic, serpentine, hellish, sinful, and material excrementality of the feminine. As John W. Crawford notes, Redcrosse “represents the Church militant. He is the Christian in a state of conflict and development, in a state of becoming.” Thus, his battle with the dragon is his encounter with “cleansing—purging—along the way,” or represents his “conflict and development” as a Christian, for he is in a constant “state of becoming” (178). On the first day, Redcrosse falls into a “springing well, / From which fast trickled forth a siluer flood, / Full of great vertues, and for med'cine good,” called “*The well of life*” (I.xi.29). This well has the capability to “Renew, as one were borne that very day” (I.xi.30), and transforms Redcrosse into a “new-borne knight” (I.xi.34). Prepared by the House of Holiness to fight against sin in the world, Redcrosse now undergoes baptism in the waters of this well to wash away—or purge—his material body, and immaterial soul, of sin. On the second day of his battle with the dragon, the knight falls down into a ditch where “There grew a goodly tree him faire beside, / Loaden with fruit and apples rosy redd,” called “*The tree of life*” (I.xi.46). From beneath the tree “forth flowd, as from a well” that “Life and long health...gauge, / And deadly wounds could heale, and reare againe / The sencelesse corse appointed for the graue” (I.xi.48). Day two functions as a corrective to the transgressions made by the first parents in the Garden of Eden: Redcrosse does not touch the fruit, and is instead rewarded by a second kind of baptism in which the waters, endowed with the life-giving properties of the Tree of Life, heal him for his fight on the third day. And on this third day, he arises like Christ, alive again, and defeats the dragon by “taking

aduantage of his open iaw, / Ran [his sword] through his mouth with so importune might, / That deepe emperst his darksom hollow maw” (I.xi.53). Day three is the ultimate triumph of the masculine Christian self over an excremental embodiment of evil, particularly in Redcrosse’s alignment with a resurrected Christ who strikes down a dragon aligned with Satan to save a kingdom, redeeming them from the beast’s sinful and evil taint. Redcrosse wins; Christian masculinity wins, defeating excremental femininity.⁵⁹

But only for the moment, for it is not long before none other than Duessa reappears, claiming Redcrosse has a prior engagement to her and therefore cannot wed Una. Although Duessa and Archimago are chased off, Redcrosse must leave his new fiancée Una behind to continue to pursue and wipe out evil, and Duessa will reappear later to trouble characters and plotlines with her excremental femininity. We must also not forget that Errour’s vomited “loathly frogs and toades, which eyes did lacke” from her battle with Redcrosse “creeping sought way in the weedy gras,” escaping into Faerie Land to wreck excremental havoc elsewhere (I.i.20). In Book I of *The Faerie Queene*, Christian masculinity wins—but only for the moment, for the threat of excremental femininity has slithered off to lie in wait elsewhere.

Meanwhile, what Gordon Teskey has identified in *Delirious Milton* as Milton’s monist materialism is important when conceptualizing both continuity and materiality in *Paradise Lost*. Such monist materialism is “the conviction that everything is matter.” It explained how “ultimate reality is one divine substance extending into infinity; that when God withdraws himself from infinity into one place, heaven, he leaves behind a portion of his own substance, so that space

⁵⁹ Or, as Crawford notes, these three days of battle can be interpreted as “the three days of Christ’s crucifixion, the harrowing of hell, and the resurrection, while the two miracles [the Well of Life and the Tree of Life] represent the efficacy of baptism and the Lord’s Supper” (176).

remains full; and that this substance is matter in the state of chaos.” In *Paradise Lost*, “The universe...is made by the Son of God, who creates everything from the alienated substance of the Father,” and therefore “Everything that is is God’s body” (86-88). But if everything is a part of God, how do we explain the presence of evil in the poem? Teskey writes,

Chaos is a cosmological concept that is in some kind of dialectical relation with the substance of God and the act of Creation...Primordial matter is good because its substance originally comes out of God...The world is made from the alienated substance of God and this substance must therefore be good. Milton takes pains to construct his metaphysics of monist materialism in such a way that there can be no room either for the (to him) nonsensical idea of creation out of nothing or for the gnostic moral terror of an archaic, independent, and perhaps equal principle of evil concealed in matter. The substance of chaos, God’s ancient, abject, alienated body, is the substance from which God creates... It is not possible to make Milton’s three chaoses—the personification, the narrative scene, and the cosmological concept [and Heaven, Hell, and Paradise]—consistent with one another, nor is it necessary to do so (72-73, 76).

While this attempt to explain Milton’s theological vision does suggest that Sin and Death are necessary components of existence, and that this vision does not need to be entirely “consistent,” it does indicate the trouble Teskey has in conceptualizing boundaries—such as the one between “good” and “evil”—in the poem.

What Teskey’s difficulties parsing “God’s abject” body points toward is a problem of reconciliation of matter, a problem that I argue can instead be solved through continuity. Rather than relying upon notions of “good” and “evil,” which the poem complicates anyway, we can

instead use continuity as a method of seeing creation in *Paradise Lost* as existing on a sliding scale of purity and filth. Or, we might return once more to the image of Alma's House in Book II of *The Faerie Queene*, with the characters able to glean knowledge in the upper reaches while the bowels are referred to but avoided in their messiness; nonetheless, Alma's House, like all of God's creation, is part of one whole, even as that one whole is made of various components that at times seem to work against one another. As a case in point, we can again return to the conversation God has with the Son in Book X: "I called and drew [Sin and Death] thither, / My Hell-hounds, to lick up the draff and filth / Which man's polluting sin with taint hath shed / On what was pure" (629-632). God creates a (seemingly) clear delineation here between "filth" and that which is "pure;" the filth comes from Sin's "infect[ing]" (608) of humankind, which Death then consumes, while what is pure comes from God. Thus, after the fall, Eden, or earth, is a plane of existence caught in the middle between these two great forces: the filthy and the pure, and thus contains—like humans themselves—aspects of both, demonstrating human (and earthly) continuity with the divine and the debased. Paradise is the ocean that, lapping at the shores of two distant landmasses, causes them to mingle and mix to varying degrees; it is the site at which the battle between the filthy and the pure plays out, for both can exist simultaneously in this middle space of continuity between the filth of Hell and the purity of Heaven. Sin's infection of, or continuity with humanity, alongside Death's role as eternal waste collector, is not a kind of purging of the world of filth. Instead, they demonstrate that filth and purity are mirrored images of one another, just as all that happens in Hell is a mirrored image of Heaven. Filth and purity, Heaven and Hell, good and evil—none can exist without the other, or would exist without the excremental femininity also embodied by Satan. The earthly plane cannot exist without containing all these aspects, and would not be the site of God's greatest triumph through the Son

if not for humans as beings of continuity who contain both filth and purity alike. Paradise is the stage upon which what seems to be in irreconcilable opposition is shown to be continuous.

Indeed, ecocritical readings of *Paradise Lost* have long offered solutions to Teskey's dilemma, for they gesture toward ideas of ecological continuity throughout the epic. For example, Diane Kelsey McColley has found that "Thinking connectedly is the method of Milton's poetics" ("Milton's Environmental Epic" 58-59). Elsewhere—specifically in her unpacking of Milton's use of monism and vitalism—McColley has noted that the monist aspects of Milton's text suggest that because "all things are made of the same matter," they are "different only in degree." This concept is reinforced by Milton's religious vision, in which "all matter, whether spiritual or corporeal, must have originated *in God*" ("Milton and Ecology" 160). Juliet Lucy Cummins has also explored how "In *Paradise Lost* created things in the unfallen world subsist along a dynamic continuum of being" that "allows creatures to grow toward God" (164). Clearly, when we read *Paradise Lost* through an environmental lens, interpretations of connectedness and continuity should surface. This is especially true in relation to the "green" aspects of nature represented through Adam and Eve's relationship to Paradise, and God's construction of the world. Milton's God, Teskey and these ecocritical scholars suggest, created the world to be continuous.

But I would argue it is primarily Sin who serves as the lynchpin for continuity, the excremental feminine figure who makes first Eve, and then Adam, continuous with the created world. Eve plucks the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge and eats; she places the materially forbidden within her own body and in so doing, allows it to mingle with her very self. Yet that

eating is also the entering of Sin into Eve's body and into the god-created world.⁶⁰ The world itself recognizes this fact, for as soon as Eve ate, "Earth felt the wound and Nature from her seat / Sighing through all her Works gave signs of woe, / That all was lost" (IX.782-784). The same reactions occur when Adam is "overcome with Female charm" and eats his share of the fruit: "Earth trembl'd from her entrails as again / In pangs and Nature gave a second groan" (IX.999, 1000-1001). Sin, through Eve, spreads into Adam, and through then outward into the world; she and her son Death feel, per above, the change to reality and traverse across the bridge to Paradise. By ingesting the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve become continuous with this fruit and take Sin into themselves, and thus humanity itself becomes continuous with her. Sin looms over all at this moment in the text, her open, mangled body symbolizing the pain of physical existence and the reality of her own ability to enter the body and transform it, just as Sin's own lower half was transformed into a serpent. Satan's desire to enter through the Gates of Hell earlier in the text is therefore akin to the continued perforation of Sin's body, which now is overlaid with the body of all of humanity: Satan will turn Paradise into a wasteland in which Sin reproduces, unchecked. In so doing, Sin as excremental feminine threatens to leave the created world awash in her own abject state.

And Milton, like his predecessor Spenser, showcases that there is a kind of joy in engaging with Sin, in wading about in feminine and excremental muck. This is one reason why, immediately after both Adam and Eve have eaten the forbidden fruit, lust appears on the scene. The eating of the fruit, the introduction of Sin into the world, and human continuity with the

⁶⁰ The epic notes this later too: when Sin and Death escape Hell and enter Paradise, Sin, who had dwelled "there in pow'r before," was "now in body" in Paradise (X.586-587). "[N]ow in body" indicates that Sin has now physically entered Paradise, whereas before she was just a part of Eve, and then Adam, through the consumption of that which God had forbidden.

gross physical reality she embodies, inspires “Carnal desire...[Adam] on Eve / Began to cast lascivious eyes, she him / As wantonly repaid; in lust they burn” (IX.1013-1015). It is no coincidence that “lust” causes the first parents to “burn,” for it is a reminder of the fiery torments of an explosive Hell, which Sin also brings with her into the higher physical realm. In burning for one another, or desiring to consume one another’s corporeal forms in sexual coupling, Adam and Eve reenact Satan’s own coupling with Sin and, like Satan and Sin, produce Death. Lost to their joy in one another’s physical forms and the beguiling pleasure of Sin, Adam and Eve momentarily forget their trespass against God’s cardinal rule. Their sexual play is thus a playing in Sin, reinforced by the implied penetration of orifices their heterosexual coupling would include. The line of continuity stretches: Adam and Eve become continuous with Sin, and through Sin, continuous in their sex with one another, which only exacerbates their continuity with Sin and the excremental materiality she embodies.

Without the intervention of God’s Son, Christ, an ultimate figurehead for Christian manhood, it would be only the toil of the earth, Death, and then Hell that await Adam and Eve, with excremental Sin standing by to obligingly hold the gates open for their entrance.

Conclusion

We might note at this point that at the end of both *The Faerie Queene*, Book I and *Paradise Lost*, the masculine Christian self is reestablished or (through Christ) at least promises to be, and thus that the continuous and feminine excremental is defeated. But this is too simple, too easy of an explanation and an ending. As Bayless explains of medieval and early modern waste,

excrement was charged with power. It was a matter utterly unlike other substances: animal matter, yet not alive or consumable; repellant and yet fruitful.

It had all the properties of carnality: it was corrupt, malodorous, decaying, and yet earthly, fecund, powerful, and unavoidable...It served as a daily reminder that, however much they deplored the fact, humans were not disembodied, pure and wholly spiritual. [Excreting] was an entirely corporeal act, which could not be refined, restrained or abjured, as could such other corporeal acts as eating, sleeping, washing, or sex...Defecation had the power to make humans undignified at best and ungodly at worst.” (55)

No matter whether Errour is decapitated, Duessa is stripped and exposed, or Sin is conquered by Christ, the very stories that Spenser and Milton have told cannot exist without the danger, allure, and continuity presented by the excremental feminine. Errour, Duessa, and Sin are some of the greatest sources of creativity in the text, not only in their fecund femininity, but in their capacity to drive the plot. They are what allows Redcrosse to stumble, then to be sinful, and to recover; they are what enable Eve and Adam to fall and then allow a promise of salvation to be fulfilled. Per Bayless, they are “powerful, unavoidable.” These female figures stage the agentic power of the excremental and the feminine. They fling their own excremental selves into our faces and force us to confront their material reality.

CHAPTER 2: Melancholic Expulsions: The Feminine Text as Excrement in the Work of Mary Sidney Herbert and Mary Wroth

Melancholy (n.): *Medicine*. Originally: a pathological condition thought to result from an excess of black bile in the body, characterized in early references by sullenness, ill temper, brooding, causeless anger, and unsociability, and later by despondency and sadness. Later: severe depression, melancholia. Now *archaic* and *historical*. (*OED* 2b)

Tears, Melancholy, and Early Modern Women Writers

In Chapter 1, I argued that the excremental female characters of Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost* are compositional in that they are integral to the plot: as forces of continuity, these feminine characters act as foils, necessary for the journey the masculine, Christian hero of each text undertakes. Spenser's Duessa is perhaps the most cunning of these excremental villainesses, for she carefully crafts the way she appears and is read by Redcrosse Knight—and his reading, in the fashion of dramatic irony, is starkly different from that of the reader. She is immediately represented as a liquid body, “Melting in tears” (I.ii.22) as she recounts her woes. To the reader, these tears—expulsive bodily material—gesture toward the excremental, later explicitly revealed in her “dong” covered behind (I.viii.48); to Redcrosse, Fidessa / Duessa's tears are evidence of her feminine distress. Bewitched by expelled liquidity, Redcrosse's later sexual coupling with Duessa beside a fountain—during which, according to Galenic humoralism, bodily fluids are swapped—is the culmination of his ignorance and the power of gross female liquids.

Clearly, tears have gendered meanings in early modern literature, particularly in ways that reflect or are exacerbated by manuscript and print culture. In the hands of a male writer, like Spenser, women's tears are dangerous, but the early modern female poets Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke,⁶¹ and her niece Lady Mary Wroth wrote about their own tears in ways

⁶¹ Hereafter referred to as “Pembroke.”

which, while still powerful and excremental, were instead meant to represent their capacity for melancholic mourning. These women writers did so in a manuscript and print culture that was viewed as inherently masculine and resistant to women's efforts at publication. In *The Imprint of Gender*, Wendy Wall takes up this issue, and her analysis reveals that the idea of an author was masculine and writing a male pastime undertaken to produce a feminized text. Class is another important axis of consideration, for "Manuscript culture offers [a writer's] Muse a 'free' arena in which she can conduct herself in a noble and dignified manner. Print, on the other hand, threatens to make her a prostitute." This literary prostitute was characterized by a (textual) body open to the eyes of a growing middle class that now had the means to buy printed texts and the time to consume them (15). The bookselling stall then becomes a "brothel" (16), a place to purchase the open, highly accessible body of the textual whore.⁶² Female authorship like that of Pembroke and Wroth complicated—and challenged—this dynamic, but texts were already inherently inscribed with characteristics of the feminine in the early modern literary scene.

And, because feminine bodies were frequently figured as the most excessively leaky bodies, male writers like Robert Burton in his *Anatomy of Melancholy* tapped into this notion to write feminine texts as melancholic purgatives—expulsions akin to the excremental—for the type of male authorial self Wall describes. Or, per Wall, "The 'feminine' ... often provided the unauthorized ground on which authorship could be established" (6). Throughout the *Anatomy*,

⁶² In his exploration of Burton's *Anatomy* and Thomas Browne's *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1646), Grant Williams makes a related argument in his classification of these early modern texts as commonplace books. Browne's text highlights "a conjunction between the abject commonplace book and the printing press's overproduction... The printing press has proliferated throughout knowledge an unmanageable excess." Burton's text also "registers amazement and frustration at the press's boundless overproduction" (75). As sites of "excess" and "overproduction," the printing press is again (albeit unstated by Williams) a leaking, loose feminine figure.

Burton frames his work so that each word that is pressed into the page⁶³ is infused with some of the author's own purgation of melancholy, one of the four fluids (alongside choler, blood, and phlegm) that determined bodily and mental composition in a Galenic humoral framework; melancholics frequently were weepy, leaking fluids even as they needed to retain them to correct their overly dry state. Melancholy was depicted as black bile and governed by the qualities cold and dry, thus aligning it with the element earth. Melancholics were often intellectual men or those caught in the woes of love; both shed tears frequently due to their melancholy. Tears were therefore a staple of a melancholic disposition and, as an expelled bodily material, were considered excremental. Yet they were the wrong kind of expulsion for a melancholic individual who was already overly dry and who instead should bloodlet to purge the portion of their blood which contained melancholic black bile. Once expelled, this melancholic material was—like hair, nails, urine, blood, tears—considered another kind of excrement. Evacuated melancholy—whether expressed in tears or in bloodletting—was not specifically feces, but akin to feces.⁶⁴

This medical paradigm informs Burton's own understanding of his condition and his writing. Of his own melancholic disposition, Burton notes, "I write of Melancholy, by being busie to avoid Melancholy. There is no greater cause of Melancholy than idlenesse, *no better cure than businesse*" (6). He continues, "When I first tooke this taske in hand...this I aymed at...to ease my minde by writing, for I had...a kind of Impostume in my head, which I was very desirous to be unladen of, and could imagine no fitter evacuation then this." To write about melancholy is then to "make an Antidote out of that which was the prime cause of my disease"

⁶³ "Press" had double meanings in early modern English, meaning to be printed or "to act the lady's part and be pressed by a man" during sex (Wall 1).

⁶⁴ See also Gail Kern Paster's *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* from U of Chicago P, 2004.

(7).⁶⁵ Burton presents readers with an author mired in melancholy who seeks to expel the excess black bile surging through his system via the expression of his condition upon the page. Ink and melancholic black bile fuse into a single image; this image is one of expulsion, of composition and narration of one's own condition as a form of purgation. It is the letting of the interior (or excremental) self into a larger, exterior world. And Burton not only imagines his text as an embodiment of his melancholy but as a purgative itself, a text which will help readers to expel or avoid their own melancholy.⁶⁶ Writing is, for Burton, an alternative to crying or bloodletting even as it is analogous to these actions. His melancholy, infused into each word on the page of the *Anatomy*, is expelled via a leaking, feminine source—a printed text, a textual whore, first available to be bought and consumed by readers in 1620.

This textual framework then begs the question: what happens when women like Pembroke and Wroth write feminized texts as purgatives, or as excremental expressions of their own melancholic tears? Do their own bodies become overlaid with that of their texts as prostituted figures who should simply be silent instead of leaking at mouth / at pen? How does the use of tears as a melancholic presentation of the female writer's self work within or upset ideas of gendered expectations in early modern societal and literary culture?

For Pembroke and Wroth, the black ink of writing and publication is reflective of the kind of humoral liquid melancholy Burton describes, especially if we understand both women's

⁶⁵ This and all other quotes from the Robert Burton's *Anatomy* are taken from *The Anatomy of Melancholy, vol. 1*. Ed. by Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicolas K. Kiessling, and Rhonda L. Blair. E-book, Clarendon Press, 2005.

⁶⁶ Angus Gowland brings up an important point when he writes of "Burton's choice of compositional method" as an "assemblage": "Although the book is stuffed with material from other books, Burton's readers...are thereby prompted to notice the author's rhetorical *dispositio* of his material and his creative 'digestion' of his quotations" (657-658). Thus, "We are thereby led to wonder whether the 'confused lump' of the *Anatomy* is somehow to be taken as a figuration (or 'evacuation') of the melancholic 'Impostume'" (659).

published writings as metaphorical manifestations of tears. Consequently, I argue that both Pembroke in “The Dolefull Lay of Clorinda” (1595) and “To the Angell Spirit of the Most Excellent Sir Philip Sidney” (1599), and Wroth in her sonnet sequence *Pamphila to Amphilanthus* (1621), write within the framework of the written text as expelled material. Via Wall, we know that such textual material, in both manuscript and printed form, is specifically *feminine* material. Both Pembroke and Wroth play with notions of the feminine in their texts to legitimize their agency as female writers expressing forms of melancholy through images of tears. Indeed, Elizabeth Hodgson indicates that in a culture in which “bodies and environments” were “mutually constitutive... Tudor and Stuart writers would have imagined tears as a kind of leakage from the body to the page” (19). Pembroke’s text is fashioned into grief-ridden melancholic tears for her brother, Sir Philip Sidney⁶⁷, whereas Wroth’s Petrarchan sonnets repeatedly center tearful melancholic female emotional experience in love while minimizing sexual desire for an absent male body. These two writers allow us to conceptualize how the excremental feminine demonstrates its agency is tied to its ability to be compositional—to narrate its own self, just as these female authors do. As Pembroke and Wroth’s melancholic works indicate, this grotesque female textual body is reclaimed as powerful, for it is from the expulsive feminine body that compositional power arises. These authorial efforts are also performative in that these authoresses set their own literary “stages” in manners meant to affect their audiences’ reception of them as writers. Rather than merely exist within the scope of gendered expectations, both women, to different degrees, test the boundaries of gender by

⁶⁷ As Hodgson indicates, Sidney Herbert’s “works seem to insist that they are born of tears alone; they further seem to insist that sorrow and loss enable her audiences as well, as the chain of inheritance extends from muse [Philip Sidney] to poet [Mary Sidney Herbert] and then from poet to readers” (24).

presenting melancholic, excremental texts that are concerned with their own expulsive composition through images and metaphors of tears, allowing these women to narrative their own emotional states, their methods of writing, and their own selves.

An exploration of such excremental compositional power by female authors is necessary in a manuscript and print culture which, if we take Wall at her word, so clearly degraded women. She notes, “Constrained by the norms of acceptable feminine behavior [such as “the identification of silence as the feminine ideal,” and the notion that women as leaky, liquid bodies could be overly leaky at the mouth as well], women were specifically discouraged from tapping into the newly popular channel of print; to do so threatened the cornerstone of their moral and social well-being” (280). If a woman did choose to write, or dared to even publish, Wall warns, “the female writer could become a ‘fallen’ women in a double sense: branded as a harlot or a member of the nonelite” (281).

For the two female writers under consideration here, who were part of the elite Sidney family, such consequences were likely all too real. The Countess of Pembroke neatly manages to avoid the pitfalls of female authorship in three key ways: (1) by completing the work of her brother, Sir Philip Sidney; (2) by translating holy works, an acceptable mode of composition for women as it was thought to allow them to engage deeply with the spiritual messages embedded within the texts (Fisken 263-265)⁶⁸; and (3) by writing elegies for her brother Sidney, sanctioned by his cultural and literary legacy, and the collective societal grief over his loss.

⁶⁸ As Elaine V. Beilin notes of Pembroke’s work, “She was both innovative and conservative. On the one hand, she considerably extended the range of women’s literary accomplishments...on the other hand, she by no means broke with feminine literary decorum, but indeed represented to her own and succeeding generations the essence of learning and virtue” (150).

Her niece Mary Wroth, however, did not as easily evade the scandal of publication—or scandal, period. In her personal life, Wroth was tainted by the death of her husband, which left her without any means of supporting herself after the inheritance she would have received reverted instead to a male relative of her husband after the death of her young son as well. But easily the thing that made her most notorious in early modern society was her affair with William Herbert III, Count of Pembroke, son of her aunt the Countess and her own first cousin (Roberts 3, 22-23). Wroth not only had a long-standing affair with him, but also bore two of his children. Her downfall was quite public, and while her reputation at court never recovered, Herbert's did. To compound matters further, Wroth's text *The Countess of Montgomerie's Urania*, which at the end includes the sonnet sequence *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, published in 1621, was likely inspired by Wroth's relationship with Herbert, represented by the unfaithful character Amphilanthus. There was also considerable scandal surrounding the publication of Wroth's text, with Lord Denny penning her a letter in which he attacked her craft and her character for slights he perceived against himself and his family in her writing. Wroth claimed that she had never sought publication and was unsure how the text made it into the public market, even writing to the Duke of Buckingham to appeal on her behalf to the king so the publication could be removed from circulation. Yet significantly, there was no actual action taken by King James I to suppress the text (Smith 82). The truth of *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*'s appearance in the market is unknown—did Wroth purposefully publish, or was it indeed an unauthorized version which circulated, causing puffed-up nobles to feel slighted?

Despite their differences in circumstance and experiences in publication, Pembroke and Wroth are linked not only in their status as two exemplary writers amongst the highly literary Sidney family, but also in their use of melancholy as the inspiration for writing. This female

lineage of melancholy makes perfect sense if, as Marion Wynne-Davies writes, “women’s mourning was considered excessive, emotional, and communal” (2). Indeed, the “communal” aspect of such feminine mourning is logically elicited in the very act of writing a text which is circulated, whether that be in manuscript or print form. To share such mourning texts is to share, or to allow your reader to experience, your own internalized humoral imbalance and woeful tears expelled upon the page.

The Countess of Pembroke and Melancholic Mourning

The Countess of Pembroke’s “To the Angell Spirit of the Most Excellent Sir Philip Sidney” is a thirteen stanza eulogy composed in iambic pentameter. Each stanza contains seven lines and a general rhyme scheme of ababba. The poem both mourns Philip Sidney and explores his works’ relation to the poetess’ own. Beth Wynne Fisker notes that “Angell Spirit” was first “appended to a scribal manuscript of their [the siblings’] verse-translations of the Psalms,” and dedicated to Queen Elizabeth in a portrayal of “humility *topos*” (265). Margaret P. Hannay *et al.* explain that this *topos* allows Pembroke to “declare[] that her poetic abilities are insufficient to complete Sidney’s work, or even to express her grief. Yet we must be careful not to overstate her use of the conventional *topos*,” for “she presents almost two-thirds of the Sidneian *Psalmes* as her own.” And, importantly, “she never uses the humility *topos* in connection with her gender; for her position as a woman writer, she never makes apology.” In Hannay *et al.*’s estimation, “Angell Spirit” is therefore “a meditation on [Pembroke’s] role as a writer” (109).⁶⁹ In other

⁶⁹ By contrast, Fisker argues that this elegy depicts a “disjunction between Mary Sidney’s internalized definitions of her role as a woman and her burgeoning ambitions as a writer” (266). I tend to align more with Hannay *et al.*’s interpretation, for while Sidney Herbert is aware of the constraints placed upon a woman writer, she nonetheless uses such constraints as a mode of authorization of her own voice and work.

words, “Angell Spirit” is a eulogy for a beloved brother, an expression of grief, a poem focused on the act of its own composition, and on the role of its authoress.

However, Pembroke cannot directly celebrate her own female literary talents; instead, she must couch her own composition within her brother’s memory and oeuvre. For instance, “Angell Spirit” begins with the narrator indicating that her work is “First rais’ed by thy blest hand, and what is mine / inspired by thee, thy secret power imprest” (3-4).⁷⁰ Here, Sidney’s literary work enables that of his sister. As war hero, as dead muse, as fecund corpse, his body—physical, memorial, and textual—is the site from which her own work grows and flourishes⁷¹. If we accept Susan Zimmerman’s premise in *The Early Modern Corpse and Shakespeare’s Theater* that “the power of the corpse is reminiscent of the power of the feminine in their uncomfortable reproductive capabilities” (17), then we might imagine Sidney’s body and his literary status as the originary waste, or composted soil, from which Pembroke’s poems as melancholic outpourings grow. Pembroke thus uses waste’s fecundity via the physical and textual bodies of her brother, watered by her melancholic tears, to narrate her poetic authority.⁷²

No matter the authorizing power of Sidney’s corpse, it is still his sister *Mary* who acts as author, editor, and publisher of both siblings. For example, in her study on how Sidney exists as the “writer,” Pembroke the “author” of works like the *Psalmes* and *Defence of Poesy*, Patricia Pender determines that the relationship between brother and sister was “conjugate and reciprocal

⁷⁰ This, and all subsequent quotes from “Angell Spirit,” come from *The Collected Works of Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke*, ed. by Hannay *et al.*, Oxford UP, 1998.

⁷¹ Or, as Nandra Perry and Robert E. Stillman so astutely note, “A sacrifice at the battle of Zutphen in 1586 to the international cause of Reformed Christianity, Philip Sidney’s corpse produced early modern England’s richest harvest of literature inside any single family. The corpus famously followed the corpse” (324).

⁷² See also Hodgson’s discussion in *Grief and Women Writers in the English Renaissance*, pp. 23, 37.

rather than subordinate and subsidiary.” Indeed, in Pender’s reading, Pembroke as author is the one who “was responsible for many of the developments in English literary history that we currently ascribe to her brother” (65-66). Pembroke was, after all, the one who edited and saw Sidney’s work into print, making an effort to legitimize and protect it. Notably, while Sidney is credited as breathing life into the sonnet sequence genre, paving the way for poets to publish, and as influential to some of the most important writers of the day, Pender notes astutely “that Philip Sidney was dead when all these things were accomplished...Sidney did not become a Protestant martyr, a culture hero, or the preeminent author of the English Renaissance by his own efforts or even at his own initiative” (67-68). Instead, “it would indeed be plausible to maintain that Sidney mitigated the stigma of print and provided the authorizing precedent of the collected works, which, in turn, gave birth to an emerging discourse of English authorship. But this holds true only if we substitute *Mary* Sidney for Philip Sidney in these postulations. Behind the phantom agency of ‘Sir Philip Sidney’...lies the material agency of the Countess of Pembroke” (69). In this context, the lines “and what is mine / inspired by thee,” gesture toward Sidney as writer, Pembroke as editor / collector / printer / author of her brother’s corpus and literary memory. She, in other words, produces and crafts *both* their personas as writers. But she is only able to do so by working within the gendered expectations of her time, wherein Sidney is upheld as masculine literary genius and she, as tearful grieving sister, is left to care for and nurture his work after his untimely demise.

Yet these lines from “Angell Spirit” have a third possibility as well, disclosing for a reading audience the close relationship between the siblings, in which a sister presented her work to her brother for his suggestions and endorsement. This is why Pembroke goes on to indicate that her “Muse [dar’d] with thine it selfe combine, / as mortall stufte with that which is divine”

(5-6). We might imagine here a brother guiding his sister's work, acting as her reviewer and source of encouragement, even as these lines speak to the combined effort of the Sidney siblings in the completion of the translation of the *Psalmes*. As the line continues, Pembroke then enacts a trope in which women are likened to lower, earthly matter—to “mortall stuffe”—while men inhabited the more rational realm, or “that which is divine.” Pembroke casts her own self and her work as inherently material, as earthy poetic matter which is base and temporary as compared to the divinity of her brother's lines.

All three readings, in my estimation, are possible and occur simultaneously in “Angell Spirit.” Due to the stigma Wall tells us surrounded print and its gendered aspects, Pembroke-as-writer can only emerge through the specter—or the corpse—of Sidney. This emergence happens both in her own writing—as a sister expressing melancholic grief—and as the editor and collector of her brother's work. Although gone, Sidney's status as an elite male in a patriarchal society is cleverly used by Pembroke to enable her own entrance into the literary marketplace. This analysis is not to suggest that Pembroke's grief is manufactured, but rather that she carefully crafts her own identity—in a performance before an audience with gendered expectations of her—as writer and editor through Sidney's legacy, which remains intact and in fact grows after his death. Sidney may make Pembroke-as-writer possible, but after his death, we are left with the sister stepping into the guise of her brother in a manner that queers and questions the roles of gender and authorship in the early modern literary marketplace—much as young men playing women onstage queered gender, desire, and love in performance.

Nonetheless, we must return to Pembroke's own casting of the *Psalmes*—and “To the Angell Spirit,” which could not have been written without the absent presence of a dead

brother—as the product of the Sidney siblings’ combined effort. Of this effort, Nandra Perry and Robert E. Stillman argue,

Mary’s [literary and editorial] skill safely delivers Philip’s ‘half-maimed piece’ from the ‘deep wounds enlarged, long festered in their gall’ or her own bleeding heart...While Mary supplies the matter (‘mortall stuffe’) for Philip’s inseminating spirit (or in the case of the *Psalms*, the common clothing for his lightening beam ‘lustre’), she also bears witness to how profoundly her proper fashioning of matter *matters* to their collective poetic project. (339)

I concur with this reading, for matter and poetic skill are intimately linked within the poem as a way of performatively authorizing Sidney’s poems and Pembroke’s editorial and authorial self. Further, in likening herself and her work to the “mortall stuffe,” and again, casting her brother and his work as “divine,” Pembroke inserts an Aristotelian script in which women provided the matter, men the impression in that matter, for the creation of a child. The *Psalms* and “Angell Spirit” are then their combined offspring, the incestuous product of Pembroke and her brother. As “children,” these texts are birthed / evacuated materials created by the combined expulsions of the Sidney siblings.⁷³ Birth is a kind of bodily evacuation and all bodily evacuations are, after all, messy affairs. Pembroke’s reliance upon ideas of the material to describe her own contributions to the efforts of the Sidney siblings is a recognition of this fact even as it is a kind of woeful longing for both her brother and his literary skills.

In the third stanza of “Angell Spirit,” Pembroke turns to the body’s liquidity as a method of expressing her own grief: if Sidney had not died and left the world bereft of his presence and

⁷³ See also Wall’s discussion in *The Imprint of Gender*, pp. 314-316, and throughout her article “Our Bodies / Our Texts?: Renaissance Women and the Trials of Authorship.”

more verses, “This halfe maim’d peece had sorted with the best. / Deepe wounds enlarg’d, long festered in their gall / fresh bleeding smart; not eye but hart teares fall” (18-20). Here, the textual child “Angell Spirit” becomes monstrous as a “halfe maim’d peece,” something that, without the guiding hand of Sidney himself, will always be left incomplete. Then Pembroke makes an interesting move, overlaying her own body with that of the poem’s, which are both marked by “Deepe wounds” that have “long festered” and therefore continue in their “fresh bleeding.” She seeps / weeps, as does the poem, forever incomplete without her brother. Pembroke and her writing are then always doomed to be open, porous, leaking bodies. She and the poem become wracked with “hart teares,” bleeding in grief in an image of flowing blood that is reminiscent—per the notion of the fungibility of humoral liquids—of menstrual blood. Although she insists they are “not eye...teares,” such tears—melancholic output—and blood become interchangeable, the same liquid in the poem as they are the same liquid in the fungibility of Galenic humoralism, continually expelled by female body and poem without any sign of stopping.⁷⁴

Pembroke returns to this liquid, melancholic grief in her fifth stanza when she likens her work and herself to “little streames with all their all doe flowe / to their great sea, due tributes gratefull fee” (32-33). She and her work are the “little streames,” the tributaries of Sidney himself, or “their great sea.” Her eulogizing thus ensures her brother’s literary legacy, for such tributaries feed into the overwhelming vastness of the “great sea” which is Sidney’s literary status. In other words, her lines or “little streames” ensure the existence of Sidney’s works, or the “great sea,” and that early modern literary culture and society will remember Sidney. These watery images also harken back to tears, or the “hart teares” Pembroke imagines herself and her

⁷⁴ Interestingly, we also see moves back and forth between the elemental states of earth and water in these lines. The body, aligned with the earth, threatens to turn liquid as the authorial self is overrun with grief.

work as expelling in Sidney's absence. Sidney and his inability to compose verse are the void⁷⁵ that must be filled by his sister and her own verse in an image of phallic gender reversal. Wall, in her reading of the *Psalmes* and Pembroke's editorial apparatuses as standing in for her brother's body, writes that "Philip's death enables his representation as the physical and textual commodity...[Pembroke] thus revises the strategy of presenting the displayed 'weak' text by holding up her martyred brother's heroic wounded body to deflect attention from the bravado of her act of writing" ("Our Bodies / Our Texts?" 56-57). Indeed, Pembroke keeps alive and simultaneously fills the void of her brother's absent presence by writing, "To pay the debt of Infinites I owe / To thy great worth" (35-36). Her melancholic, liquid grief is thus as life-giving as water. The completion of her brother's work is accompanied by extensive apologies ("Pardon [oh blest soule] presumption too too bold" [25] and "There lives no witt that may thy praise become" [49]), but it is necessarily, as is Pembroke's own writing, the very embodiment of her expelled melancholic grief.

Pembroke is forthright about her writing as melancholic output in her penultimate stanza, in which she writes,

To which these dearest offrings of my hart
 dissolv'd to Inke, while pennis impression move
 the bleeding veines of never dying love:
 I render here: these wounding lynes of smart
 sadd Characters indeed of simple love

⁷⁵ In *Shakespeare's Ocean*, Dan Brayton describes how for early modern Europeans the ocean loomed as a dangerous void, or a non-place which existed before creation itself. That Pembroke firsts casts her brother as a "great sea" and then imagines his memory and oeuvre as the void which her own lines must fill is potentially a gesture toward this early modern conception of the sea. For more, see the chapter "Back to the Sea? The Terrestrial Bias" in *Shakespeare's Ocean*.

not Art nor skill which abler wits doe prove,

Of my full soule receive the meanest part. (78-84)

Here, the “dearest offerings of my hart” alludes to the lines examined above, wherein “hart teares fall” (19-20). Thus, the “offerings” are the bloody “hart tears” continuously flowing from the leaking, feminized body of both text and sister. This blood is then “dissolv’d to Inke,” taken from “the bleeding veines of never dying love” in an image of crying as a form of bloodletting, or of straightforward bloodletting itself. Either way, the lines are marked with continuous flowing which Pembroke has “render[ed] here” in verse. “Angell Spirit” is, again, cast as written in blood and tears, as composed of feminized melancholic expulsive material. Through this expulsion, the poetess narrates herself as a writer via her narration of her brother’s legacy.

Pembroke’s “The Dolefull Lay of Clorinda” deals with many of the same melancholic and compositional themes espoused in “Angell Spirit”; however, it is first necessary to discuss the lay’s debated authorship. Hannay *et al.* note, “‘The Dolefull Lay’ was first published in 1595 as a companion poem to Spenser’s personal lament for Sidney, ‘Astrophel’. Scholars continue to debate whether it is the elegy mentioned in Pembroke’s letter to [Sir Edward] Wotten [in which Pembroke clearly asks for the return of a manuscript], and whether the ‘Lay’ was written by Pembroke, Spenser, or in collaboration” (120). Hannay *et al.* conclude that “Examination of Pembroke’s work indicates that the diction, style, and phrasing of ‘The Dolefull Lay’ do not mandate Spenserian authorship, but they do indicate Spenserian influence” (131). Further, they find it “may have been an early effort, one certainly inferior to her mature works” (132), and that it is likely Spenser worked with her on its revision. Rather than engage in further debate

concerning the authorship of the “The Dolefull Lay” as a method of legitimizing the poem’s place in my own argument, I will let Hannay *et al.*’s conclusion speak for itself.⁷⁶

The image of the grief stricken, wounded heart of “Angell Spirit” makes an earlier appearance in “The Dolefull Lay,” which eulogizes Pembroke’s brother through the stand-in figure of the shepherdess Clorinda. The elegy opens with the poetess wondering, “Ay me, to whom shall I my case complaine, / That may compassion my impatient grieffe?” (1-2).⁷⁷ Early in the poem, “grief,” or melancholy over loss, is connected to the speaker’s search to “unfold my inward paine, / That my enriuen heart may find reliefe” (3-4). When read in relation to Pembroke’s other elegy “Angell Spirit,” it becomes clearer that the image of a broken, bleeding heart as the source of composition is briefly touched upon in “Dolefull Lay” and then greatly expanded upon as a guiding metaphor for melancholic writing in “Angell Spirit.” In “Dolefull Lay,” the speaker then goes on to consider to whom she may complain of this grief which makes her heart weep: the heavens? Earthly men? Rejecting both options, the speaker concludes, “to my selfe will I my sorrow mourne, / Sith none alike like sorrowfull remaines” (19-20). Pembroke’s grief through elegy is thus cyclical: it originates within herself, is expelled by her via writing, and then is re-consumed by her via this writing, as she is the only one who still “sorrowfull remaines” over the loss of her brother.⁷⁸ Melancholic outpouring never ceases, only is endlessly written and then renewed. Pembroke herself addresses this notion plainly when she continues,

⁷⁶ For more on this debate, see Pamela Coren’s article “Edmund Spenser, Mary Sidney, and the Doleful Lay” in *SEL: Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2002, pp. 25-41.

⁷⁷ This, and all subsequent quotes from “The Dolefull Lay,” come from *The Collected Works of Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke*, ed. by Hannay et al., Oxford UP, 1998.

⁷⁸ It is also important, however, to recall that Pembroke is pursuing publication both of her written material and her grief. Even as she insists that her grief is fully internalized, publications suggests that writing provides an outlet for this grief—much as Burton imagines the *Anatomy*, or the very act of writing, as a melancholic purge.

“And to my selfe my plaints shall back retourne, / To pay their usury with doubled paines” (21-22). Here, we are presented with an echo, or the image of compounded melancholic grief: writing may “purge” it onto the page, but it returns doubled through “usury,” or interest, or even like a seed planted in the earth which then yields an exponentially greater crop. This is a vision in which mourner writes to expel, and the expelled, abject-like, always returns to haunt until the haunting grief is all that remains during the revision process.

With no one else to grieve quite like the speaker, the material, external world becomes a sympathetic entity in the poem, with images of nature used to echo the speaker’s own pain and reflect upon the revision process. She continues,

The woods, the hills, the rivers shall resound
The mournfull accent of my sorrowes ground.

Woods, hills, and rivers, now are desolate,
Sith he is gone the which them all did grace:
And all the fields do waile their widow state,
Sith death their fairest flowre did late deface. (23-28)

The echo of the speaker’s loss is taken up by “The woods, the hills, the rivers,” both subjects and readers who are now unable to be “grace[d]” by the verse of Sidney. His loss leaves them “desolate,” for his “fairest flowre” was “defaced” by “death.” Readers are again presented with an image in which grief inverts gender, the female body implied by a “flowre” now associated with a male figure. Further, this “flowre” when “deface[d]” signals a non-generative state. This state extends outward, encompassing nature writ large. Instead of production, we are left with decay; or, viewed differently, the only thing that is produced is barren, melancholic grief—a

state of dryness due to the excessive outpouring of the body's liquids through tears. And from this barrenness springs the poem itself, the symbol of further barren grief. Hodgson, in her writing on "The Dolefull Lay," indicates that Pembroke's work allows the poetess to "relive her pain [and] to increase it. She imagines her grief doubling and multiplying" through "tropes of repetition, echo, and legacy," such as the way in which the natural world echoes / repeats the speaker's grief, as do Clorinda's fellow shepherdesses (34). Such "tropes of repetition" and the ways in which the poem reflects the repetition of grief also point toward how a writer may re-consume their own expelled, tearful melancholy during revision. The poem thus comments simultaneously upon its initial production and its own need to be revised, even as this revision causes the writer pain.⁷⁹

It is also worth noting how melancholy is reflected and doubled in the image of woods, hills, and rivers in performative manners that overtly tap into scripts for melancholic experience. Again, as a Galenic fluid in a humoral paradigm, melancholy as black bile was associated with both dryness and the element earth. The woods and hills certainly signal the earth, dry and barren and overwrought with melancholy without the poetic voice of Astrophel / Sidney. The river itself is more complex, and can perhaps be more clearly understood—particularly in its performative aspects—in relation to one of Shakespeare's plays, *As You Like It*. In Act II, Scene i, the First and Second Lords report of Jacques's behavior to the banished Duke Senior:

FIRST LORD: Indeed, my lord,
The melancholy Jacques grieves at [killing deer],
And in that kind swears you do more usurp
Than doth your brother that hath banished you.

⁷⁹ I sympathize with this feeling of revision-induced pain.

Today my lord of Amiens and myself
Did steal along behind him as he lay along
Under an oak, whose antic root peeps out
Upon the brook that brawls along this wood,
To the which place a poor sequestered stag
That from the hunter's aim had ta'en hurt
Did come to languish. And indeed, my lord,
The wretched animal heaved forth such groans
That their discharge did stretch his leathern coat
Almost to bursting, and the big round tears
Coursed one another down his innocent nose
In piteous chase. And thus the hairy fool,
Much marked of the melancholy Jacques,
Stood on th'extremest verge of the swift brook,
Augmenting it with tears.

...

DUKE SENIOR: And did you leave him in this contemplation?

SECOND LORD: We did, my lord, weeping and commenting
Upon the sobbing deer.

In this performative narration of melancholic crying, Jacques suffers from a kind of melancholy typified in scholars, who in their intellectual pursuits become overwrought with black bile. Jacques's identification with and metaphorizing of the deer speaks to this kind of intellectual work, a "contemplation," as Duke Senior calls it, which leaves Jacques working with heavy-

handed meaning making. Shakespeare is a skilled enough writer to have no need to be so incredibly direct with his reader, and thus we can conclude that this linkage is so heavy handed *because* of Jacques's own performed melancholic intellectualism. He seems to have taken this melancholic intellectualism to such extremes that he now even finds the necessary hunting conducted by Duke Senior and his followers as worse than how Duke Fredrick "usurp[ed]" the place of his brother Senior.

Yet what is perhaps most interesting in this passage from *As You Like It*, at least in relation to "The Dolefull Lay," is the enfolded image of the Jacques-deer-river triad. Jacques, in his "weeping," is linked to the "sobbing deer," who has "from the hunter's aim...ta'en hurt." Blood—perhaps even the image of "hart tears" from "Angell Spirit," here punned upon in the doubling of hart / heart—is linked to tears, which in the fungibility of liquids of the early modern humoral paradigm makes these liquids analogous. The deer may literally be "sobbing" "big round tears" as it "heaved forth such groans" from its injuries, but as explored previously, blood itself signifies crying in the similitude that links all bodily expulsions and fluids.⁸⁰ In sympathizing with this crying, bleeding deer, the "melancholy" Jacques aligns himself with the animal, which in bleeding and crying along "th'extremest verge of the swift brook, / Augmenting it with tears" is only compounding its melancholy by expelling fluid needed in the dry, cold state elicited by too much black bile in the blood. Jacques similarly engages in actions that only exacerbate his melancholic state as he cries along with the deer, feeding into his scholarly melancholy by metaphorizing it. Jacques' body and that of the deer are then both seeping fluids like the running water of the "swift brook." Simultaneously, however, bodies and brook exist in opposition: the microcosmic individual bodies of human and deer are made overly dry while the

⁸⁰ Or, as Hodgson notes of Aristotelian thought, "tears are the blood of the soul" (9).

macrocosmic, natural world becomes wetter. A disruption in the interior little world of man—or deer—is performatively shown to cause disruptions in a larger, exterior world.

Pembroke's "The Dolefull Lay" makes use of these same disrupted micro / macro connections to explore how the poem's own river becomes "desolate": its bed is dry, for it has so thoroughly exhausted its liquidity in weeping / flowing that it is now barren. This idea of over- and then underproduction of liquidity reads as a kind of performance, an exaggeration taken to underscore the writer's grief in a manner accessible to readers. And, in both *As You Like It* and "The Dolefull Lay," inner and outer states mesh to fully encapsulate this grief. Or, as Elaine V. Beilin writes, Pembroke as the shepherdess "Clorinda is forced to confront herself and her landscape. Through the description of a 'desolate' pastoral world, she presents a cleareyed [sic] vision of fallen nature, now clarified for her by the immediate presence of death" (138). Such inner and outer states as self and landscape, as Plumwood's work has demonstrated, exist along a spectrum of continuity until speaker, natural world, and poem / text are all consumed in the dry and barren black bile of melancholy. It is from this dry, barren earthly image that, nonetheless, the poem itself comes into existence as an entity performatively relating feminine grief.

It is perhaps also interesting to note that while Jacques is the most overtly melancholic character of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, other characters are tinged by the humoral condition as well. Indeed, what Burton describes as love melancholy is brought to life in the figures of Orlando and Rosalind. This love melancholy sends Orlando scribbling his love sonnets upon trees and leaves Rosalind as a cross dressing figure, only able to be close to the man she loves because she has coded herself as male within the confines of The Forest of Ardenne. When understood in relation to Wall's argument on gender in the literary marketplace in early modern

England, Rosalind queers her gender, becoming temporarily “masculine” to be “published,” or to make herself known beyond the domestic sphere. Indeed, if we put aside for the moment that a boy actor was portraying a young woman who then portrays a young man and immerse ourselves in the fiction of the play, then in Rosalind we see a feminine figure who uses melancholic longing for a male figure to narrate herself, to temporarily become male and gallivant as she pleases within the confines of the wood. Through gendered performance she gains, like Pembroke through form and content, access to masculine authority to speak and construct herself. Similarly, in both “Angell Spirit” and “The Dolefull Lay,” Pembroke uses melancholic longing for a male figure as a kind of authorial performance to narrate her own melancholic grief and encapsulate it in the very ink she writes onto the page. Through melancholic grief, she crafts herself as “a [wo]Man in print” (Wall *Imprint* 1).⁸¹

Mary Wroth and Lovelorn Melancholy

Mary Wroth’s *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* is a sonnet sequence appended to *The Countess of Montgomerie’s Urania*, and it continues the love story between title characters Pamphilia and Amphilanthus, or Wroth and Henry Herbert, first written about in *Urania*. As noted previously, *Urania* and the attached sonnet sequence—which circulated amongst Wroth’s friends in manuscript form before publication—made it into print only to receive harsh criticism from those like Lord Denny. In their myriad types, sonnets contain 14 lines, iambic pentameter, and a strict, repetitive ending rhyme scheme. In the case of Petrarchan / Italian sonnets, the first stanza is an octave (eight lines) followed by a sestet (6 lines), while Shakespearean / English sonnets contain three quatrains (stanzas of four lines) and a closing couplet (a stanza of two

⁸¹ This quotation originates in Thomas Dekker’s opening address “To the Reader” from *The Gull’s Hornbook* (1609, p. 3).

lines). Sonnets often contain a *volta*, or turn, about midway through the text at line 9. This poetic form typically featured a love stricken male lover pining after an unreachable female beloved. By contrast, Wroth's sequence is a reversal of the traditional gender roles often deployed by sonnets, instead casting the lady as the lover and her beloved as an unobtainable man of the English court. Indeed, the sequence is an innovative and carefully structured set of poems which, even when it occasionally transitions into song, is always thematically focused on the female lover's inward expression of woeful love. In her editorial framing of her edition of the poems, Josephine A. Roberts contends that Wroth's sequence is identifiable structurally as "belong[ing] to the Petrarchan tradition," with Wroth positioned in the role of "Sir Philip Sidney's successor" (41). Composed of eighty-three sonnets and twenty songs, *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* is "carefully arranged in four distinct, yet interrelated, sections" (44). The text highlights how Wroth works within established convention only to meaningfully break it in alternative performances of gendered expressions of love. Indeed, playing within and then breaking convention characterized much of Wroth's life.

Throughout *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, melancholy exists in a variety of images and forms, some seemingly contradictory: as water, as fire, as night, as grief, as longing and frustration, as jealousy, as thwarted hope, and as authorial inspiration. Perhaps using a commonplace or inspired by the work of her aunt the Countess of Pembroke, Wroth also makes use of a bleeding heart to express her melancholic state. Sonnet 36 [P41] of the first section of the sequence begins,

How well poore hart thou witness canst I love,
How oft my grief hath made thee shed for teares
Drops of thy deerest blood, and how oft feares

Borne testimony of the paines I prove (lines 1-4).⁸²

Here, Wroth evokes the image of “hart’s blood” that I identified in Pembroke’s elegies and Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, which allows her to explore how melancholy is caused by love: “How well poore hart thou witness canst I love.” This painful love elicits “my grief,” which causes the heart to “shed...teares / Drops of thy deerest blood”—another pun on hart / deer in relation to melancholy. Again, we experience an image of purgation in the heart shedding its blood which does not aid the restoration of internal humoral balance, but only compounds it, leaving the speaker dryer and hence more melancholic. And, as in the case of both Jacques and Pembroke’s persona, these bloody tears mirror literal tears spilling down the face of the speaker,⁸³ for later lines indicate they are “Borne testimony of the paines I prove,” while “Joy” is “tortur’d...with racks” (lines 3, 5). “Racks” here conjures an image of a rack upon which a body is tortured, but also signifies the wracking of the body during heaving tears. In this sonnet, the speaker of the collection performs her melancholic state as an overly leaking body, feminine both in the author / speaker’s gender and her extreme and unstoppable liquidity. Tears and blood trickle down the body as letters, syllables, and words trickle into lines and stanzas. Wroth mirrors this liquid flowing via her punctuation, which contains only two full stops—at the end of the poem (line fourteen) and at the end of line twelve—but is otherwise marked by enjambment and the slight pauses of commas. Despite these painful melancholic expulsions, the sonnet’s final couplet ends with the speaker shoring up her own sense of superiority in love: “For know more

⁸² This and all subsequent quotations from *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* come from the Louisiana UP, 1983 edition of the text, edited by Josephine A. Roberts.

⁸³ In this example, we also can consider tears onstage versus tears as represented textually upon the page. If both are performative—tears, in this case, used by Wroth as a way to justify her written work as worthy of being published and read—then the tears of Jacques and Wroth’s persona both represent the fake within the real.

passion in my hart doth move / Then in a million that make show of love” (lines 13-14).

Melancholy may cause tears and her heart to bleed, but the speaker seems to *revel* in this excessive, and excremental, liquid expulsion. These lines also depict knowledge of how she is read even as she grieves, suggesting a carefully staged and performed inner state is made available to readers.

Such revelry is continually replicated in the sequence through imagery of water, which appears across multiple sonnets. For instance, in sonnet 6 of the third section of the sequence [P68], the speaker likens her “paine,” or the melancholy she experiences in her state of woeful love, “to a ship, on Goodwines cast by wind / The more she strives, more deepe in sand is prest / Till she bee lost” (lines 1, 5-7). The image of a ship cast upon the shore demonstrates liquidity that is just out of reach but within sight. Love is enfolded within this image of water, for the speaker herself is described as “Sunk, and devour’d, and swallow’d by unrest, / Lost, shipwrackt, spoul’d, debar’d of smallest hope / Nothing of pleasure left” (lines 8-10). This is a bleak state indeed, but one that also reiterates the point made by the speaker at the end of sonnet 36 [P41]: that to love may be to be filled up with—and then emptied out of—liquid melancholy. She nonetheless wishes to be awash in this humoral state, for it means that she has access to her feelings of love and desire—and hopefully, to the beloved himself. By contrast, in the image of the ship trapped upon the sand in sonnet 6 of the third sequence, the speaker is stranded, able only to stare out at the vast ocean that represents both her melancholy and her love. Perhaps she is trapped in this state because she has shed so many tears, the salt of the ocean a mirror of the body’s expulsion of salty tears. If so, then it seems that no liquid remains within the speaker; all has become external, a giant, moving body of water which has left her stranded, and which she must unwillingly face. In depicting her love melancholy in this manner, Wroth writes her

experience within an important early modern literary convention: one of “amatory loss,” which “makes especially visible the two key features of theories of the passions—the external ‘non-natural’ cause and the literal fluidity of this passion’s expression through tears...[this] became an important site for debate over, and exploration of, the ‘affective environment’ in which human feeling exists” (Hodgson 75). The warning here, then, may be that to revel too much in love will leave one physically and emotionally trapped—particularly within an imbalanced (and gendered) body.

This ocean of tears is in contrast with the fresh, flowing waters of the spring which forms the central metaphor of sonnet 44 [P51] of the sequence’s first section. Its first two stanzas read:

How fast thou hast’st (O spring) with sweetest speed

To catch thy waters which befor are runn,

And of the greater rivers wellcom run,

‘Ere thes thy new borne streames thes places feed,

Yett you doe well least staying heere might breed

Dangerous fluds your sweetest banks t’orerunne,

And yett much better my distress to shunn

Which makes my teares your swiftest course succeed.

This sonnet, which reads initially as the speaker’s commentary upon the coursing waters of a spring, is more comprehensible as melancholic when the “spring” is transformed into the “beloved” Amphilanthus. Biographically, the poem relates the beloved William Herbert / Amphilanthus / spring’s quick departure from the lover Wroth / Pamphilia. Indeed, the beloved / spring moves “fast” and “hast’st...with sweetest speed” to capture waters that have flowed ahead

of him. This is so he may join with “the greater rivers” who “wellcom” his return, and avoid the “Dangerous fluds your sweetest banks t’orerunne” that “staying here might breed.” This poem likely relates Herbert’s departure from Wroth to return to the royal court—which he was eventually invited back into, but she was not. The “Dangerous fluds” he avoids, then, “might breed” because of his association with Wroth, a relative social outcast: “You fly my ills which now my selfe outgoe” (line 10). By leaving, the Herbert / Amphilanthus / spring can also avoid Wroth / Pamphilia’s desire, may “shunn” her “distress,” his travel flowing away from “my teares,” which his “swiftest course succeed.” Simultaneously, the Herbert / Amphilanthus / spring avoids both the pollution that arises from associating with an outcast of the court, just as his spring’s fresh waters seek to avoid the salty pollution of the lover’s tears. Yet the speaker’s tears are also represented by the spring. Their potential for pollution is exacerbated because these salty tears threaten to flow continuously, for the beloved has always only just arrived before being carried away again, an action replicated over and over in the relationship. Thus the speaker is always crying, always pained, always melancholy, “soe o’recharg’d my lyfe blood wasteth quite” (line 12). And, because she is continuously in this state of absence from the beloved, the speaker is also presumably always attempting to purge and capture her melancholic distress in her writing.⁸⁴ But while the waters of the spring and written lines may continuously flow, the speaker herself appears trapped again—like the ship stranded upon the sand of sonnet 6 of the third sequence [P68]—by the very liquid melancholy of her lovelorn circumstances and ideas concerning her gender. A lingering sense of frustrated envy then arises in the poem; Pamphilia, as female lover, must remain away from the court for birthing “thy new borne streames” (line 4),

⁸⁴ On this subject, Naomi Miller finds that “Wroth’s speaker uses her male lover’s absence to empower her own lyric voice” (87).

or Amphilanthus's illegitimate children, which forever stain her reputation while leaving him unscathed and able to move about freely. The beloved, or Herbert himself, is reaccepted back into the court while Wroth exists as a social pariah, feeling as if she is the only one truly steadfast and constant in the relationship.

This idea of envy also rings true if we choose to return and read the poem more literally. The speaker is also envious of the waters of the literal spring to move or change—an action which prior poems show the speaker to be incapable of doing, either physically or emotionally. This movement allows the spring to avoid distress and flooding, its waters moving because that is what it is natural for a spring to do. For the waters of the spring to flow is joy; for the waters—the tears—of the speaker to flow is a sign of her distress at the leave-taking of the beloved. This idea of the spring joyfully flowing is mirrored by the very construction of the poem. Much like sonnet 36 [P41], end stops occur at lines 12 and 14. However, sonnet 44 [P51] makes less use of enjambment, instead slightly arrested, or paused, by the writer's frequent use of commas at the end of lines. As the enjambment of sonnet 36 [P41] mirrored the continuous flowing of blood and tears, the slight pauses sonnet 44 [P51] makes use of through frequent commas allows the sonnet's rhythm to move more like a spring: speeding up as it momentarily bubbles to the surface before returning belowground in a lull.

Yet readers are again left with a sense of joy even at this water drenched distress; this joy exists both in the ability to love and performatively render this love in writing. Such emotion arises in the closing couplet of the sonnet, where the "Sweet spring" is told to "keepe [its] way," or to never be arrested, like the speaker or by "ill days, or griefs assunder rent" (lines 13-14). If the spring is the speaker's tears, then in telling the water body to "keepe your way," the speaker embraces her own abandonment by the beloved, which causes her to flow with tears. The

speaker then appears joyful in the beloved's ability to come and go, and even revels in the melancholy this movement thrusts upon her. No wonder, then, that she begins an earlier poem in the sequence by wondering, "Am I thus conquered?" (sonnet 14 [P16], line 1). Said differently, Pamphilia seems to be amazed at how she is "conquered" in love by Amphilanthus in manners that leave her both woeful and joyful at her position as a steadfast lover.

In fact, the entirety of the sonnet sequence is concerned with this very notion: that the lover is conquered by the beloved, and as a result, is trapped in a continuously melancholic state that only compounds itself. This idea of entrapment is literalized by Wroth in her use of a corona of sonnets dedicated to Cupid in the middle of the sequence. This corona is characterized by the image of a labyrinth that the speaker unsuccessfully attempts to navigate; to emphasize this sensation, the corona both ends and begins with the line, "In this strang labourinth how shall I turne?" For Jennifer Munroe, this labyrinth functions as a garden space—because, as she notes, labyrinths in the period often formed part of the structure of early modern gardens—and therefore as "a metaphor for Pamphilia's wandering within spaces that leave her feeling trapped yet within which she exercises mobility and articulates desire." The labyrinth, aligned with femininity, then "works as the most material, spatial representation of Wroth's search for an alternative space for women" (43)—a space performatively rendered by Wroth in a gender-reversed sonnet sequence. But the labyrinth structure also reflects the veins of the body through which melancholy travels, leaving the speaker perplexed and distraught at the state of her own physicality and emotionality. If so, then garden labyrinth and female human body collapse into one image, with Pamphilia trapped both externally and internally within her own melancholic state.

Consequently, this fact is why the speaker of the corona at first struggles against the wiles of Cupid before realizing this struggle is in vain, for it is too precisely located within her own singular experience as lover, as Wroth, and most importantly, as woman writer. Thus, the speaker determines that this corona, or “Crowne of Sonetts,” is intended as “a crowne unto [Cupid’s] endless prayse / Which shall thy glory, and thy greatness raise / More then the poore things could thy honor spite” (sonnet unnumbered [P76], lines 12-14). Like the sonneteers before her, Wroth overtly addresses the act of her own writing here, which had previously cursed Cupid and now will lend him praise. Writing is directly acknowledged by the speaker as a form of complaint and lamentation, performed as a carefully crafted method of speaking to, and traversing throughout, her humoral condition of melancholy, which is brought on by painful love. If we take the title of the sonnet sequence literally in this context—*Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*—then, via the use of “to,” we can see these sonnets as a kind of love letter, seeking to express that which cannot be expressed to the beloved otherwise. The act of writing serves as the source of emotion in the poem, the mode by which the lover’s love melancholy is represented and narrated to herself and others. This act of poetic outpouring is also, as writing is for Burton, a purging—or expulsion—of the poet’s interior state of melancholy onto the page in both intellectual and material, because textual, form.

The idea that the sequence is concerned with writing is further clarified in conceptualizing how writing metaphorically functions as expression and release of love melancholy—a purgative action, performed much like bloodletting and in line with Burton’s own understanding of his need to write. We might then say that the sonnet sequence explores how writing about melancholy is a necessary evil—both needed and painful—for a lover such as Wroth, a female sonneteer. Notably, Hodgson concludes that throughout *Urania*, to which

Pamphilia to Amphilanthus is appended, Wroth employs the “technique of making the sonnet itself the manifestation of grief” (81), or of making lines out of tears, pressed into the page in black ink that again mirrors a black humor. Angela Bullard concurs, adding that adopting / performing a melancholy persona also lends Wroth credibility in the male-dominated literary world of the early modern period (81).⁸⁵ As Wall has warned, female authors publishing their own texts is a compounding of whorish literary production, perhaps even the product of madness and / or hysteria, as women were said to lack the genius necessary for true literary achievement (Bullard 87). It is therefore no wonder that the entire sequence is bracketed by poems that are the writer’s own musings on the act of writing about her melancholy from her gendered position as a woman.

This anxiety about gendered self-authorizing is taken up early in the collection in Sonnet 8 of the sequence’s first section, highlighting that love melancholy becomes the very reason for writing: “Led by the powre of grieffe, to waylings brought / ...I seeke for some smale ease by lines” (lines 1, 3). This notion is essentially a rephrasing of Burton’s own contention that “I write of Melancholy, by being busie to avoid Melancholy.” But for the speaker of Sonnet 8 of the first section, writing does not cure her grief, but compounds it, for her “lines” only “Increase the paine; grieffe is nott cur’d by art” (line 4). Melancholy leads the speaker to write, but during the act of writing, she realizes that she is not curing her melancholy, but compounding it. While Aurelie Griffin has persuasively argued that Wroth’s use of the sonnet form “explores [the] capacity to cure melancholy by expressing it” (122), the overwhelming presence of melancholy

⁸⁵ Specifically, Bullard argues that Wroth taps into genial melancholy, which is first described from the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Problems* XXX. In utilizing this melancholic tradition, Wroth “challenges early modern perceptions of women’s emotional constitution that consistently venerated male-experienced melancholy over female-experienced melancholy and denied women a claim to the emotional constancy necessary for artistic production” (82).

throughout the sequence seems to work against this notion.⁸⁶ Eventually, Griffin comes to this conclusion too, stating, “Writing fails to cure melancholy,” even as “embracing the fundamental imbalance of melancholy [allows Wroth to] find[] her own poetic voice” (132). As each word, line, stanza, and poem is infused with melancholy, the speaker not only realizes that she has purged via writing, but also realizes that in capturing her melancholy within the formal conventions of sonnets, she has bottled it, always re-presenting it to herself in a manner that—in a gesture toward the re-reading necessary in the editing process—only reminds her of her own love melancholy, and thus exacerbates her woeful condition further. Subsequently, Wroth’s writing makes her relive her lovelorn circumstances repeatedly, for writing is “an unkindness” that causes her already agitated inner humors to “move within the hart” (line 5). While writing and revising, the speaker is reminded that unlike Amphilanthus / Herbert, she has remained static physically and emotionally, “true, and free from changing thought,” and therefore her writing “breeds” “unknowne woe,” causing only further expulsion in the form of “ceaseles tears” (lines 5-8). Here, Wroth presents us with an image of the tortured artist, writing and rewriting and rereading, and in so doing, both expelling her melancholy and torturing herself with it as her writing reminds, and compounds, until she leaks with melancholic tears. Again, as in the case of Pembroke, for Wroth melancholy begets *more* melancholy and, as expelled product, more fruitless writing.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ As does Burton’s text in describing his attempts to write as an “Antidote” to his imbalanced humoral complexion. After all, each edition of the *Anatomy* was increasingly longer as Burton’s revisions added, rather than clarified or deleted, text.

⁸⁷ With Wall’s argument concerning the gendered dynamics of print in mind, we may then ask if writers are less likely to experience melancholy after publication. The continuous expansion of Burton’s *Anatomy* tells us the answer is no, and the criticism Wroth faced for publication of her own internal experience of melancholy indicates that for women writers, this expression of female liquidity and excrement can potentially render women writers and their texts excessively whorish.

Nonetheless, the speaker resolves that she still “triumph may,” for her love—and poems—may yet “allay” her circumstances (lines 13-14). But I find this too neat an ending for a sonnet that is so bleak, so overrun with fruitlessness, and so caught up in its own composition. This ending reads as trite, tacked onto a poem that otherwise would have no ending. Perhaps this sensation is intentional, Wroth’s own tongue-in-cheek method of pointing toward the futile effort of writing to express and expel melancholy when composition leaves her awash in tears, trapped again in a saltwater prison and bemoaning the easy flows of a spring. Or perhaps it is a necessary ending at a time when, as Paula Payne Harms indicates, the silencing of women was culturally and socially widespread. For Harms, Wroth continually keeps a male audience in mind while writing, frequently “altering the traditional voice of the poet to prove her chastity and obedience as a Renaissance woman” (210). While I would argue that Pamphilia’s constancy—a representation of “chastity and obedience”—is less Wroth’s alteration for a male audience and more of a staple of her character in love, I nonetheless agree with Harms’ conclusion that the silencing of women in the period afforded Wroth the means and the “power to speak” (210) in a form and on a subject from which they were often excluded. Naomi Miller elaborates: through Petrarchan sonnet form, “Wroth finds a voice in sexual difference itself, or in a re-gendering of the tension between lover and beloved” (155). Wroth thus upsets the phallogocentric tradition of Petrarchanism and centers on the significance of female expression—and expulsion—of emotion through writing.

Consequently, Wroth’s poems are both an interrogation of Petrarchan masculinity as often represented by sonnet sequences and an exploration of the pain elicited by attempting to express melancholic feelings via expulsive writing. Therefore, sonnet 8 of the first section leaves all subsequent sonnets and songs of the sequence to be read in this light, highlighting the female

writer's own compositional desperation and futility, and her own uniquely gendered experience of melancholy. Writing-as-melancholy is the "Antidote," in Burton's words, to the distress the speaker experiences, even if the act of writing out this distress is itself distressing. Indeed, in her examination of Wroth's *Urania*, Sylvia Bowerbank argues that the prose text is continuously characterized by "melancholic interminglings and interdwellings of woman in nature" (33)—present too in *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* in the images of labyrinth, ocean, spring, and more. Bowerbank thus concludes that Wroth's text is the gendered inverse of Burton's *Anatomy*, wherein "*Urania* is a woman's radical anatomy of melancholy" (34). I would argue, then, that just as Burton narrates his own condition and self via excremental expulsion, so does Wroth. The sonnets—and earlier prose text—highlight the female writer's own compositional desperation and futility, her own uniquely gendered experience of melancholy in her given situation.⁸⁸ Subsequently, the corona then spreads outward from the sequence's center; the sequence itself becomes a "strange labourinth" flooded with tears and black bile.

It therefore makes perfect sense that Wroth has arranged her sequence so that her last sonnet [P103] muses upon writing about love melancholy. Yet the sonnet's tone immediately appears different from what she had previously expressed, semi-satisfied instead of outright grief-ridden:

My muse now hapy, lay thy selfe to rest,
Sleepe in the quiett of a faithfull love,
Write you noe more, butt lett thes phant'sies move

⁸⁸ By contrast, Rosalind Smith finds that "Wroth is participating in a genre that is not everywhere coded as male, and in a wider lyric tradition offering a range of precedents for women's construction of a specifically female subjectivity" (86). Smith argues that Wroth uses gender as a means by which to offer political and religious interrogations of her culture and society.

Some other harts, wake nott to new unrest (lines 1-4).

What's most immediately striking in this poem is who the speaker addresses with her words: her own self. She orders her "muse" to "lay thy selfe to rest," content that the proceeding sonnets prove she is "faithfull [in] love." This idea indicates the very reason for the speaker, Pamphilia, to have taken up the task of writing the sequence in the first place: to narrate—or performatively render—her condition and to express her own love and heartache, like so many sonneteers before her. Now she has reached an ending, commanding herself and her muse to "Write you noe more," and instead let what she has written, "thes phant'sies," "move / Some other harts."

Further, she imagines that her own melancholic and poetic outpourings may inspire others to write when she notes, "Leave the discourse of Venus, and her sunn / To young beeginers, and theyr brains inspire / With storys of great love" (lines 9-11).⁸⁹ Melancholy here traverses a circular liquid path again: it is both the reason and the product of writing, and compounds itself to elicit the creation of yet more and more writing that also expresses love melancholy.

Melancholy is in this sense a source of overwhelming replication, like reproduction run amok; Griffin notes this idea as well about this final poem, for she finds that it expresses how "poetic measure has proved unable to contain melancholic excess" (126). Writing and melancholy threaten to collapse into one another, but are held in opposition by the intervening hand—and body—of the writer, who can choose whether or not to expel her humoral liquids through text: "And thus leave off," the speaker commands herself in the final couplet (line 13).

⁸⁹ In her reading of these lines, Leila Watkins also sees Wroth as encouraging others to take up the task of writing of their own frustrated desires (160-161). For Watkins, the sequence is less about how the sequence merely adds a gender complication, and more about how Wroth's text seeks to "develop[] the genre's potential to extend consolation to a larger community of readers who also suffer from erotic disappointment or frustration" (141). Thus for Watkins, Wroth's sequence does not focus on the gendered dimensions of love, but on the shared suffering of lovers across gender.

If this poem is the sequence's final expulsion of melancholy, then it is also significant that this ending is where the speaker signs her own name, commanding herself, "Now lett your constancy your honour prove, / Pamphilia" (line 14). The dangling "Pamphilia" here is not only a kind of signature at the end of the letter—imagine her sealing and addressing the sequence to Amphilanthus—but is also an assertion of self. If these poems are melancholy in written form, then to sign her name at the end is both for Pamphilia to sign herself into the page via expelled black bile / black ink, and to claim an assertion of the self in the face of this excremental deluge.⁹⁰ Love melancholy and tears may have prompted Pamphilia to write, but at the end, her purge is semi-successful, for it leads to a presentation of the self and a performance of the internal in the face of overwhelming humoral and excremental waste. It is Pamphilia's emotional experience that matters at the end of the sonnet sequence—her "constancy" in love, which her "honour prove[s]"—not the body or being of a continually elided or inconstant beloved. Said differently, Pamphilia's own melancholic emotional experience forms the core of her reason for writing, not desire for an absent male body.⁹¹ Instead, *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* is consciously centered around female emotional experience and its expulsive literary expression.

Conclusion: "In this strang labourinth how shall I turne?"

Throughout *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, the speaker is afflicted by what Burton specifically details in the third partition of the *Anatomy* as love melancholy; Pamphilia's constant love for an inconstant beloved is what elicits black bile in her humoral complexion. By contrast,

⁹⁰ Hodgson notes that "In the process" of writing and working through the sonnets, "the lover and the beloved both appear and dissolve, and...they do not entirely re-form" (77). I agree with Hodgson that the beloved dissolves, but this final sonnet—and the intensely internal nature of the sequence of a whole—instead demonstrates a centering of the female sonneteering self.

⁹¹ As Griffin puts it, the absence of the male beloved offers a "change of perspective" that focuses on the female lover, and thus "enables Wroth to focus exclusively on her persona's feelings, and as such, to offer an extremely detailed study of melancholy in her poems" (122).

the speaker of Mary Sidney Herbert's poems is afflicted by melancholy that has arisen from loss and subsequent grief. Both female authors and their speakers mourn, but their type of melancholy determines the genre in which they have chosen to compose: for the lover, sonnets, and for the griever, elegies. Nonetheless, both female authors are confined by the social expectations of their gender, and how, as Wall details, this tied into manuscript and print culture. Both women dared to circulate their texts as manuscripts and to (uncertainly, in Wroth's case) publish; their texts not only threatened to become loose, whorish women, but so too did their authors. It is as if the patriarchal culture of the early modern period not only feared the mass availability the printing press would allow, but also feared that mass availability would trickle into the very heart of a culture bent on the silencing exploitation of female bodies. To allow a text to circulate threatened to allow female bodies agency in circulation, and to allow female authors to narrate their own experiences outside the strictures of patriarchal expectations. They would move from solid, containable forms to whores, leaking at mouth, at eyes, at vagina, at anus, at urethra. Similarly, printed texts by women opened the body for the masses to peer in upon these inner, private leakings. Best to keep women, and their authorial voices, as silent as possible.

Clearly, neither woman writer I have examined here was very good at being silent; instead, both writers utilize the performative capabilities of themselves as poets through their careful manipulation of early modern cultural and literary expectations for women. There is, as noted intermittently above, a kind of theatricality about their work: the stage is carefully set to feed into an audience's expectations, even as the players subtly move and speak in ways that test the limits of early modern authorship. This cannot be a coincidence in an Elizabethan, and then Jacobean, culture that was suffused with the idea of the theater. Indeed, in the early modern

period, theater took on new dimensions as it moved from the courtyards of inns to individual playhouses and acting companies competed for audiences. New plays were written and performed with a kind of fervent vigor, and playgoers eagerly paid their fare to watch London's premier form of entertainment. Even kings and queens could not get enough of the plays; Elizabeth I and James I both had dramas acted before them and their courts. This was the era of Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, Elizabeth Cary, Thomas Middleton, Ben Jonson, and many more besides. Pembroke herself translated Robert Garnier's French play *Marc-Antoine* into the English *Antonius*, and Wroth wrote her own original play *Love's Victory*. And, during her time at James I's court, we know Wroth acted in Ben Jonson's *Masque of Blackness* when it was performed before the English king and queen. It would have been natural for Pembroke and Wroth to consider the performative and theatrical aspects of their texts and themselves as writers—how would their work circulate, what kind of cultural capital would they tap into, how would they authorize themselves like a player intoning a dramatic monologue? Their method is essentially the same: embrace the power of the leaking, excremental female text through performances of tearful melancholy.

In fact, I contend that Pembroke and Wroth both *must* embrace the inherent excremental leakiness of a female-authored text in a paradigm of patriarchal manuscript and print culture in order to gain an audience and legitimize their authorship. Pembroke and Wroth present themselves as continuously weeping and flowing bodies. Their texts, written with and therefore endowed with melancholy, are the product of this leakage. Rather than remain silent, both Pembroke and Wroth give their speakers license to weep and leak in their texts. Indeed, as I have examined at length above, to even write of their melancholy in light of Burton's *Anatomy* is to both write with their seepages and offer these liquid parts of themselves for readers'

inspection and consumption. For Pembroke, this textual and excremental expulsion of melancholy is successful; for Wroth, it is damning.

CHAPTER 3: Excremental Pollution: Hell, Smoke, and a Whorish London in John Evelyn's
Fumifugium

“We are *conspiring*—literally, breathing together—and to contemplate this fact can dramatically change our lives to reveal new ways that human others and nonhuman otherness are woven into the very elemental conditions of our existence.” –David Macauley, *Elemental Philosophy*, p. 26

Introduction: Milton's Hell and Evelyn's London

In Chapter 1 I explored excrement as a feminine material that threatens the wholeness of Christian masculinity in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, Book I, and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. I relied, in part, upon the work of Martha Bayless, who argues that Hell, the anal, and the excremental were linked in the late-medieval and early modern mindset. The excremental in Spenser and Milton's works therefore functions as a kind of hellish pollutant to the body and soul, and thus the masculine subject's very self, by introducing sinful temptations into the world.

But in Book I of *Paradise Lost*, Milton describes another source of early modern pollution: mining. The scene takes place not long after the rebellious angels led by Satan have lost the Heavenly War and fallen through Chaos and into Hell:

There stood a hill not far whose grisly top
Belched fire and rolling smoke. The rest entire
Shone with a glossy scurf, undoubted sign
That in his womb was hid metallic ore,
The work of sulphur. Thither winged with speed
A num'rous brigade hastened...
Mammon led them on,
Mammon, the least erected spirit that fell
From Heav'n...By him first

Men also, and by his suggestion taught,
Ransacked the center, and with impious hands
Rifled the bowels of their mother Earth
For treasures better hid. Soon had his crew
Opened into the hill a spacious wound
And digged out ribs of gold. (lines 670-675, 678-680, and 684-690)

Here, the demon Mammon leads his compatriots in a mining project to unearth gold from Hell's soil: the "hill" whereon they dig is the site of "Belched fire and rolling smoke," tinged by the scent of "sulphur." These mining activities are then taught by Mammon to "Men also," who he instructs in how to "Rifl[e] the bowels of their mother Earth / for treasures better hid." This is a scene that would resonate with Milton's English readers, who were familiar, either through personal experience or by report, of London's air pollution problem—a direct consequence of mining. While Charles II's London was beset with smoke-filled air from the burning of sea coal rather than the search for gold, many of the details remain the same, particularly the extensive mining to search for the material and the production, when burned, of great clouds of blackish, sulfurous smelling smoke. A Londoner reading Milton's Book I need only peer through their soot-encrusted windows for a clear visual depiction of Hell.

While Milton critiqued the state of London through poetry, his contemporary John Evelyn took a different tactic in a pamphlet titled *Fumifugium; or The Inconveniencie of the Aer and Smoak of London Dissipated. Together with Some Remedies Humbly Proposed* (1661). The title page indicates that the document was "Printed by *W. Godbid* for *Gabriel Bedel*, and *Thomas Collins*, and [is] to be [s]old at their Shop at the *Middle Temple Gate* neer *Temple-Bar*" (image

1).⁹² The text was not only sold to London's citizens but was also presented, by Evelyn himself, to Charles II for perusal. When the king looked over Evelyn's work, he would have found a prose document that opens with two equally significant letters: one to Charles II, urging him to read Evelyn's work and take it under consideration, and a second, longer one "To the Reader" that explains why Evelyn believes readers should be invested in the problem he interrogates and the solutions he describes. The main body of the treatise is then broken up into three parts: the first outlines the problems of burning of sea coal, the second proposes a solution through the removal of coal burning industries from London and the planting of gardens, and the third considers the economic and health benefits of Evelyn's plan. *Fumifugium* is rather short—around forty pages total—and easily read in a single sitting, possibly to make it more palatable to Evelyn's royal audience. It was likely influenced by Evelyn's expertise in gardening, deep religious beliefs, and his work as a public servant to the English royal crown.

Evelyn would have likely seen *Fumifugium* as an extension of his service to the Stuart line, for in Marvin Mudrick's estimation, Evelyn was "a faithful and lifelong believer in royalist legitimacy." He was a dedicated public servant who worked for Charles I before the English Civil War and, after the Restoration, for the son Charles II (377). As a young man, Evelyn travelled extensively on the European continent and toured famous gardens in a multitude of countries, which fostered a long and enduring interest in gardening. As a deeply religious man, gardens also held biblical appeal for Evelyn and may explain why he, like Milton, attached

⁹² This, and all subsequent quotes from *Fumifugium*, come from a 1661 original printing of the text available through *Early English Books Online* (EEBO) and available at [http://gateway.proquest.com/authenticate.library/duq.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:image:51974](http://gateway.proquest.com/authenticate/library/duq.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:image:51974). It is because this original printing does not contain page numbers that I instead cite in-text using image numbers, which is how readers navigate the pages on *EEBO*.

mining and smoke to Hell and the cultivation of plants to Paradise. Evelyn kept exacting details of the sites he toured for his own future gardens, able to be realized when he received the estate of Sayes Court in 1652 after his marriage to Mary Browne (Willes 161-164). His most famous work, *Sylva, or a Discourse of Forest Trees and the Propagation of Timber in His Majestie's Dominions* (1664), was not only the first book licensed by the Royal Society—of which Evelyn was a founding member—but was also reprinted multiple times and was considered “an important volume to have in a propertied gentleman’s library” (118). Evelyn’s ideas on horticulture and gardening, and his own garden at Sayes Court, made him famous, attracting the attention of royalty at home and abroad (175). His expertise in horticulture was already intact by the time he published *Fumifugium*, and served as the backbone for his proposal to rid London of its hellish atmosphere.

This chapter explores Evelyn’s condemnation of sea coal pollution in *Fumifugium*, which relies upon depicting coal smoke as a befouling, foul smelling, and miasmatic pollution in ways that link it to Hell. As a result of this link, the smoke is also categorized by Evelyn as a type of excrement which, in the airscape of mid-seventeenth century London, threatens to cross bodily borders to rot from the inside out, particularly by affecting the human subject’s inner pneuma, or vital spirit, when inhaled. London is used as a vehicle to represent these effects as Evelyn describes the once great city’s descent into a polluted and polluting feminized body. Indeed, Evelyn crafts excremental smoke as a feminizing agent that, when inhaled, threatens to transform the human subject into a feminized, excremental, and Hellish entity like itself. This threat is embodied for readers through depictions of a whorish London, a sullied Duchess, and an effeminate Charles II. I read *Fumifugium* through Stacy Alaimo’s ecofeminist text *Bodily Natures* (2010), wherein she uses the term “trans-corporeality” as a method to unpack how

deeply intertwined the human and the more-than-human, material world are—or, in Evelyn’s text, how interconnected the human and more-than-human are in the London airspace. Per Alaimo, trans-corporeality attunes us to how “the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from ‘the environment’” (2). In Evelyn’s text, trans-corporeality can be used to explain how the human and more-than-human are interconnected in the environment of the London airspace. While previous chapters have explored the power and agency of the expelled, Evelyn’s depiction of London’s coal smoke demonstrates that this form of expulsive pollution is also dangerous in very real and trans-corporeal ways that threaten entire ecosystems.

Coal Contextualized

Coal was first mined in England from the port city of Newcastle-upon-Tyne during the thirteenth century (Thorsheim 3) and subsequent pollution complaints did not take long to manifest. For example, Peter Brimblecombe finds that “The earliest documented air pollution incident in England” took place at Nottingham in 1257 during the reign of Henry III, when Queen Eleanor visited Nottingham Castle and found it so smoky and foul smelling from the burning of sea coal that she left in fear of her health (*Big Smoke* 8-9). And this queenly reaction was not an outlier, for as William H. Te Brake indicates, “The smoke of sea coal fires was a general nuisance in London by the last quarter of the 13th century” (339). The general disgust toward coal amongst the population—and, perhaps more pointedly, its continued annoyance to English royalty—did inspire laws and attempts at reform: throughout the medieval period, sea coal use underwent sporadic periods of legislative limits, such as bans on burning, both residentially and commercially, during certain times or in specific areas (Brimblecombe *Big*

Smoke 14).⁹³ During the early modern period, Elizabeth I, James I, and Charles I all took mild actions against the use of sea coal (Cavert 311, Richards 236). However, James potentially inspired its usage amongst the aristocracy and wealthier classes, as “The domestic use of coal in Scotland had been common for centuries and it was used in the Jacobean Royal household” (Brimblecombe “Interest in Air Pollution” 123-124). And, since its inception, the business of coal was, and remains, a lucrative industry. Even in early modern England, it was a source of “gentry entrepreneurs[hip]” and allowed the wealthy, the monarchy, and the Church to lease out sections of their land for mining (Richards 195, 230). The money to be made in coal considerably curtailed laws and actions taken against its polluting effects.⁹⁴

All coal can be noxious, but the coal mined and burned in medieval and early modern England was particularly foul. This is in large part because England’s coal is primarily bituminous⁹⁵, meaning that when burned, it “produces toxic ash, sulphur dioxide (a key ingredient in acid rain), and the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide” (Thorsheim 5). Bituminous coal is also notorious for producing sizable clouds of smoke, which are very “black” and “abrasive” (Cavert 316). And, to make matters worse, this coal was highly sulfurous, containing anywhere between two to three times that present in coal mined today (Thomas 244, Brimblecombe

⁹³ Coal smoke’s effects were also offset with the invention of taller chimneys for homes and industry, which allowed the smoke to be carried farther upward into the atmosphere and more easily blown away by wind.

⁹⁴ Little has changed in our own contemporary battle with fossil fuel emissions.

⁹⁵ The concept of “bituminous,” while most frequently applied to coal, is also linked by Milton to Hell in *Paradise Lost*: for example, the Tower of Babel is said to be built on a “plain wherein a black bituminous gurge / Boils out from underground, the mouth of Hell” (12.41-42). According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “gurge” means a “whirlpool” (1), with Milton’s own lines used as an example from the period. Rather than airy/smoky, this bituminous substance is liquid, seeping from a bubbling wound—a pore?—in the Earth’s surface at a spot where God’s creation and Hell physically touch, or interpenetrate, one another. That this “gurge” is a whirlpool also gives movement and watery agency to the bituminous substance, as if it purposefully eats away at the Earth or attracts things of evil—like the Tower of Babylon—to its presence.

“Interest in Air Pollution” 123). Per Keith Thomas in *Man and the Natural World*, coal’s “effects were correspondingly lethal. The smoke darkened the air, ruined curtains, killed flowers and trees and corroded buildings” (244). The high sulfur content also made this coal particularly foul smelling and inspired the linkage between the smell of sulfur and representations of Hell, a commonplace by the time Evelyn and Milton wrote (Hiltner 102). It is then no wonder, as Ken Hiltner indicates, that

as the seventeenth century opened London had a serious problem with air pollution...Charles I and others soon realized [it]was not only eating away at the fabric of buildings but also killing animals and fish, causing the local extinction of entire species of plants, and according to some midcentury accounts, second only to the Plague as the leading cause of human deaths in London. (95)

Coal was not only unpleasant in sensorial and aesthetic ways, but also damaging and dangerous.

Why, then, the continued reliance upon coal throughout the medieval and early modern periods, especially if England’s population and government saw and recognized its hazards? The primary reason was the scarcity of wood and coal’s easy availability in comparison. England’s population expanded greatly from the thirteenth- to the first half of the fourteenth-centuries, and

Demands for timber and wood fuels grew proportionately with population increase, while much waste, including woodland, was reclaimed and cultivated to meet increased demands for food. If these demands were severe enough, woodland dwindled to the point where local fuel shortages developed and alternative sources of fuel were sought. (Te Brake 344)

One of these “alternative sources” was coal, which was found in “numerous, easily worked outcroppings...throughout England, Scotland, and Wales.” And, while timber and wood prices

soared exponentially, coal was “sold at prices that rose slowly and moderately,” making it a more accessible fuel source for both industry and the majority of England’s population (Richards 228, 194). But populations dipped during the fourteenth century due to food shortages and the plague outbreak of 1348-1351, which killed about a fourth of Europe’s population. In England specifically, “outbreaks of the plague in 1348-51, 1360-61, 1369, and 1374 reduced the population totals from the preplague level of over 3.7 million to 2.25 million in 1374.” The lowest population numbers were “reached sometime between 1400 and 1430 at around 2.1 million, less than 60 percent of the preplague figure” (Te Brake 353-355). This decrease in population meant that “for the first time in centuries [England] actually experienced a period of reforestation,” with wood prices falling between 1500-1550. But “by the close of the sixteenth century England’s population had nearly rebounded and was consuming its forest at a startling rate.” This resurgence caused wood costs to inflate even as sea coal prices remained relatively steady. It therefore again became more practical for businesses and citizens to return to the use of sea coal (Hiltner 97-98).

Early modern England was stuck between a rock and a hard place, reliant upon a source of fuel that for centuries had been known to cause sickness and was widely found disgusting. Or, as Hiltner tells it, for London citizens there existed a “deep, unresolved contradiction in their stance toward coal,” for they needed the cheap source of heat even as they realized “the dangers it wrought both on their health and on their glorious city / nation” (122). And the need for heat in early modern England, and specifically London, was nothing to be taken lightly. Northern Europe was caught in the grip of what is now known as the Little Ice Age from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. In England, this meant that the temperature was a few degrees colder than today, which had a profound impact on crops, mortality rates, and the need to keep warm with

any source of fuel available (Brimblecombe *Big Smoke* 23). Although at first it was the poorer inhabitants who turned to coal, the wealthy soon followed as the need for fuel pared down wood sources and aristocratic pride. The rate of consumption of sea coal grew exponentially, for “from 1575-80 it was a mere 12,000 tons, by 1651-60 it grew to 275,000, and by 1685-99 it reached a staggering 455,000 tons” (Hiltner 98). By this time London became synonymous with sulfuric coal smoke. Practicality—coal—won out, and the citizens London became trapped in a smoke-laden Hell of their own design.

An Excremental Hell

Throughout this chapter, I define coal and, when burned, the resulting smoke it releases as excremental because both coal and coal smoke signal, both culturally and in *Fumifugium*, ideas of extraction, release, and expulsion. Coal, when mined, is forcefully expelled, or removed by digging into, the earth by human actions. When burned, smoke acts as a leftover waste product—the chaotic, dirty, and stinky expulsion of coal, which itself is an expelled material. And, significantly, types of waste, both past and present, are frequently understood and depicted as pollution. Coal smoke also hits upon many of the aspects of early modern waste discussed so far, particularly as a feminine, hellish, smelly, and mobile material released by a substance that affects the larger ecologies of which it is a part.

Depictions of sensory overload, such as the aforementioned smell, are one of Evelyn’s first methods for classifying London as Hell due to coal usage. For example, *Fumifugium*’s opening letter to general readers appeals to an understanding of what individuals experience in the city daily, such as the “Clouds of Smoake and Sulphur” which are “full of Stink and Darkne[ss]e” (image 6). Evelyn argues London’s “Buildings [are] compos’d of [s]uch a Conge[s]tion of mi[s]happen and extravagant Hou[s]es,” and “the *Streets* [are] [s]o narrow and

incommodious in the very Center” (image 6) that they are unpleasant to see, difficult to traverse, and an overall inconvenience. This chaotic layout is worsened by the “trouble[s]ome and malicious...di[s]po[s]ure of the *Spouts* and *Gutters* overhead, which are particulars worthy of Reproof and Reformation; becau[s]e [the city] is hereby rendered a *Labyrinth* in its principal pa[ss]ages, and a continual Wet-day after the Storm is over” (image 6). The “Stink and Darkne[ss]” Evelyn first points to dominates the scene. London could, and indeed should, be magnificent, but its poor layout—the buildings and houses that form a “Conge[s]tion (also a reference to the way coal smoke affects breathing) and the “narrow” and “incommodious” streets, fouled by overrun “*Spouts* and *Gutters* overhead”—derails this possibility. When combined with the loathsome presence of coal smoke, the city “is hereby rendered a *Labyrinth*,” a frustrating maze of foulness from which no escape is apparent.⁹⁶ This “*Labyrinth*” also indicates a befuddling of the senses, which are overwhelmed by scents of stagnant water mixed with sulfur, the inability to see clearly through streets and smoke, the taste of sea coal with every breath, and the sense of anxiety and frustration that accompanies these sensory experiences. For Evelyn, sea coal smoke makes London an unclean, stinking cesspool and amplifies the experience of population density in the city both internally and externally.

⁹⁶ Evelyn’s choice of the word “*Labyrinth*” here is initially odd, for labyrinths were often used as key features in gardens—a fact Evelyn would have known, given his lifelong interest in gardens. Early modern gardens were carefully crafted to provide various kinds of sensorial pleasures, and the labyrinth area of the garden was no exception. But here, London as a labyrinth is clearly meant to be regarded as a negative. One possibility for the choice of “*Labyrinth*” is to see it as a careful move on Evelyn’s part to suggest London *could* be as pleasant as an English garden—and as I will go on to show, Evelyn did suggest gardens as the sensorial solution to a smoky London—but instead is a labyrinth that smothers and confuses, leaving those who travel the city’s streets lost. Rather than enjoying the sights of London, this alternative labyrinth is frightening, more evocative of Theseus and the minotaur than of a garden reminiscent of Paradise.

Notably, there was precedent for linking an overcrowded city, beset by dirt and stink, with an excremental Hell. For example, Piero Camporesi has explored how in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries the Jesuits described a kind of Baroque Hell in which all of Hell's inhabitants would be packed together into a small, stinking space in which they continually shared breath, touched and bumped into one another, and were exposed to the excremental outpourings of one another's bodies. In Camporesi's own words, this kind of Hell was an "immoral latrine" which functioned as a "punishment of the sense of smell" (70-72). This was a particularly torturous Hell for the elite, for they would have to mingle with and be contaminated by the bodies of the lower classes, unable to escape their sweltering presence (75). Importantly, such a hell was clearly representative of urban life, for it embodied "the image of a corrupted city" (77-78). This Baroque Hell—a congested city—reminds us how ideas of the demonic realm is characterized by the gross, the bodily, and the excremental.

Evelyn intentionally channels this Baroque Jesuit Hell in *Fumifugium* to illustrate the dire, polluted conditions of a smoke-laden London. Like the Jesuit Hell, London's citizens are packed so tightly they cannot avoid the foulness of one another's bodies; this is caused by the city's design and exacerbated by the coal smoke which together turn the city into a "*Labyrinth*." Further, the wetness of London, combined with the "Stink" of coal smoke, quite clearly evokes Camporesi's idea of Hell as an overcrowded space full of foul smelling bodies: anyone who walks London's streets cannot avoid the touch of befouling water or inhaling smoke. Coal smoke both stinks and compounds stink as it spreads through London's airspace; it is unavoidable, coating both the exterior and the interior of human bodies and rendering them foul. The London

Evelyn describes is therefore explicitly “the image of a corrupted city.”⁹⁷ As a microcosm for all of England, London as a “corrupted city” synonymous with Hell offers a poor representation of England’s monarchy, people, and status. London-as-Hell is then a visceral condemnation of London’s reliance upon the sea coal industry—a condemnation remembered every time one sees, smells, or breaths in the London air.

Further, early modern English peoples were also reminded of the excrementality of coal smoke through the processes of mining and coal’s sulfurous scent. As contemporary readers, we can recognize coal as a product of the decaying matter of million-year-old plants, unearthed after spending millennia underground and transformed into a fossil fuel due to the combined agencies of microorganisms, pressure, and heat. As the mixture of plant “corpses,” coal can be viewed as a type of excremental leftover of the past. While early modern miners and industries were not aware of this fact, they nonetheless would have experienced the action of digging into the ground to unearth coal as bringing them closer to that excremental Hell. And the stench of sulfur compounded this sensation of experiencing an excremental Hell. For example, Emily Friedman notes the multiple ways in which sulfur was reminiscent of both Hell and excrement: sulfur and brimstone were synonymous, used interchangeably in translations of Revelations to discuss Hell; decomposing bodies were said to give off the stench of sulfur; and in *Sensorium: A Philosophical Discourse of the Senses* (1710), Matthew Beare “frequently makes reference to sulfur and sulfurousness when discussing perceptible effluvia and their effects on the body” (101, 113, 102). Friedman argues for coal’s sulfurous scent as part of a London smellscape, or the intertwining scents which make up the experience of a physical place at a specific moment in

⁹⁷ Interestingly, Evelyn was also one of the individuals who, after the Great Fire of London in 1666, drew up plans for the city’s reconstruction. This plan likely had its origins in the reorganization of the city he imagines in *Fumifugium*, as discussed at the end of this chapter.

time (1-4). Coal's sulfurous presence in the smellscape—and therefore airscape—of London reminds Londoners of an excremental Hell. And, because coal was in great use by both households and industries alike, this stench in the smellscape would have been so overpowering—and come with such deleterious effects—that this excremental Hell was unavoidable within London, once again transforming it into a “corrupted city.”

Indeed, Evelyn finds the foul smelling smokiness of London's smellscape particularly deplorable and dangerous to health in its miasmatic properties. He is practically apoplectic:

That this Glorious and Antient City...which commands the Proud Ocean to the *Indies*, and reaches to the farthest *Antipodes*, should wrap her stately head in Clouds of Smoake and Sulfure, so full of Stink and Darkness, I deplore with just Indignation (image 6).

London's history is here evoked to incite a national pride, and thus “Indignation,” that so great a state should be sunk in cloying clouds of filth. Such clouds of smelly filth are, again, reminiscent of ideas of Hell. But once more, Evelyn carefully stresses that this is a *stinking* Hell, one in which the inhabitants are tormented by “Clouds of Smoake and Sulfure, so full of Stink and Darkness.”⁹⁸ Again, Evelyn relies on precedent, for foul smells as a threat to health is rooted in

⁹⁸ As Hiltner notes, it was a commonplace since the medieval period on to link the smell of sulfur and brimstone which accompanied the burning of sea coal to the stench of Hell, especially when “English writers wanted to depict Hell as particularly noxious and unpleasant” (102). The link between coal's sulfurous smell and Hell was made more commonplace throughout the early modern period by popular writers' reliance upon the idea. For instance, Hiltner also indicates that “Shakespeare coined the term *sulfurous* in *Hamlet* to describe the flames of Hell,” while his contemporary Edmund Spenser “embodies the Hell mouth in *The Faerie Queene* as a dragon spewing smothering sulfur smoke.” Milton also made use of the terms “brimstone,” “sulfur,” and “sulfurous” to describe Hell in *Paradise Lost* (103, 105). Early modern England's growing reliance upon coal for industrial, heating, and cooking activities only further inscribed the linkage between the sulfurous smell of coal with Hell until it became a literary trope—one which has survived into our own era.

the miasmatic theory of the period. As Emily Cockayne notes, miasma theory, which was “still informing medical knowledge” as late as 1720, was a “belief in the harmful effects of bad airs—or miasmas...It was thought that the corrupt air itself caused and spread diseases when it was breathed in...Miasmas were thought to drift up from corpses and carcasses, stagnant gutters and ditches, dunghills, privies and any other festering matter.” The way to tell if the miasma emanating from something was dangerous was based off the foulness of its scent. While “fresh air” was healthful and “an indicator of the quality of life,” London’s smoke-engulfed state exemplified how “Matter, including air...was considered to be ‘infectious’ and was supposed to cause disease” (212-215). Smoky London is therefore not only a sensorial hell but also a hell that negatively impacts the health of those who come into contact with the miasmatic properties of sea coal smoke. This impact is felt in the body and soul via pneuma, which was created when the humoral balances contained within the blood mixed with air inhaled into the lungs. This pneuma could then affect the rest of the interior health of the body (Rawcliffe 8). As a miasmatic pollutant, coal smoke is damaging to the interiority of the self, eliciting decay both physically and spiritually: through pneuma, smoke is integrated with, or made a part of, the very physical essence of a body. As the container of the soul, this physical taint effects infects the spiritual self too. Hell then becomes both a physical and spiritual reality in London.

Evelyn makes explicit that it is human greed that caused London to become so hellish. In his letter “To the Reader,” Evelyn writes that his “few Proposals” are intended “for the Meliorating and refining of the Aer of London” caused by the “sordid, and accursed Avarice of some few Particular Persons, [who] prejudice the health and felicity of so many” in their pursuit of “any Profit,” which “render[s] men regardless of what chiefly imports them.” He continues, “for it is not happine[s]s to po[ss]e[ss] Gold, but to enjoy the Effects of it, and to know how to

live cheerfully and in health” (images 5-6). Evelyn stresses that capital wealth—the profits to be made off the sea coal industry, or other industries’ reliance upon this cheaper fuel—is given precedence over the health of London’s inhabitants, an ecological argument that rings true in a contemporary sense as well, especially in relation to issues such as fracking, nuclear power and waste, and continued mining.⁹⁹ And it is specifically Evelyn’s mention of the desire to possess “Gold” that evokes the idea of London as transformed into a Hell on earth with Miltonic undertones. Indeed, Londoners are aligned with the humans Mammon has taught to “Rifle[] the bowels of their mother Earth / For treasures better hid.” Although published six years before *Paradise Lost*, *Fumifugium* participates in the Miltonic imagery of demons rifling the earth’s bowels for hidden treasures, with the various industries of London cast as demonic forces. The polluted landscape is then not only reminiscent of Hell, but Hell itself is reminiscent of the polluted landscape—of London.

In this pursuit of ever increasing amounts of coal to fuel their trades and subsequent profits, Evelyn contends that London’s industries are subjecting the entire city and every person in it to Hell. This is not just because London has been transformed into a physical location which is reminiscent of a smoky and sooty Hell, but also because every Londoner is dependent upon

⁹⁹ As has been noted by multiple readers of *Fumifugium*, Evelyn casts blame on the industries of London—brewers, dyers, lime-kilns, and many others—for the abundance of coal smoke rather than London’s citizens, although evidence suggested it was indeed residential homes that produced the most smoke. This is a significant decision, for as Hiltner explains, “What is striking about his approach to London’s air-pollution problem is that, like many modern environmentalists, Evelyn realized that casting blame away from his readers to industry was a highly effective rhetorical device” (106-107). Evelyn creates, in other words, a partial straw-man onto which the narrator and his readers alike can cast blame for their pollution predicament. This may also be why the author’s tone is both scolding and amazed; he scolds that wealth should be placed above health, and is amazed that anyone should do so, not only to themselves but also to their fellow citizens. He implies that London’s smoke is an infringement upon the health and therefore the rights of every Londoner who must breathe the city’s smoke-riddled air.

these industries for their existence. These demonic industries and the citizens who thrive because of them are tainted with soot, stained with a kind of sin; industrial demons are the tempters, and London's citizens are the sinners these industrial demons have caused to stray. The coal industry and its concomitant smoke therefore evokes Hell inside and out. As the concept of *pneuma* reminds us, the soul was considered throughout the period to be a thing made of air, and thus was, like the physical bodies (human and non-human), objects, and smoke of London, a part of the city's aircscape. As the human soul—that which should be elevated to be closer to God—encounters sea coal smoke, it also encounters Hell and the excremental, and is made more like these impurities. Per Alaimo, this is a trans-corporeal process, wherein “the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from ‘the environment’” (2)—or in the case of *Fumifugium*, London, an environment in which inhabitants are enmeshed in the city's smoky, Hellish, and excremental aircscape. Suffused in smoke, the physical body and the soul which reside within this body both decay in a mirror to the toxic disintegration of London's buildings. Hellish smoke, excremental in its alignment with Hell, remakes London into a site of anal degradation.

Indeed, Evelyn overtly indicates his reliance upon the idea that the human soul is an airy, pneumatic thing when he continues, “That men whose very Being is Aer, should not breathe it freely when they may, but...condemn themselves to this misery...is strange stupidity” (image 6). By casting humans as beings “of [the] Aer,” he ties human health to the qualities of the invisible agent which continually exits and enters to body in a manner which makes human corporeality dialogue with the exterior world. Humans are enmeshed in this ecological substance; they cannot escape it physically or spiritually, and thus for humans to infest the air with smoke from sea coal

is a “strange stupidity.” Evelyn here suggests that rather than pollute the air, humans must care for it to ensure their own physical and spiritual health.¹⁰⁰

It is useful to pause here to recall, as I have noted in other chapters, how what is deemed excremental is both feminine and multitudinous, a cesspool of continuously replicated images. In Evelyn’s *Fumifugium*, coal expels excremental smoke and sulfur, which then transform London into Hell, a place always linked to the anal and shitty; again, London in *Fumifugium* is an “immoral latrine.” Every living thing—human, plant, and animal—and even every non-living thing—buildings, clothes, curtains—which is subject to residing in a shit-laden Hell also becomes infused with, or takes on the qualities of, the excremental. Evelyn’s London is an unwashed, overflowing chamber pot, continuously creating more of itself; or, as Evelyn notes, the city’s current state means “there is nothing free from [the smoke’s] universal contamination,” which is evidenced in “the Spittle, and other excrements which proceed from [London’s inhabitants], being for the most part of a blackish and fuliginous Colour” (image 13). Expulsion replicates as excremental soot causes the human body to expel its waste products. Under early modern medical paradigms, it was the female body that was the leakiest and thus the most excrement producing, suggesting that a coal smoke infested London is a grossly feminized London. To allow London to remain so is tantamount to feminizing London in some of the most dangerous ways possible—for nation, city, monarchy, and citizens alike.

A Polluted Woman: Smoke, City, and Monarch

This project has already and often cited the links between early modern forms of excrementality and feminine bodies or experiences, in part due to its heavy reliance upon

¹⁰⁰ Evelyn’s words also indicate that clean air is invisible to the eyes even if it may be sensed, while polluted, smoke filled air is innately visible, a tainted shroud haunting London’s inhabitants.

ecofeminism as a useful theoretical framework through which to interpret such literary depictions. In Chapter 1, I explored the threat of excremental feminine beings through Spenser's Error and Duessa, and Milton's Sin. These women have the capacity to taint through their excrementality and thus to incite error and sin. They are simultaneously terrifying and titillating, that which the (male) self recognizes and desires but also shuns. In Chapter 2, I explored how Mary Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, and her niece Mary Wroth were both female writers who utilized early modern notions of writing as a melancholic—and hence excremental—purge to depict their expression of feminine mourning (both as grief and lovesickness) in their literary works. I argued that both women knowingly wrote within this excremental paradigm to authorize and legitimize their feminine experiences and selves.

In Evelyn's *Fumifugium*, it is London which is cast in such a powerful-because-tainted feminine role. I explore above how Evelyn crafts London as hellish due to sea coal smoke, but now, I wish to unpack how he does so in specifically gendered terms. Again, Evelyn writes,

That this Glorious and Antient City...which commands the Proud Ocean to the *Indies*, and reaches to the farthest *Antipodes*, should wrap her stately head in Clouds of Smoake and Sulfure, so full of Stink and Darkness, I deplore with just Indignation (image 6).

London is not just a place of buildings inhabited by individuals, but a “her,” an anthropomorphized feminine figure who is “Glorious and Antient.” She is powerful, for as England's capital and home of the monarchy, she “commands the Proud Ocean to the *Indies*, and reaches to the farthest *Antipodes*.” She should therefore be “stately” and proud, but instead has “wrap[ped]” herself “in Clouds of Smoake and Sulfure,” the excremental refuse of sea coal. As I note above, this London has transformed into a Hell on earth because of how steeped the city has

become in pollution, meaning that London as female is, like Errour, Duessa, and Sin, another excrementally tainted female figure. Like these abject women, female London is “full of Stink and Darkness,” her body a hellish temptation for men to sin by placing the desire for wealth over the health of themselves and their fellow citizens. London pollutes all she touches, for she has been transformed by the greed of those who run her coal-consuming industries into a dirty old whore. The men who own industrial ventures in London are like Johns, evacuating soot into her body in a mirror to the evacuation of semen into the body of a prostitute. But these men are also her children, as are all London’s inhabitants, continuously subjected to the horrific excrementality of the pregnant female body which retains its menses but is still a source of over-leakage at mouth and bladder.¹⁰¹ Importantly, it is both London as a collective body or entity that is feminized, and smoke that is, in polluting and dangerous manners, feminizing. In this case, all of London’s inhabitants move closer to her own gross femininity through the polluting and feminizing agent of smoke. London’s citizens, then, are doomed to mirror her in microcosmic manifestations of inward Hell, especially when we recall, as Evelyn reminds readers, how many people are afflicted with “the Spittle, and other excrements which proceed from [London’s inhabitants], being for the most part of a blackish and fuliginous Colour” (image 13).

Charles’ sister demonstrates the transformative power of an excremental female London beset by smoke, standing as an argument for the monarch’s substantive action against the use of sea coal within city limits. Throughout the text, sea coal smoke effects all bodies trans-corporeally enmeshed in the airspace of the city, but this threat to health is also represented as a threat to the very fabric of the nation-state, for once the Smoke “enters...nothing remain[s] long

¹⁰¹ See Gail Kern Paster’s discussion of Ben Jonson’s play *Bartholomew Fair* in Chapter 1 of *The Body Embarrassed*, “Leaky Vessels: The Incontinent Women of City Comedy,” pp. 23-63.

in its native Splendor and Perfection” (image 3). For both Evelyn and Charles, this invasion is embodied in Charles’s sister, “the now *Duchesse* of Orleans, who at her *Highnesse* late being in this City, did in my hearing, complain of the Effects of this Smoake both in her Breast and Lungs, whilst She was in Your Majesties Palace” (image 3). Political and physical health are embodied by Evelyn, and for Charles, in the material body of England’s princess; she stands representative of all which Charles may lose—a throne, his masculinity—if the smoke from burning sea coal continues unabated. Or, as Evelyn next states outright, the smoke’s “Evil is so *Epidemicall*; indangering as well the Health of Your Subjects, as it sullies the Glory of this Your Imperial Seat” (image 3). And, as Evelyn indicates that the threat to the Duchess’s health is manifest not only in her “Lungs” but also in her “Breast,” readers are reminded again of the body of a London-as-mother-turned-whore, or femininity—like the smoke itself—which eludes patriarchal boundaries to threaten with tainted and feminized agency.¹⁰² The effects of smoke are therefore dire, threatening the very wellness of the nation-state, the king’s subjects, the health of the royal family, and the role of the feminine in a patriarchal society. This threat is predicated upon its ability to enter and invade spaces (the royal palace) and bodies (the Duchess), to transform from the inside out, and to turn the Duchess, like London itself, into a dirty, leaking whore. In their tainted forms, both London and a smoke-addled Duchess are poor representations

¹⁰² It is also useful to consider that one entity that does not respect boundaries—unless the tightest of seals and other extreme precautions are taken—is air, and, in the case of *Fumifugium*, the sea coal smoke which pollutes this air. Boundaries are illusory, arguably an entirely human invention meant to provide a sense of security through delineation: this is where the body / self, the home, the nation, ends. In contemporary society, boundaries have become a highly charged political issue, one which includes issues of race, class, and human rights (such as the southern United States’ border with Mexico). Entities like air remind us how nonsensical the boundaries we attempt to impose truly are as they freely escape efforts at containment and exclusion.

of the kind of glory to which England long aspired, and instead only present negative images to the world. This is a negativity which a newly restored monarch cannot afford.¹⁰³

The links Evelyn's writing draws between a hellish London, a sullied Duchess, and the trouble these polluted figures represent for Charles are sketched from the text's opening in epistolary form to warn that smoke may function as a feminizing infiltrator. In this letter to King Charles II, Evelyn begins with flattery, noting that he is walking at the king's palace at "WHITE-HALL (where I have sometimes the honour to refresh myself with the Sight of Your Illustrious Presence, which is the Joy of Your Peoples hearts)." This flattery is about spectacle and sight; it is not Whitehall itself which Evelyn is privileged to behold, but the King's very person—his masculine majesty. But such an opportunity to gaze upon divine masculine royalty is immediately arrested, for Evelyn notes "a presumptuous Smoke issu[ed] from one or two Tunnels neer *Northumberland-House*, and not far from *Scotland-yard*, did so invade the Court; that all the Rooms, Galleries, and Places about it were fill'd and infested with it" (image 2). Evelyn's language is carefully crafted here in his address to his king, for the smoke he describes is an outsider that has "invade[d] the Court" and "infested" the king's rooms with its taint. Evelyn represents smoke as a politically dangerous agent, a presence that dims the splendor of the royalty of England and threatens to send them into obscurity. Indeed, Evelyn's next words are that the "Men [in the court] could hardly discern one another for the Clowd" (image 2). It is no accident that it is the "Men" who were blinded, for the smoke leaks into the court as a woman's body constantly leaks, or at least threatens to leak, into the exterior world from mouth,

¹⁰³ Or, as William M. Cavert indicates, "Clean air was desirable as an aspect of royal self-presentation rather than as an ingredient in public health or as a basic human right... Early modern England's sustained and serious initiative against urban air pollution was wedded to a politics of courtly display and hierarchy, of distinction and exclusion" (333).

from eyes, from breasts, and from vulva. In sketching this image, Evelyn also suggests that this smoke threatens the very fabric upon which the nation-state is founded; after all, what is a nation-state with a ruler who is obscured and unseen, who seems unreal in his cloaking, whether that be by the prior government of Oliver Cromwell or by destructive, feminizing smoke? Charles is warned, then, that the body over which he should have control like a husband—the body of a feminized London—leaks beyond his control due to the alternative agency of smoke, which elides full masculine and human control. Notably, this smoke may be a “trouble...to Your Sacred Majesty, as well as a hazzard to Your Health” (image 3), much in the same way feminine liquids (such as menstrual blood) and desires (specifically, for voracious amounts of sexual intercourse) could cause the masculine body to fall to disease.¹⁰⁴ Thus Evelyn, the staunch royalist, is “kindled” with “Indignation” at the threat this smoke poses to his king (image 3).

But Evelyn’s appeal to Charles also gestures toward the period’s gossip concerning the king’s own masculinity, or rather effeminacy, during his reign. Through a historical exploration of satire from the period after the Restoration, Harold Weber determines that Charles II was imagined as effeminate in two distinct ways: in his lack of heir and his constant philandering with women who were not his wife. Both aspects of this effeminacy tied back into a discussion on Charles’ inability to act as a husband-monarch to a wife-nation. Indeed, although Charles was “a king noted for his prodigious heterosexual appetites,” he nonetheless “bec[a]me a figure ridiculed...for his effeminacy, impotence, and homosexuality” (92). To the English imagination, male monarchs acted as fathers and “the nation’s passionate husband; for centuries the symbolic

¹⁰⁴ Some misogynistic paradigms of the period even claimed that menstrual blood could cause dogs to go mad, destroy crops, or be used in love potions by women to acquire the man—or men!—they desired. For more, see Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford’s text *Women in Early Modern England*, Oxford UP, 2000.

female body of the state had been wedded to the masculine body of the monarch, the very health of the kingdom assured by and imagined in the powerful erotic relationship between them” (90). Charles II’s constant extramarital affairs—such as the one with actress Nell Gwyn, a former prostitute—may have proven, as Samuel Pepys noted in his diary, how well-endowed the English monarch was, but they also left the nation without an heir, the throne passing instead to Charles’s brother James. As Weber goes on to demonstrate, the sign of Charles’s potency—his penis—is then transformed into a symbol of impotency, “a radical conversion of Charles’s ascendant masculine power into various forms of submission, sterility, impotence, effeminacy, and homosexuality. While the king’s phallic preeminence should enforce traditional patriarchal hierarchies...it functions instead to erode distinctions between male power and female passivity” (94). Ironically, Charles’s “weakness for women makes him not only their tool but a womanish figure as well, a female who no longer rules his own kingdom...His sexual activity defines at once his strength and his weakness, for his promiscuity expends his sexual powers, disseminating his maleness rather than consolidating it” (103). Indeed, Charles was imagined as “subject[] to the women whose erotic powers master and tame him” (101). Like Redcrosse and Adam from Chapter 1, unable to respectively resist the feminine tricks of Duessa and Eve alongside S/sin, Charles II is tainted by his sexual dalliances with the uncontrollable female body until he is rendered like these women. But real life is not so perfect as art; there is no Guyon, Knight of Temperance, to act as the corrective to the earlier Redcrosse, or a Christ to redeem Adam and Eve and eliminate S/sin.

In *Fumifugium*, the threat of a feminizing smoke on a female London / nation and on the bodies of English royalty therefore also reflects this ongoing dialogue concerning Charles II’s effeminacy, which—assuming he had ears—was a discussion about which the king could not

have been entirely ignorant. Although never outright breaching the topic, Evelyn's work slyly and successfully channels the idea of an effeminate-because-overly-sexual Charles to make his ecological appeal. Indeed, sea coal smoke's threat to the king's masculinity which I identified above is heightened by the underlying context of Charles's effeminacy. The elimination of smoke from the city would therefore act as a kind of taming of this feminine, feminizing, and hellish agent, ensuring that the boundaries of the body are not crossed—like what occurs in the exchange of fluids during intercourse under a Galenic medical paradigm. If we return to the concept of *pneuma*, that vital spirit which is engendered when air is inhaled into the body and mixes with the Galenic humors, then coal smoke may trans-corporeally transform Charles's gender even more, compounding his effeminacy and threatening, per Pepys, that last remaining sign of Charles's masculinity: a well-endowed and far too often used penis. Taming of the smoke therefore reflects Charles's own body and the need to govern it as a method of ensuring the health of monarchy and nation-state alike. In this figuration, the continued use of sea coal—cheap and easy to acquire—also mirrors Charles's continued dalliances with his mistresses like Nell Gwyn, actress and former prostitute, arguably—and misogynistically—also cheap and easy to acquire. This mass of referential images is cleverly used by Evelyn as a political argument for the king to act as the nation's husband, both by controlling his desires and controlling the use of sea coal and, through it, smoke.

However, the multiple political appeals embedded within the text do not downplay the material and very real effects of feminizing coal smoke in London, but rather enhance them. In fact, Evelyn's metaphorical use of smoke stresses both the individual impact of sea coal and the literal, collective consequences of its continued use. As his letter to Charles at the opening of the text indicates, the health of the royal family and of London's physical self—its buildings, for

instance—are deteriorated just as the health of every Londoner is overwhelmed by smoke. The city of London—currently a polluted, hellish, and dirty old whore—again figures as a collective and governmental body representative of England’s people, greatness, and monarchy. Sea coal threatens this greatness:

all the common and familiar materials which emit it, the immoderate use of, and indulgence to *Sea-coale* along in the City of *London*, exposes it to one of the fowlest Inconveniencies and reproches, that can possibly befall to [a] noble, and otherwise, incomparable City (image 9-10).

In Evelyn’s depiction of the effects of sea coal upon London’s inhabitants and the structures which compose it, this collective body, again reflective of the king, must be kept orderly and rid of smoke. Importantly, this smoke should not leak—as it does when coal is burned—but should be purged by, as Evelyn goes on to argue, *removing* coal burning industries from London.¹⁰⁵ This will protect London, the city’s citizens and physical trappings, and the royal line as embodied in the Duchess and restored King Charles II. In erasing smoke from the confines of the city, London’s greatness may once again be revealed in the clearer air, and her inhabitants may act as microcosmic manifestations of her own glory through the benefits of clean air on their health.

Trans-corporeal and Feminized Agency: Health and Environment

To briefly reiterate the argument explored above, the threat of coal smoke is predicated upon smoke’s ability to enter and invade spaces and bodies, to transform from the inside out into a dirty, hellish feminine, or sick entity. Per Evelyn,

¹⁰⁵ The distinction here between leaking and purging is how purposeful each action is; leaking is often portrayed (at least from the viewpoint of a male dominated society like early modern England) as the random and haphazard release of something—feminine tears, vaginal fluids, or words—whereas purging is done purposefully, often with medical intent.

New Castle Cole, as an expert *Physician* affirms, causeth *Consumptions*...and the Indisposition of the *Lungs*, not only by the suffocating abundance of *Smoake*; but also by its *Virulency*: For all *subterrany* Fuell hath a kind of *virulent* or *Arsenical* vapour rising from it (image 12).

Such interpretation of the problem from “an expert *Physician*” relies upon miasma theory, particularly in the indication that a “*virulent* or *Arsenical* vapour”—a smell of sulfur, like rotten eggs—permeates the air. This sulfuric stink miasmically warns of sea coal smoke’s threat to health. This is affirmed in Evelyn’s text when he notes that the use of “*New Castle Cole*” results in “*Consumptions*” and illnesses in the lungs. This argument is based both in fact and commonly accepted medical knowledge of the period, which contended that smoke inhalation was linked to damage to the lungs, throat, and voice, and could even result in death (Brimblecombe *Big Smoke* 52-55). Evelyn writes that these illnesses are caused by the “*virulent* or *Aresnical* vapour” that arises from this “*subterrany* Fuell.” Here, “subterrany” is also another reference to Hell, indicating that sea coal was plundered from the bowels of the earth. Hell is again something you can smell, evidenced as you breathe in London’s sulfurous smelling air and ingest a noxious form of the coal’s, and thus the earth’s, excremental expulsion. Every living thing that resides within or is brought into London is subject to this dangerous excremental and miasmatic transformative process. Or, as Evelyn states, “those who repair to *London*, no sooner enter into it, but they find a universal alteration in their Bodies” (image 11).

This transformative capability of coal smoke on a body enmeshed within the London airspace can be theorized through Stacy Alaimo’s ecological concept of trans-corporeality, which she explores in her philosophical text *Bodily Natures*. Although I have touched on trans-corporeality intermittently throughout this chapter, it is now useful to consider a more complete

exploration of this ecological concept as a method of understanding Evelyn's *Fumifugium*.

Trans-corporeality, which insists we recognize human immersion in the ecological world—in things like London's airspace—emphasizes a dialogue between the inner human and the outer environment. It is therefore a “thinking across bodies” which inspires

recognition that the environment, which is too often imagined as inert, empty space or as a resource for human use, is, in fact, a world of fleshy beings with their own needs, claims, and actions. By emphasizing the movement across bodies, trans-corporeality reveals the interchanges and interconnections between various bodily natures. But by underscoring that *trans* indicates movement across different sites, trans-corporeality also opens up a mobile space that acknowledges the often unpredictable and unwanted actions of human bodies, nonhuman creatures, ecological systems, chemical agents, and other actors (2).

The London airspace is one such “a mobile space” of human and more-than-human interchange and dialogue. This dialogue occurs through porosity, in which the human body acts as a sponge in the environment, soaking up the exterior and releasing into it as well. Indeed, airscapes are uniquely mobile spaces, for air is always moving in flows which often elude human control—and, far too often, acknowledgement.¹⁰⁶

Trans-corporeality is therefore a useful methodology for understanding smoke in *Fumifugium*, for in Evelyn's portrayal of the situation, coal smoke is similarly a part of London's airspace whose “actions” are predicated on “movement across bodies” in ways that demonstrate

¹⁰⁶ Importantly, we may also note here that in the early modern world, it was the female body which was uniquely—because excessively—trans-corporeal as it overflowed its boundaries through leakage and hungrily (sexually) sought to take in the surrounding world in manners which eluded patriarchal control.

human “interchanges and interconnections” with the larger, exterior world. Further, coal smoke is one such “chemical agent[]” or “other actor[]” that has caused “unpredictable and unwanted actions” in England’s capital. It is also an actor that is characterized by “movement across different sites” and thus clearly indicates how London is an airscape ecology and a “mobile space.” This “mobile space” is characterized by bodies—human, plant, animal, inert—touching or inhaling smoke. And, as explored above, this hellish smoke can radically alter any body it touches or enters, which in Alaimo’s estimation also elicits a disquieting “unraveling of the human” and foregrounds how “trans-corporeal subjects” are “inextricably part of the flux and flow of the world that others [ie, human subjects] would presume to master” (3, 17).

In the case of *Fumifugium*, any attempt to master the use of coal only illustrates how uncontrollable the substance is through its waste product smoke, which has unwanted and unavoidable effects. These effects underscore human enmeshment in and reliance upon a vibrant world of multiple beings and actors in the ecological system of an airscape. Human activity may have resulted in the contamination of the air until it became so infused with smoke as to become a pollutant, but miasma theory demonstrates that once this smoke has been created, any semblance of human control over it is eliminated. The smoky air will smell foul, enter and erode buildings, kill plants, or cause human illness whether humans intended for it to do so or not. Smoke as waste indicates that humans have not mastered coal, but merely make use of it. Evelyn’s London is therefore an airscape ecosystem composed of actants whose agencies clash, a result of imagining that coal can be dug up and used because it is falsely assumed to be an “inert” resource. Instead, coal smoke proves itself to be a highly agentic excremental pollutant *because* it is a miasmatic, trans-corporeal, and feminizing agent.

Coal smoke's agency in *Fumifugium* must be understood in relation to the liquid and airy paradigm of Galenic humoralism as well, a concept I have already gestured toward in my discussion of pneuma and an idea that trans-corporeality, as I noted in this project's introduction, mirrors. For example, in the main body of the proposal, Evelyn again stresses the importance of human immersion in an airscape. He writes that "Aer [is] the *Vehicle of the Soul*, as well as that of the Earth," for both humans and their environment "finde the benefit which we derive from it, not onely for the necessity of common Respiration and functions of the Organs; but likewise for the use of the *Spirits* and *Primigene Humors*" (image 7). Once more tapping into ideas that linked smoke to Hell, it is the health of both the body and the soul that depends upon the quality of the air in which a person resides. The intake of air Evelyn describes affects both the "*Spirits*" and the "*Primigene Humors*," with "*Primigene*" a Latin derivative meaning primitive or original, and "*Humors*" denoting his reliance upon humoral theory, which posited that there were four chief fluids which composed and determined the qualities of a body / a person: blood, bile, choler, and phlegm. That these humors are "*Primigene*" and originary indicates that they are tied to the very essence of the self, suggesting that an alteration to these specific humors will have both lasting and dramatic impacts for a body / a person. Interior humoral liquidity is thus dependent upon the inhalations and exhalations of the body, or the self's airy flows and enmeshment in an airscape.¹⁰⁷ The kinds of excrement I have examined previously are often

¹⁰⁷ However, alternative ideas of the soul-body connection existed in the period. For example, Julie R. Solomon contends that "while Galenism and its materialism was an important influence in the early modern period, it was markedly tempered by a Christian culture that valued the incorporeal character of the soul." In this paradigm, the soul interpreted exterior stimuli via the senses before stirring the passions, and then the humors, to action, because the soul was "the body's caretaker" (199-200). Similarly, Douglas Trevor argues for Edmund Spenser and his contemporaries as engaged in "what he and other Christian writers in the late sixteenth century perceived as an alarming rise in the materialist theories of the passions. These writers...cautioned against hard-line Galenic readings of the body because such readings

semi-solid, semi-liquid mush, but smoke in the airscape indicates that the excremental crosses forms even as it crosses the barriers of the body to influence the humors in trans-corporeal flows. Or, to return to the concept of *pneuma*—a mixture of liquid humors and inhaled airs which affects both body and soul—Evelyn imparts the key medical idea that human health is reliant upon an environment that permeates the body and enters into the self, and at times threatens to “unravel” that same self. Various states—liquid, airy, human, more-than-human—take on agency, and engage in clashes of agency, as early modern individuals breathe in the smoky air of Evelyn’s London.

Such trans-corporeal dialogue with air is predicated both on the constant necessity of air and on its alternative materiality. As Evelyn notes,

The *Aer* on which we continually prey, perpetually inspire[es] matter to the *Animall* and *Vital* Spirits, by which they become more or lesse obfuscated, clouded and render’d obnoxious...[air is the] universal *Medium* (image 8).

Air is that which humans “prey” upon precisely because it is continually ingested; it is the ultimate food for the continuance of life. It not only enters the body but exits it only to reenter and re-exit in continuous airy flows. Such dependence occasions important effects on the human body, whose well-being is determined by the purity or lack thereof of the air ingested; or as Evelyn says, ingested air may inspire “the *Animall* and *Vital* Spirits” to “become more or less obfuscated, clouded and render’d obnoxious.” There is no escape from air, for it is the

potentially support a ‘humoral’ account of the soul.” These critics “claim that such accounts threaten the divine omnipotence of an electing God by providing sinners with too convenient an opportunity to blame their failings on bodily fluids over which they have little control” (241). Nonetheless, Evelyn’s argument suggests at least of modicum of materiality to the soul in his argument against coal smoke. Even if Evelyn was a dedicated Christian, his argument cannot be made without some acceptance of Galenic theories of a more material inward soul.

“universal Medium,” that which surrounds, permeates, exists within, and exits a body always. It is a material on which all other materiality depends, and in which humans continuously exist—even if we do not recognize such facts, save when the smellscape turns heavy, unpleasant, or noxious. Or, as Evelyn himself states, “the Body feeds...upon the Aer, or what accompanies it...it is allwaies preying [upon the air] sleeping, or waking,” and air is therefore the most “constant and assiduous Food” (image 8). As explored in Chapter 1, Eve’s sinful consumption of the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge indicates how that which is consumed has important and potentially lasting effects on the body and the self. But unlike Eve, Evelyn’s Londoners have no choice; they must constantly be eating and expelling and living in air. Air is a necessity; humans can attempt to change its qualities, but the need for air will always exist. As a result, human bodies will always be dependent—no matter what illusions of pretention we may strive toward in our notions of human dominance over the world—on air, and therefore subject to the agency of airscapes.

The physiological effects of this reliance are extreme and may either be beneficial or harmful in ways which mark a feminized London as both the polluter and the polluted. For example, “Lucid and noble *Aer*” has the potential to “clarify[y] the Blood, subtilizes and excites it, cheering the Spirits and promoting digestion,” while smoky, excremental air that is “dark, and grosse...perturbs the body, prohibits necessary Transpiration for the resolution and dissipation of ill Vapours, even to the disturbance of the very Rational faculties” (image 8). Clean and clear air clarifies; dark and soot-laden air obscures, negatively affecting both physical and mental health. In Evelyn’s estimation, this is a medical fact which the first founders of London took into consideration when choosing its location for the site of a grand city; London is the larger body which, depending upon its situation, can influence the smaller bodies which occupy it in micro-

and macrocosmic connections. Evelyn knows this to be the case because, as he says, London “is built upon a sweet and most agreeable Eminency of Ground” beside the Thames. When this river does spawn gross “Fumes” they are “carried off” both by the way the sun shines upon the area of the Thames and southerly winds (image 9). London’s air should be perfect, sweet, and health-giving, Evelyn contends, were it not for “that hellish and dismall Cloud of S E A C O A L,” which has “mixed with the otherwise wholesome and excellent *Aer*” of London until “her *Inhabitants* breathe nothing but an impoure and thick Mist accompanied with a fuliginous and filthy vapour” which “disord[ers] the entire habits of their Bodies” (image 9). The “fuliginous and filthy vapour” Londoners are ingesting has been cast by the text as excremental—thus, Londoners ingest a form of excrement when bodies should only excrete such waste products to balance health. Londoners consume, like the speaker of Sonnet 129, a hellish and excremental feminine gent that will lead only to their destruction. Indeed, readers are reminded that London is a “her” polluted—just as they are—by feminizing smoke. This idea is exacerbated in such gendered terms when we recall Evelyn’s insistence that because humans “prey[]” upon air, we consume it, and are therefore altered by it—much as a child handed off to a wet nurse may have had its constitution and very personality altered by the morality of the woman’s character, contained within her breastmilk. Or, this “her” may attune us to London as a polluted womb in which citizens are trapped, making them, like Oedipus, both child and sexual partner. London thus functions simultaneously as the expulsive female body and a body polluted by industrial greed; it is little wonder London has become a latrine overflowing with noxious and polluting waste. Humans may believe they are in control of coal, but they cannot circumvent its smoky expulsions and the alterations it may corporeally inspire, especially when they cannot escape the alternative agency of multiple feminine figures with the ability to sway health.

Significantly, however, not just humans are affected by coal smoke; flora and fauna are impacted as well. Evelyn's apoplexy at the environmental impact of coal smoke throughout *Fumifugium* is likely predicated on his own lifelong interest in gardens, as discussed above. In fact, Evelyn may have been inspired to publish his own indignation at the sooty state of London because of how it would have negatively impacted his own carefully crafted garden at his home at Sayes Court. After preaching on the implications to human health, he next exclaims that the smoke is a killer of "Fowl, and...Bees and Flowers abroad, suffering nothing in our Gardens to bud, display themselves, or ripen" (image 11). Polluted air, the "universal *Medium*," kills and causes "suffering" to the exterior, natural world. Evelyn's words are a reminder both that human actions have consequences for entities and actants beyond the human, and that the human is never fully separated from the stuff of the material world. Humans are enmeshed in layers of the more-than-human, and vice-versa: airs and waters, insects and feces, flowers and fowl. They continuously touch and are touched in manners that elide clear delineations because all entities are trans-corporeally interdependent on London's airspace.

Smoke—tainted air—also elides human control as it affects economic interests in the natural world. Evelyn notes that because of the burning of sea coal, there "happeneth yearly a great Destruction of the Brood of Wild-fowle, and Moore-game...the Aer is so distemper'd, and such unseasonable and unnatural storms are ingendred, as that the Corn, and the Fruites of the Earth are thereby in Divers places blasted, and greatly hindered in their Due course of ripening and reaping" (image 16). Fauna are damaged by excremental smoke just like humans are. And, in specifically noting that it is "Wild-fowle and Moore-game" whose "Brood" is annually destroyed, Evelyn appeals to his gentleman reader, the hunter of such game who has a stake in the bird population for their own aristocratic sport. Similarly, by noting that storms are produced

that harms crops such as “Corn, and the Fruites of the Earth” and causes agricultural products to be “greatly hindered in their Due course of ripening and reaping,” Evelyn seeks to garner the attention and sympathy of farmers, landowners, and those who lease their land out for crop production, for the economic impact they sustain is immense. If we continue to assume his statements are accurate, the blighting of agricultural products would have also further exacerbated the food shortages brought on by the Little Ice Age, a shortage which everyone would have felt—either in their stomach or their pocketbook.

But there are reproductive undertones to smoke’s effects on the natural world as well. For instance, Evelyn’s statement attributes effects on the weather to smoke, as “the [smoke-laden] Aer is so distemper’d” that it “ingendre[s]” “unseasonable and unnatural storms.” His choice of “ingendred,” or engender(ed), is significant, for according to the *OED*, it has a variety of meanings, such as “To produce, generate, or give rise to (an object, substance, etc.) by natural processes” and “To contract or develop (a disease or medical disorder)” (5a, 5b). Throughout the early modern period, it also meant “To produce offspring; to procreate, reproduce” in manners which spanned both male and female contributions to the act of begetting (3, 1b and 1c). Smoke inspires a kind of blasted, monstrous and diseased birthing in the air, with the product or child of this trans-corporeal union being storms. Like the storms of Shakespeare’s *King Lear* and *Pericles*, the smoke-inspired storms of Evelyn’s London are non-human actors on a stage who are key contributors to the plot. Even if their effects are random rather than purposeful, the actions of such non-human actants as smoke, air, and weather is nonetheless felt.

Overall, these nature-based appeals are rooted in a sense of pastoralism, a literary trope which spanned the early modern period and was founded on a nostalgia for a past green world of plenty and simplicity. For instance, Evelyn compares the current conditions he describes to the

fecundity of flora and fauna in London before the onset of coal smoke and its effects when he writes, “For there is a virtue in the Aer, to penetrate, alter, nourish, yea and to multiply Plants and Fruits, without which no vegetable could possibly thrive” (image 11). Prior, smoke-free air produced a landscape of green plenty—potentially a normative, rather than monstrous, offspring—a landscape to which, Evelyn’s words suggest, London may return if only it would curb its coal usage. Of course, it’s doubtful such a pseudo-Paradise ever truly existed, for pastoralism is not only rooted in a false sense of past nostalgia for a lost green world, but we also know that coal smoke was used in prior centuries. Nonetheless, pastoralism’s cultural capital as a trope in early modern England offered a vision of how London could rectify its current hellish and excremental state. To do so, those with the power to alter London’s coal usage would have to recognize air as a trans-corporeal and pneumatic substance in its ability “to penetrate” a variety of human and more-than-human bodies. They would have to accept the feminizing, although random, agency of smoke. The individual with the power—at least in Evelyn’s framing of events—to rectify this problem was the restored King Charles II.

Conclusion: Dungy Solutions

Throughout *Fumifugium*, Evelyn suggests that if London can curb its use of coal and concomitant production of smoke, the city can return to a pastoral kind of pseudo-Paradise. This idea is key to the proposed solutions Evelyn offers in his treatise and the effects he imagines these solutions will inspire: that London can be pulled from its hellish state by positive human actions which will trans-corporeally affect the other actants that make up the environmental network of London’s airspace.

Evelyn’s multi-step solution to London’s pollution is initially reliant on a purge—or the expulsion of expulsive material—of industrial coal use. He advocates “the Removal of such

Trades, as are manifest *Nuisances* to the City, which, I would have placed at farther distances” located “below the River of *Thames*” (images 13-14). Industrial use of coal must be eliminated from the feminized body of London, and the best way to do this is to expel those industries that rely on coal. Rather than an unsanctioned leakage, the female body which is London would undergo a carefully controlled purge, as one did when bloodletting to release impure humors under the supervision of a doctor. This industrial removal also reads as an act of defecation, or the body excreting those substances that have entered it back into the exterior environment, with the area “below the River *Thames*” as a kind of privy kept clean by running waters and flowing airs. Under Galenic theory, both bloodletting and shitting (or urinating, for that matter) were ways in which to restore the interior human body to balanced health; or, as Evelyn writes, the expulsion of coal-reliant industries “would produce so considerable (though but partial) a Cure, as men would even be found to breath[e] a new life as it were, as well as London appear a new city” (image 14). The parenthetical phrase “though but partial” is key here, for Evelyn indicates that the removal—or expulsion—of industrial coal use is not enough to completely cure London or her inhabitants. Expelling the coal means escaping London’s excremental and hellish state, but more is needed to ensure wellbeing.¹⁰⁸

Consequently, the second part of Evelyn’s solution is to transform the city into a site of multiple gardens to rectify the air, transforming a newly purified London into a pseudo-Paradise with health-giving, rather than deleterious, properties. As Carolyn Rawcliffe has argued, “the garden itself constituted a major weapon in the relentless battle against disease” (3)—a battle much like that which Evelyn takes up throughout *Fumifugium*. Specifically, Evelyn argues for

¹⁰⁸ Evelyn also argues that the removal of industry from London would also have economic benefits for the city, for “thousands of watermen would find employment plying their trade” between London and where the industries would be newly located (Jenner 538).

the creation of miniature plantations bedecked with plants across the city. Such gardens should “be elegantly planted, diligently kept and supply’d, with such *Shrubs*, as yield the most fragrant and odoriferous *Flowers*, and are aptest to tinge the *Aer* upon every gentle emission at a great distance.” Additionally, between these plots of land should be beds of flowers “which upon the least pressure and cutting, breath[e] out and betray their ravishing odors.” Crops should also be planted, of “such blossom-bearing Grain as send for their virtue at farthest distance” (image 19). Evelyn recommends plants that are incredibly perfumed, spreading their sweet scent in ways could change both smellscape and airscape of the city. These flowers would work in tandem with air to create a pleasing and highly sensory experience of the city. In stressing the ways in which such scents will “tinge the *Aer* upon every gentle emission,” Evelyn again relies upon miasma theory as a key factor in health, for there existed an “intellectual tradition of early modern Europe whereby air was corrected and perfected by using the perfume of flowers” (Jenner 547). Indeed, Evelyn imagines that the smell of the flowers and plants he recommends will further clear London’s air and make it healthful;¹⁰⁹ while under miasma theory the current bad, sooty smell of London indicates its hell-ridden and sickened state, this imagined sweet-smelling London will indicate its Paradise-like and life-enhancing qualities. Rawcliffe stresses this notion too, arguing that Evelyn had a “preoccupation with the therapeutic value of gardens,” which in the period were thought to be immersed in “a floral perfume” reminiscent of the “inexpressible sweetness [which] permeated Heaven,” tended to by Jesus as gardener (6, 8).

In trans-corporeal terms, Evelyn’s reconstructed London would allow the human body to become trans-corporeally coextensive with a kind of “good” form of excrementality—the animal

¹⁰⁹ In *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall*, Francis Bacon also stresses the medicinal benefits of gardens, arguing that they are “the Greatest Refreshment to the Spirits of Man” (139).

ding that would allow the flowers and plants of this new Paradise-like London to thrive.¹¹⁰ Or, as Jenner notes, the gardens that Evelyn recommends “echo[ed]” ideas to “recreate the garden of Eden,” for “Contemporary representations of paradise followed a long Christian tradition of emphasizing the delicious and sweet smell from the flowers blossoming there” (544). Thus, humans grow closer to God through their inhalation of sweet smelling plant scents, and even become trans-corporeally intertwined with these plants themselves in the airscape. This makes the human body less smoky and more plant-like. When the human subject is trans-corporeally decentered and instead caught up in a network of actants in a healthful landscape, humans can grow—like a vine winding upward toward the sun—towards God and spiritual life. In fact, the perfumed and purged airscape of London would allow the trans-corporeally interconnected network of humans, flora, fauna, and inanimate entities to all simultaneously participate in this renewal of health.

But in following Evelyn’s instructions, the very nature of London itself would be transformed. This change would manifest in the reorganization of the city’s layout, the removal of smoke, the benefit to health, and the sweet smells which would permeate the city. These effects would eliminate London as a Baroque Jesuit Hell. However, the city’s transformation is also represented as a gendered change as well. While we might logically imagine that Evelyn’s plan to clean London’s air would result in the feminized city returning to a more pure and pristine state, one not of virginity but stateliness, like a grand older woman who serenely nurtures her inhabitants and proudly shows her aged glory, this is not at all the case. Instead,

¹¹⁰ Significantly, this is not just an extended metaphor on Evelyn’s part, but an actual, material solution that he imagines. For Evelyn, London physically can be purged of its coal smoke and, with the introduction of specific plants in artful designs, instead become a mirror of the heavenly Paradise, or perhaps a recreation of the original physical Paradise from which Adam and Eve were banished.

Evelyn specifically writes that the purified London airscape will result in the city experiencing “ravishing varieties of the [plants’] perfumes, as well as...the most delightful and pleasant objects, and places of Recreation for the Inhabitants” which will then “yield also a *Prospect* of a noble and masculine Majesty” to England’s capital. When excremental and hellish, London is a woman, a leaking old whore; but when the city is clean and healthful and a pseudo-Paradise, it is characterized by a “masculine Majesty.” The reference to “Majesty” is also a gesture toward Charles II, as if the entire city—so long as the king ensures Evelyn’s plan comes to fruition—will become a macrocosmic extension of its male monarch, dissolving the king’s effeminacy and rendering him a good husband to the nation. Charles’ is thus aptly deemed by Evelyn “the very Breath of our Nostrills” (image 18), his macrocosmic form bedecked with sweet-smelling plants and flowers that nourish his subjects. The king becomes a garden too, both purged and purging smoke, and yet reliant upon another form of waste—animal dung—to fertilize and ensure the health of these plants and flowers. These floral images also suggest reproduction of a necessary kind: the king producing an heir with his wife to someday inherit his throne. The seemingly immaterial airscape of London, and the health of all beings / actants that reside within this landscape, is therefore always dependent upon the low, the material, and most of all, the excremental. Even while the excremental, leaking and feminized whore is erased, the reliance upon shit itself can never be fully removed.

Unfortunately, Evelyn’s grand vision for clearing London’s air and promoting health was never adopted by either Charles II or by Parliament. Coal use continued essentially unabated, until “By 1700, coal had become the principal British energy source” (Richards 239). London remained the powerful-and-agentic-because-hellish woman who wraps her head in clouds of sulfurous smoke.

CHAPTER 4: “Serpent of Old Nile”: Wonder, Narrative, and Excremental Ethics in Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*

“The history of love, shit, and the lizard also waits to be written.” –Dominique Laporte, *History of Shit*

Introduction

When Dominique Laporte wrote in *The History of Shit* that “The history of love, shit, and the lizard also waits to be written” (103), he apparently wasn’t taking William Shakespeare’s late career play *Antony and Cleopatra* into account. First performed in 1607, *Antony and Cleopatra* follows its titular characters through the ups and downs of their mature romance, which is beset by drunkenness, gender swapping, public displays of affection, jealousy, war, and finally, death. The play culminates with the death of Cleopatra—Antony having rather unsuccessfully attempted to end his life at the conclusion of Act IV—and thus details the fall of Egypt and the rise of the Roman Empire under Octavius Caesar. It is, by all accounts, a rather serious and tragic rendition of one of Egypt’s most (in)famous rulers. But the play also repeatedly, and explicitly, stages “love, shit, and the lizard.” Love: Antony and Cleopatra’s romance forms the central tension and problem of the play. Shit: images of the excremental abound, from “this dungy earth” to “the stale of horses” (1.1.37 and 1.4.62). And the lizard: the asp, which Cleopatra uses as her method of suicide in Act V, and the crocodile discussed by Antony and Lepidus in Act II, are both lizard-like entities¹¹¹ in the same way that Spenser’s Errour and Duessa, and Milton’s Sin, are lizard-women. Shakespeare has his own lizard-woman in Cleopatra, who is Antony’s “serpent of old Nile” (1.5.25)—that same indescribable crocodile from Antony and Lepidus’s

¹¹¹ The early modern period doesn’t seem to have drawn sharp distinctions between what could and could not be classified as a lizard; anything vaguely snake-like or scaly seems to have counted. Edward Topsell’s bestiaries *The History of Four-footed Beasts* (1607) and *The History of Serpents* (1608) indicate such classification blurring.

discussion aboard Ptolemy's ship. As I discussed in Chapter 1, these lizard-like creatures and women blur the line between animal, excrement, and human; they are all three simultaneously. As one half of the core love story of the play as well, Cleopatra is Shakespeare's own history of "love, shit, and the lizard."

Consequently, Cleopatra represents Val Plumwood's idea of continuity *and* Stacey Alaimo's notion of trans-corporeality as she gallivants across both the early modern stage and the stages she has set for herself as a spectacle of wonder in the classical world. She represents how "human identity [i]s continuous with, not alien from, nature" (Plumwood 35-36) and how "the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment'" because "*trans* indicates movement across different sites, [so that] trans-corporeality also opens up a mobile space that acknowledges the often unpredictable and unwanted actions of" various actors (Alaimo 2). Cleopatra's identity cannot be separated from either the land- or waterscapes of her country, nor from the various excremental lizard beings who inhabit Egypt. She flows between forms, simultaneously the "serpent" and the "Nile," ultimately the "serpent of old Nile." As lizard-shit-land-water-woman, Cleopatra is an ecological assemblage, or as Jane Bennett, yet another ecological scholar tells us in *Vibrant Matter*, Cleopatra stages how "what is supposed to be outside the delineation of the human is always already inside. This stuff of matter generates, composes, transforms, and decomposes" (143). Cleopatra's identities feed into, compose, decompose, and contradict one another; she reminds us that we are continuous with the world around us, or that there are only small degrees of difference between us and the things of the material, more-than-human world. She forces us to acknowledge that we may put land- and waterscapes, critters and plants, and especially excrement, from our minds, but that they are always working in the background to compose us in trans-corporeal flows between bodies.

And, as the end of the play demonstrates, Cleopatra's excrementality is powerful, because it means that *she* is the one who controls the narrative as she slips through Caesar's grasp by taking her own life. Useful to this aspect of Cleopatra's story is Serpil Opperman's work in *Material Ecocriticism*, where he outlines the concept of storied matter, or "matter's creativity. This creativity can be interpreted as a form of narrative transmitted through the interchanges of organic and inorganic matter, the continuity of human and nonhuman forces, and the interplay of bodily natures, all forming active composites" (21). Such storied matter imagines human and more-than-human intertwinement into larger narratives of existence "where the world reveals its creative becoming" (31). Therefore, to imagine the fictional Cleopatra that Shakespeare provides is to allow his Cleopatra to recall other portrayals of the Egyptian Queen, but also, through Shakespeare's play, to see how she always and already conjures human and more-than-human identities. Cleopatra is then the site of an equalized ecological assemblage that is composed of various things interacting with and upon one another in a composite amalgamation of narrative, or of storied matter. She is and, she is also, she *is—ad infinitum*.

Such an argument, like Cleopatra herself, threatens to overflow the boundaries of these pages, but I will try to sketch the contours here. Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* categorizes the Egyptian Queen as excremental by aligning her with land- and waterscapes, and with spontaneously generated critters / lizards. As excremental assemblage, she is the multiple and plethoric, an embodied figure of continuity who traipses through the play's narrative in strangely alluring manners. Indeed, her excremental nature eroticizes Cleopatra, as Antony and Enobarbus continuously stress. This erotic, excremental nature is also part of her wonder-laden theatricality, the oozing spectacle which is Cleopatra. Each time she appears, so do all the other aspects of her identity with which she is continuous and trans-corporeally enmeshed, layering the ecological

concept of storied matter—of interconnected entities in an ecology of interdependence and in a larger narrative. Indeed, Cleopatra thrives upon story and narrative, and like the prior lizard-women I explored, she also is able to wrest control of the narrative from her male counterparts and, through her suicide, dictate her ending and her own story. Cleopatra is excrement, woman, flora, fauna, story: she *is* the power of the ecological to which we must give attention. As a result, Shakespeare's Cleopatra can help us conceptualize options for exploring more ethical engagements with the material substances and entities we typically demean, particularly as a counter-narrative to anthropocentrism, sexism, and racism in what I term excremental ethics.

Cleopatra is the excremental woman who first inspired this exploration into early modern literary waste, and it only seems right that she unites the tenets of early modern excremental ecocriticism. She (1) is a kind of brown excremental waste who can help us to engage several ecological, feminist, race-, class-, and sexuality-based issues through excremental ethics. She (2) is also a feminine source of power, like all the women writers or feminine figures explored in previous chapters; why else would the Romans be so anxious over her dalliance with Antony? She (3) stages human continuity and trans-corporeality with excrement like Error, Duessa, Sin, and a soot-laden London; through the myriad kinds of waste of which she is composed, human enmeshment in the more-than-human world disallows material separation. She (4) indicates how waste has intense potential for narrative control of itself and others, much like Spenser and Milton's excremental women. And (5) she reminds us, as do Mary Sidney Herbert and Mary Wroth, that writing or narrating can be types of self-referential waste that foregrounds anxiety over the expelled. Shakespeare's Cleopatra does it all, and she does it while covered in—and as—muck.

Shakespeare's Cleopatra: Excremental and Ecological Multiplicity

In this section, I explore how Cleopatra is cast as various types of ecological substances or entities reminiscent of excrement, and then consider her as a site of staged early modern plethora. Paired together, Cleopatra as plethoric and staged excrement revises the revulsion audiences typically feel toward forms of waste, instead casting an excremental Cleopatra as a site of visual, erotic, and ecological pleasure.

Shakespeare does not shy away from aligning Cleopatra with the excremental across all five acts of *Antony and Cleopatra*, beginning with her status as landscape. Rome may have its Romans, but Cleopatra *is* Egypt, both ruler and that over which she rules.¹¹² She is John Evelyn's feminized London but greater; she is larger, more myriad, more powerful, more alluring, and in the words of Clare Kinney, is "interchangeable with every aspect of her country," for "Cleopatra *is* Egypt, [and] Egypt is also Cleopatra" (178). She is "great Egypt" according to the Egyptians' own accounts (1.5.42), an idea Antony adopts after the first ruinous battle with Caesar: "O, wither has thou led me, Egypt?" (3.11.51). Later, as Antony lays dying in the lovers' final moments together, he declares, "I am dying, Egypt, dying" (4.16.19 and 43). As Egypt, Cleopatra is both "great" as ruler and, in the case of Antony, destructive. Her body is present in the very landscape of Egypt, and the Egyptian landscape is overwritten on her body. There was precedent for Shakespeare to align Cleopatra with Egypt itself, particularly due to gender; as Susan C. Staub notes, the "figuration of woman as landscape is ancient...implying passivity, receptiveness, and mutability." Galenic theory, gynecology manuals, and even ideas of gardening all rendered landscape feminine (69-71). And the "passivity, receptiveness, and

¹¹² Or, per Clare Kinney, "Perhaps the fascination and the infurcation that Cleopatra ignites in Rome's autocrats derives in part from the fact that she can be Egypt in a way that neither Caesar nor Antony can ever embody Rome; they are merely Roman" (178-179).

mutability” of feminized landscape often makes it a site of patriarchal and thus exploitative colonization; indeed, the second half of the play is concerned with Caesar’s attempts to colonize Egypt and Cleopatra, although the Queen is anything but passive, fighting back alongside her Antony and offering us an alternative vision of land as agentic. As a walking vessel representative on both metaphorical and literal levels of her country, Cleopatra is ruler and feminine landscape itself, allying her with the element of earth or mud, another brown substance reminiscent of the excremental.

Cleopatra is aligned with the waterscape her landscape self contains too: the Nile, a hotbed of creation and spontaneous generation.¹¹³ Or, as Kinney says, “she is the Nile itself” (178)—primarily, I would argue, because she functions both as the reproducer and the reproduced: as Nile-soaked land¹¹⁴ and that which erupts from it through spontaneous generation. For evidence, we may turn to Antony and Lepidus’s conversation aboard Ptolemy’s ship in Act II:

ANTONY: The higher Nilus swells
The more it promises; as it ebbs, the seedsman
Upon the slime and ooze scatters his grain,
And shortly comes to harvest.

LEPIDUS: You’ve strange serpents there?

¹¹³ For more on spontaneous generation in *Antony and Cleopatra*, see Edward Geisweid’s chapter “‘The Nobleness of Life’: Spontaneous Generation and Excremental Life in *Antony and Cleopatra*” in *Ecocritical Shakespeare*, edited by Lynne Bruckner and Dan Brayton.

¹¹⁴ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines mud in the early modern period as “Soft, moist, glutinous material resulting from the mixture of water with soil, sand, dust, or other earthy matter...” (1a) and “Something regarded as base, worthless, or polluting” (6). Dung has a very similar definition, highlighting that mud’s presence elicits the aura of waste as well: “excrementitious and decayed matter employed to fertilize soil; manure” (1) and “...that which is filthy or defiling” (2).

ANTONY: Ay, Lepidus.

LEPIDUS: Your serpent of Egypt is bred now of your mud by the operation of your sun; so is your crocodile.

ANTONY: They are so. (2.7.19-27)

Antony and Lepidus both describe Egyptian agricultural practices and spontaneous generation in relation to the ways in which water and muddy landscape—Cleopatra’s two selves, at least so far—interact. Agriculturally, the Nile ensures a “harvest,” for “the seedsman / Upon the slime and ooze scatters his grain.” This is also a gendered, sexual reference, with “the seedsman” a male who, as the name implies, inserts his seed into feminized landscape to produce a “harvest,” or offspring. Aristotle likened women to fields that were plowed during intercourse, as does Shakespeare in *Antony and Cleopatra*: “She made great [Julius] Caesar lay his sword to bed. / He ploughed her, and she cropped” (2.2.233-234), exactly as the banks of the Nile do under the seed of the “seedsman,” mirrored with the elder Caesar. As Lepidus states, just as plants are grown due to the Nile’s flooding, so too are squirming creatures—like the “strange serpents”—spontaneously generated. And, as noted in the Introduction and Chapter 1, these spontaneously generated critters or “strange serpents” were excremental beings, thought to be brought forth as the sun inseminated the wet, muddy landscape—again, male and female copulating—by beating down rays “Upon the slime and ooze.” As the “serpent of old Nile,” Cleopatra is one of these “strange serpents herself”—one of those excremental critters.

And importantly, Cleopatra takes pleasure in constructing her own identity as excremental. Consider once again her statement that Antony calls her “my serpent of old Nile” (1.4.25), and that in imagining what Antony is doing, saying, and thinking while he is away from her, she is “feed[ing herself] / With most delicious poison” (1.4.26-27). Cleopatra longs to hear

Antony call her his serpent and to be this serpent—to be, in other words, the excrement of the generative Nile. To imagine herself as such is “most delicious poison,” a reconceptualization of what is deemed bad or harmful as orally pleasurable. Or, considered again, waste is frequently cast as harmful (often rightly so) and gross, but as embodied in Cleopatra, is made sexually and visually pleasurable. Further, Cleopatra’s longing for Antony’s description of as her “serpent of old Nile” both indicates Antony’s pleasure in imagining her as a spontaneously generated serpent and hence excrement, and her acceptance of this moniker, for she overtly desires to hear him describe her as such in a daydream of auditory delight. This desire and delight applies even in her anger when she strikes and then calls back a messenger who has told her Antony has married Octavia; Cleopatra curses, “Melt Egypt into Nile, and kindly creatures / Turn all to serpents!” (2.5.78-79). Here, cursing is imagined as a release, and is Cleopatra’s only ability to respond—besides striking the poor messenger—to Antony’s marriage to a woman besides herself. Additionally, if Cleopatra accepts her status as “Egypt,” then she casts her body as melting into itself in a manner that has orgasmic undertones—“Melt Egypt into Nile”—and subsequently spawning forth children of excrement—“Turn all to serpents!”—in both erotic, reproductive, and monstrous¹¹⁵ manners. Thus, both Antony and Cleopatra figure her body as excremental, and both take sensory and sexual pleasure in this imagining. To achieve this pleasure, Cleopatra both accepts and describes herself as excremental, refusing to separate her body from its excretions and instead purposefully immersing herself in effluvia.

And, as suggested by Cleopatra occupying the roles of both the reproducer and the reproduced as land- and waterscape mix to spontaneously generate serpents, the Egyptian Queen

¹¹⁵ Indeed, “Turn[ing] all to serpents” is reminiscent of Errour’s slithering brood from *The Faerie Queene* and Sin’s hourly born, howling offspring from *Paradise Lost*, as discussed in Chapter 1.

takes on the roles of both masculinity and femininity in non-dualistic manners to become *self-productive*. Or, as Steve Mentz says, “From brown shit, we get Cleopatra” (203). What she reproduces is none other than herself, the “strange serpents,” or the “serpent of old Nile.” One of those serpents is the crocodile, also discussed by Antony and Lepidus. Indeed, the play explicitly recycles language in their discussion of the crocodile to underscore Cleopatra’s serpent-like, and thus excrement-like, nature: Lepidus, after hearing Antony’s description-less description of the crocodile, concludes “’Tis a strange serpent” (2.7.45). This replication of a “strange serpent” stresses how, according to Enobarbus, Cleopatra “beggared all description” (2.2.203); after all, how can someone who both eliminates dualisms and is human-land-water-serpent-excrement ever be made clear or imagined? Cleopatra is the macro- to the microcosmic, and vice-versa: she is Egypt, Nile, crocodile, and herself, as if her identity spirals inward and outward in concentric circles. She is never single, but always multiple.¹¹⁶ And, through Cleopatra, the divisions between human, animal, land, and water are eroded trans-corporeally as they interpenetrate one another through their containment in a single character. Indeed, these identities all grow together *into* the Queen, generating her presence, composing her identity, transforming from one signified to the next, and decomposing as another signified is evoked. But importantly, *difference* is not eroded, even as all these identities are types of excremental waste; they still stand as themselves while simultaneously being, or rendering, one another in their mirroring. Cleopatra’s selves are therefore both trans-corporeal and continuous, or are as legion as the squirming life of the Nile’s

¹¹⁶ Kinney makes this point as well, particularly in relation to Cleopatra’s ability to have both a public and a private self, whereas Romans—particularly Antony—are only allowed public selves (179-182).

mud. Cleopatra's alignment with excremental stuff leaves her both multitudinous and self-generating, a powerful position in a play concerned with its own capabilities for theatricality.¹¹⁷

A Wondrously Theatrical Queen

To conceptualize Cleopatra's plethoric and excremental theatricality, it is useful to read her through early modern conceptions of wonder. Scholars indicate that wonder is primarily an emotive state that arises from the visual—from the act of an audience looking upon an object, a person, or a situation—such as the magnified flea from Robert Hooke's *Microcosmographia*. Or, as Alexander Marr indicates in *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, wonder was typified by “human inquiry into the natural world; the sustained scrutiny of specific objects; the revelation of the hidden; rapturous admiration at the handiwork of God; the emotional and cognitive response at experiencing the new or unfamiliar” (5-6). In *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750*, Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park also indicate that wonder— “a cognitive passion, as much about knowing as about feeling” (14)—arises when “the line between the known and the unknown” is made apparent (13). Daston and Park specifically explore those wonders of the marvelous that existed beyond typical classification in

¹¹⁷ Many scholars have commented upon the theatricality of the play—particularly in relation to the play's ending and Cleopatra's death—and are worth noting here. For instance, Gordon Braden insists on the theatricality of her suicide, for “together in death, [Antony and Cleopatra] make the world their enduring audience,” as “a good deal of Shakespeare's play is about the uncanny power of a theatricalized make-believe to affect the ordinary reality around it” (50-51). Jacqueline Vanhoutte concurs, underscoring the theatrical nature of Cleopatra's suicide by reading the Queen's death as dignified and “one more extravagant political self-assertion,” meant to be highly public and publicized (158). Tanya Pollard also stresses the theatricality of Cleopatra's death and imagines it as the erotic fulfillment of the Queen's desire to unite with Antony in marriage (115). For her, Cleopatra's death is triumphant, for it allows Cleopatra to regain Antony and to “produc[e]...a more heroic Antony” at the play's close (108). And Unhae Langis asserts that Cleopatra is a master of theatrical disguise, falsely portraying herself as a helpless woman to achieve a “honorable death” through “practical wisdom;” her suicide subsequently embodies both “honor and love” (403).

medieval and early modern Europe, such as monsters, and figures and items from an exotic East, that were forms of titillation and inquiry in elite culture. These wonders instill a desire to know, or to “see,” both visually and as a method of understanding.¹¹⁸

While wonder certainly had scopophilic dimensions, it was also seen as important to self-improvement. Or, as Daniel Fusch argues, early modern wonder elicits “the ethical end of provoking self-fashioning, through reforming the wit (right thinking) and then the will (right doing)...Wonder is meant to be humbling, to show the defects in one’s reason for the purpose of moving one to perfect one’s reason” (183). Notably, Sir Philip Sidney and John Milton both wrote within this tradition, understanding writing as the method through which to “provoke readers to fashion themselves and choose virtuous actions” (192); or, as I noted in Chapter 1, the goal of both Spenser and Milton’s work was reformation on the part of individual readers, with the poet helping to guide this reformation through their writing.¹¹⁹ However, Peter G. Platt offers caution, noting, “wonder was not always embraced as good...Wonder—and the encounter with the marvellous—stimulated inquiry but should dissipate when the problem in question was solved. In short, wonder should cease; understanding or reason should replace wonder” (13). We

¹¹⁸ Consider, for example, the changeling boy over which Titania and Oberon quarrel throughout *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*; the queen of fairies states, “His mother was a vot’ress of my order, / And in the spiced Indian air by night / Full often hath she gossiped by my side,” and that after the death of her “vot’ress,” “for her sake I do rear up her boy,” refusing to allow Oberon to claim him as a “henchman” (2.1.123-123, 136, 121). This child, an Indian—and thus, to the early modern European world, an Eastern—curiosity is the crux of the argument between the fairy king and queen, which frames the entire events of the play. While for Titania the child has emotional and parental meaning, for Oberon and audiences alike—especially if the child is placed upon the stage during this argument—he is an object of marvel and wonder. And, like an object plucked from distant shores and placed in a curiosity cabinet, Oberon eventually wrestles the boy from Titania and adds him to his entourage, or collection, able to gaze upon him anytime he wishes.

¹¹⁹ This self-improving end of wonder can be traced to Plato and Aristotle, particularly the latter; indeed, Aristotle returned to the idea of wonder repeatedly in his texts, from *Metaphysics* to *Poetics* (Fusch 187; Platt 12, 15).

should not get too caught up in the sensation of wonder, wondering only for sensation's sake, or we threaten to become, like Antony, always desiring to gaze upon Cleopatra and continuously caught "In her strong toil of grace" (5.2.338).

There is also a history of studying the concept of wonder in relation to the early modern stage, particularly—because he often stands as representative of the period—the Shakespearean stage. Platt, for instance, argues that Shakespeare's plays are frequently a "site of the marvellous" (13), and Fusch contends that "because Shakespeare and the humanist tradition to which he responds define wonder as a passion and an emotional desire...wonder [in Shakespeare] signifies not ignorance but the impulse behind the need to know" (188-189). Indeed, a slew of Shakespeare's plays have undergone readings in relation to wonder, such as *Pericles*,¹²⁰ *Hamlet*,¹²¹ *Macbeth*,¹²² and *The Winter's Tale*.¹²³ In *Shakespeare and the Theatre of Wonder*, T. G. Bishop defines wonder as the experience of the "'between' quality of theatricality." Wonder thus "raises the question of the theatre's interest in emotions it generates through its characteristic creation of a dynamic space of flux and intermediacy—between stage and audience, between the real and impossible, between belief and skepticism, between reason and feeling." It is into theater's "space of flux and intermediacy" that playgoers exist as audience members, and it is in this space that wonder as an emotion arises (3). As a result, to experience theater is to exist in a liminal space of the real—real bodies, sometimes real events—and the fictive—created plot, character, sets—and to hold in suspension these states while watching the

¹²⁰ See Jean E. Feerick's chapter "Poetic Science: Wonder and the Seas of Cognition in Bacon and *Pericles*" in *The Palgrave Handbook of Early Modern Literature and Science*.

¹²¹ See Judith Anderson's article "Wonder and Nostalgia in *Hamlet*."

¹²² See Robert Pierce's article "*Macbeth* and the Tragedy of Wonder."

¹²³ See Huston Diehl's chapter "'Strike All That Look upon with Marvel': Theatrical and Theological Wonder in *The Winter's Tale*" in *Rematerializing Shakespeare: Authority and Representation on the Early Modern English Stage*.

play unfold. And to return to the scopophilic desire to look, the theater is a place of the visual, dependent on both what is seen and unseen by characters and audiences alike. This idea of the seen and unseen is arguably another kind of “space of flux and intermediacy” into which the audience is pulled, and upon which the fiction of the play rests as a source of tension. We do not, for instance, see Ophelia’s drowned form in *Hamlet*; it is merely reported to us, but we know it exists within the fiction of the play, affecting the characters. We do, however, see Yorick’s skull and Hamlet’s woe, and the play presents these three things—a dead Ophelia, a whitened skull, a mourning prince—onto the space of the stage for audiences to “witness” emotionally and/or physically. Both the seen and the unseen captures our attention—prompts wonder—and propels the play toward its tragic conclusion.

Cleopatra’s own theatricality, which causes wonder, functions much the same. As the analysis above make clear, Cleopatra is dependent on that which is seen—both visually and as something known—as she represents the excremental, the leaking feminine, the womb, and the power contained within these types of abject. She is a vision of continuity as her myriad selves compose and decompose in unending cycles of signifieds, and she is a kind of Eastern curiosity, a figure that Daston and Park insist captured the attention of early modern Europe for presumed exoticism. Selves and meanings pile into the queen until Cleopatra is made so plethoric, or multitudinous, that the audience—whether us as readers / viewers, the Egyptians, the Romans, or even just Antony—cannot look away from the spectacle that is the Egyptian Queen. As excrement, as exotic and erotic woman, as powerful queen, she disgusts and pleases, titillates and elicits a desire to know. Cleopatra is, in short, wondrously captivating. The play stages three key moments of wonder-filled theatricality for Cleopatra¹²⁴—although arguably, she is always

¹²⁴ There is a fourth moment—that of Cleopatra’s death—but we will turn to that later.

performing—that are worth exploring to understand the theatrical nature of an excremental Cleopatra throughout *Antony and Cleopatra*.

First is the very opening of the play, where Antony narrates the marvelousness of himself and Cleopatra as a unit as they perform their love for their followers:

ANTONY: Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
of the ranged empire fall. Here is my space.
Kingdoms are clay. Our dungy earth alike
Feeds beast as man. The nobleness of life
Is to do thus; when such a mutual pair
And such a twain can do't—in which I bind
On pain of punishment the world to weet—
We stand up peerless. (1.1.35-42)

This speech flows from liquid to mushy solids to smelly shit: “Let Rome in Tiber melt;” “Kingdoms are clay;” “Our dungy earth.” Antony casts Rome aside and locates himself as a subject of Egypt—of Cleopatra—by declaring “Here is my space.” Imagine him clutching at Cleopatra, and the joke is clearer: Cleopatra is both Egypt, the location where he now resides, and the “space” he fills with a phallus. As Egypt / Queen / excrement, Cleopatra is decidedly attractive, so alluring that Antony, one third of the Roman triumvirate, is prepared to forsake his homeland for her. Excrement does not get in the way of Cleopatra’s appeal, but rather *enhances* it, transforming her into a site of scopophilic desire for Antony and for their audiences as Antony narrates this moment. The excremental then becomes a site of wonder on the early modern stage, represented in the figure of Cleopatra. Although many playgoers would likely already know the story’s tragic outcome, Cleopatra compels audiences to suspend reality and exist in a “space of

flux” and wonder: what excessive, amazing, dramatic action will she take next? And importantly, the love (physical and emotional) that exists between Antony and Cleopatra is so great—perhaps so greatly theatrical—that they are made into a “mutual pair,” complementing each other to form one whole. For Antony, no other lovers reach the heights of himself and Cleopatra, or represent more for the known world. They transcend their individuality to stand representative of west vs. east, rational vs. bodily, categorized vs. exotic, Roman vs. Egyptian, and in so doing “stand up peerless.” As Antony declares his love in terms which gesture toward Cleopatra’s excrementality, their entourage look on, reminding us as readers and viewers that this love—no matter how real or heartfelt—is still a spectacle. Indeed, their greatness and wonder is rendered null without an audience, the stage representing the entire world upon which and for which they perform.

While this moment is staged for playgoers, Cleopatra’s subsequent two instances of theatrical wonder are merely recounted to the audience. In the second instance, Enobarbus recalls Antony’s first experience with the Queen:

ENOBARBUS: The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne
Burned on the water. The poop was beaten gold;
Purple the sails, and so perfumèd that
The winds were love-sick with them. The oars were silver,
Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made
The water which they beat to follow faster,
As amorous of their strokes. For her own person,
It beggared all description...
The city cast

Her people out upon [Cleopatra], and Antony,
Enthroned i'th' market-place, did sit alone,
Whistling to th'air, which but for vacancy
Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too,
And made a gap in nature. (2.2.196-203 and 219-224)

This speech is bedecked in theatricality and plethora. Cleopatra has carefully staged each piece of scenery, from the throne upon which to sits to the perfume that scents the air; all of it is meant to project her majesty and beauty before yet another ruler of Rome.¹²⁵ Like a marvel on display in a curiosity cabinet, Cleopatra is placed to be advantageously viewed, to elicit sensorial pleasure, and to cause the marketplace audience to feel wonder at the gold, silver, flutes, and perfume that surround her. Wonder is predicated here on excessive wealth, so vast that it defies full knowledge and instead reflects off Cleopatra to enhance her beauty and allure. Enobarbus notes that everyone in the marketplace, where Antony sat, leaves to see Cleopatra up close, even the air “which but for vacancy / Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too.” In so doing, “a gap nature” is created, filled with the carefully cultivated artifice that Cleopatra projects. She becomes everything—she has “beggared all description” in “her own person,” and, surrounded by the multitude of objects she has gathered as part of her performance, both encapsulates and reflects them into a projection of her selfhood.¹²⁶ This selfhood—or the recognition of Cleopatra’s

¹²⁵ And, as discussed in relation to coal smoke in Chapter 3, this perfume becomes part of the smellscape of the marketplace, sensorially affecting viewers and drawing them to Cleopatra.

¹²⁶ Cleopatra is also surrounded by a variety of objects and individuals upon the barge—including the gold throne, perfume, and silver oars already discussed—such as a “pavilion” (2.2.205), “pretty dimpled boys” (208), “divers colored fans” (209), “gentlewomen” appearing “like the Nereides, / So many mermaids” (212-213), and “silken tackle” (215). She overtly presents herself in relation to excess, her selfhood containing and projected by each aspect of her river barge. Arguably, she colonizes each these objects and individuals and seeks their incorporation into a “master identity” that is “incorporating, totalising, or colonising” and

greatness—is dependent upon understanding the queen as eliciting wonder in the marketplace, causing all to wish to see and know her as they “gaze on Cleopatra.” Interestingly, Antony holds himself in check, delaying visual gratification as his own greatness and wonder-inducing fame competes with that of the Egyptian Queen’s; but the queen, the play makes clear, wins when she draws his audience, like two theaters competing for playgoers. Already cast in the role of excrement by the play, the wonder Cleopatra inspires in the marketplace audience—including Enobarbus—acts as a performance of and a longing for shit. Rather than cringing away, spectators—and we, as an audience—are continuously drawn toward an excremental Cleopatra who, like Duessa, makes forms of waste alluring.

The final moment of Cleopatra’s use of wonder and theater is relayed by Octavius Caesar as an explanation for declaring war on Antony and Cleopatra. “As ‘tis reported,” he notes,

CAESAR: I’th’ market place on a tribunal silvered,
Cleopatra and himself in chairs of gold
Were publicly enthroned. At the feet sat
Caesarion, whom they call my father’s son,
And all the unlawful issue that their lust
Since then hath made between them. Unto her
He gave the stablishment of Egypt; made her
Of lower Syria, Cyprus, Lydia,
Absolute queen... She

“recognises the other only as part of the empire of the same” (Plumwood 157). Indeed, her status as Cleopatra and as Queen is rendered visible as the marketplace audience takes in her trove of curiosities, eliciting wonder that any single being can own and control so much stuff. An argument can therefore be made that this stuff is colonized into Cleopatra’s identity, the individuality of each thing erased in the face of an all-encompassing Egyptian Queen.

In th'habiliments of the goddess Isis

That day appeared, and oft before gave audience (3.6.3-11 and 16-18)

This scene, where Caesar relates Antony's return to Egypt at last, is yet another moment of Cleopatra carefully crafting a wondrous spectacle. This presentation of herself as Queen, and of Antony alongside her, doling out kingdoms to their children, is all staged so that they appear a mighty, regal, and united family. Cleopatra is wonder embodied: she *is* Isis the goddess and Antony is her sword, which reshapes kingdoms and sets up a dynasty meant to rule a good part of the known world. They are a curiosity and a marvel, gods wrapped in human form, which audiences both desire to know and cannot fully know. This inability to know compounds wonder, leaving audiences trapped in a sensorial limbo—which, as Platt points out, is a defective stagnation, an entrapment in wonder that defies understanding and knowledge. Instead, audiences—and particularly Antony—are forever trapped in wonder and unable to access Cleopatra through reason. Indeed, this lack of reason points us toward the future disasters of Antony and Cleopatra's love, which are predicated solely on overwhelming emotion that consumes both a country and the characters' lives. And, by staging this scene "I'th' market place" to be "publicly enthroned" "in chairs of gold," Cleopatra ensures not only that her Egyptian citizens will be witness to this event but that the larger world will as well, as evidenced from Caesar's recounting of the report. Her stage is the world, and as land-water-snake-woman-excrement, she celebrates herself and endows these identities not just with majesty, but with godhood, elevating the debased—the smelly, the excremental, and the grotesque. Through Cleopatra, feminized shit shapes the course of a nation, is made a key player in the classical world, and above all, is celebrated in manners that transition into awe.

It would be easy to assume that theatrically presenting a Cleopatra who embodies various kinds of excrement would leave her abhorrent, like a stripped Duessa or smoke engulfed London, but as these examples demonstrate, it is just the opposite: Cleopatra as excrement is a wonder-based spectacle of eroticism and desire. Caesar's cringing at Antony's relationship with Cleopatra is therefore disgust that in dabbling with the Egyptian Queen, Antony is playing with waste, for the once great Roman has removed himself the Empire and now wades in the muck. Yet to return to Antony's opening speech, this is what he prefers, what he finds pleasurable: "Here is my space." Shitty Egypt and shitty Cleopatra are not denigrated but upheld as sites of bodily enjoyment and privileged as mesmerizingly beautiful, for "she did make defect perfection" (2.2.237). Antony *loves* Cleopatra as—or even because she is—excremental, a position offered to audiences as well. As Gail Kern Paster reveals in *The Body Embarrassed*, there is evidence for such early modern excremental excitement. For example, in her reading of Ben Jonson's 1610 play *The Alchemist*, Paster explores how women's bodies—especially those of whores—were likened to privies as places of pleasurable evacuation for men. Male dramatic characters who are bodily controlled by women—Cleopatra notes that she "drunk [Antony] to his bed, / Then put my tires and mantles on him whilst / I wore his sword Philippan" (2.5.21-23)—function as representations of infantile desire and regression and elicit notions of "ambivalent bodily experience" that is at once shameful and pleasurable (161). Given the play's content, this reading maps perfectly onto *Antony and Cleopatra*. Again, we are returned to the differing reactions of Caesar and Antony toward Cleopatra, for her alignment with excremental forms of waste makes her at once a spectacle of the disgraceful, the wondrous, and the erotic. Therefore, in staging Cleopatra, the play keeps staging excrement, forcing readers and audiences to confront that which they would rather ignore and to reconsider our own collective human

immersion in excrement. We are meant to ponder if, like Antony, we can enjoy the excremental embrace.

Cleopatra's Trans-corporeal and Continuous Narrative

This section explores the storied matter of a multitudinous Cleopatra, based in understanding the Queen's narrative as constituted by trans-corporeality and continuity, and thus a brief reminder of Alaimo and Plumwood's ecological concepts proves useful. Alaimo's trans-corporeality insists on human immersion in the environment, urging us to realize that we are never fully separated from the stuff of the physical, material world. Plumwood's continuity, meanwhile, calls for a reconceptualization of the dualistic Western master-model that insists upon human exceptionalism and separation from nature. Instead, she proposes continuity as understanding humans as existing in degrees of relationality with the natural world, cautioning, however, that this does not mean eliminating difference into one massive, colonizing entity. Read together, these two ecological scholars insist on both recognizing and celebrating connectivity, enmeshment, similitude, and difference between humans and a larger world made up of various actants. In so doing, humans may relate to the environment through more ecologically sound practices, rewriting narratives of colonization, instrumentalization, and the depletion of nature. Trans-corporeality and continuity, particularly when read together, can aid in the understanding of the material world as a living, moving system made up of a diverse multitude of actants.

Much of Cleopatra's wonder-inducing theatricality, as explored in the prior section of this chapter, is based upon the multiplicity of trans-corporeality and continuity. This multiplicity is material and ecological, governed by continuity and trans-corporeality as her various identities—woman, Queen, land, water, serpent, excrement—evoke one another and, in their

containment in the singular figure of Cleopatra, collapse into one another. Cleopatra—both Shakespearean character and historical Queen whose life has been examined at angles that often best suit her biographer’s agenda—is a container filled with, in the words of Bennett, agentic *things* exerting their own bits of power.¹²⁷ The agencies of Cleopatra’s various selves are at times contradictory and at times aligned, but they always represent her. She is both singular and identifiable as Cleopatra, and multiple as she is lost in the swirling mass of her signifieds. She both underscores difference and presents the world to audiences as one brown streak. She connects concepts and physical things in continuity, and dissolves them into one another in transcorporeality. Perhaps it is best to simply say that she is the excremental in all its complex glory.

Capturing Cleopatra in language is therefore a tricky and shifting task, for she seems to elude its categorical and dualistic grasp in manners that would make even Derrida dizzy. Shakespeare gestures toward this notion in Act II of *Antony and Cleopatra* when Antony and Lepidus continue their discussion of Antony’s time in Egypt. Lepidus asks,

LEPIDUS: What manner o’ thing is your crocodile?

ANTONY: It is shaped, sir, like itself, and it is as broad as it hath breadth. It is just so high as it is, and moves with it own organs. It lives by that which nourisheth it, and the elements once out of it, it transmigrates.

LEPIDUS: What colour is it?

ANTONY: Of it own colour, too.

¹²⁷ This idea of a multitudinous Cleopatra is also supported by understanding the early modern medical concept of porosity, which figured the body as a sponge in the environment, inhaling and exhaling things like air, water, food, and effluvia in constant flows that thoroughly enmesh the human subject in the more-than-human world. Early modern subjects, when understood as porous beings, thus always threatened to become multitudinous in manners that blur the category of the human. This slippage is why careful governance of the self, and the achievement of internal bodily balance, was necessary.

LEPIDUS. 'Tis a strange serpent. (2.7.38-45)

This discussion centers around the Egyptian crocodile, which is humorously unable to be described, or captured in language, by Antony. Underlying this comedy, however, is a reflection upon Cleopatra, who is here represented by the crocodile, as she has been by other serpent and mud-like critters. Like an object of wonder, Lepidus hopes to mentally be able to gaze upon the crocodile—to see it in his mind’s eye—and in so doing, to also gaze upon Cleopatra. But both the linguistic slipperiness of the crocodile and of Cleopatra avoid representation to Lepidus, or to a another third of the Roman triumvirate. Instead, the crocodile blends into the muddy Egyptian shore along the Nile, lying in wait to ensnare with its teeth-lined jaws, just as Cleopatra has ensnared Antony and the audience. A crocodilian Cleopatra is a dangerous wonder, that upon which we wish to gaze but from which we must distance ourselves, for she will consume us through spectacle. Cleopatra again is both multitudinous—trans-corporeally and continuously—and wondrous. She is so grand and so many, or so theatrically wondrous, that she escapes Antony’s ability to relay verbally, leaving us again with an imperfect and irrational understanding no matter how long we as audiences—here aligned with Lepidus and a befuddled Antony—gaze upon Cleopatra. The queen thus becomes ghost-like,¹²⁸ eluding capture in mere words; to see her is to know her, and to see her is also to be rendered speechless. And, significantly, we see a racialized question too when Lepidus asks “What colour is it?” in

¹²⁸ Another aspect of the linguistic inability to describe Cleopatra is due to her status as both alive and dead. Indeed, early modern audiences were familiar enough with classical sources to already know the outcome of the play, and a viewing or reading of it is therefore one long wait for Cleopatra’s death: she is both physically present and presently spectral. This dual state is compounded by the various moments of foreshadowing throughout the play (Cleopatra: “Give me to drink mandragora / ... That I might sleep out this great gap of time / My Antony is away” [1.5.3; 5-6] and a little later, “Now I feed myself / With most delicious poison” [1.5.26-27]), which are mere elbow nudges to audiences already in the know concerning the Queen’s fate.

reference to the crocodile. Antony is unable to answer, for Cleopatra slips through words and leaves him nearly speechless. There is a kind of power, then, in her ability to avoid anyone else's words about her, manifest here in relation to excrement and race.¹²⁹

Enobarbus also notes the inability of language to ever contain Cleopatra as he struggles to describe why Antony is so taken with her to fellow Romans Agrippa and Maecenas. He states,

ENOBARBUS: ...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. For the vilest things
Become themselves in her, that the holy priests
Bless her when she is riggish (2.2.240-245)

Enobarbus's description of Cleopatra turns to an explanation for why Antony will never be able to leave the Egyptian Queen. He is completely caught by her; her barge was the hook she baited him with, just as she reflects upon catching him while metaphorically fishing. "Age" does not diminish her beauty, "nor custom," for Cleopatra is never the same, but is full of "infinite variety." This "infinite variety" reflects back upon her theatrical staging of the barge, reminding us of her plethoric self-presentation. It also, however, points us back toward how Cleopatra is serpent-excrement-Egypt-queen-Nile all at once, a spiral of material continuity and "infinite variety" that reproduces itself in replicated loops of reference that defy linguistic delineation.

¹²⁹ Race is an important concept throughout the play—as discussed more below—and scholars have taken note of this fact. For instance, Steve Mentz's chapter "Brown" in *Prismatic Ecology*, discussed elsewhere in this chapter, briefly examines the relationship between brown excrement and brown skinned bodies. Dympna Callaghan's chapter "Representing Cleopatra in the Post-Colonial Moment" and Joyce Green MacDonald's article "Sex, Race, and Empire in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*" also prove instructive.

And in this variety, this cluster of different kinds of selves that form one whole but never dissolve fully into similitude, “she makes hungry where most she satisfies.” Indeed, even if she is excrement itself, “the vilest things become themselves in her.” Her excrementality, her plethora, and her ever-changing nature is key to the allure of Cleopatra. She elevates the excremental, making it and herself a source of pleasure. And this multitudinous excrement is also a key aspect of the narrative, framing events, characters, and relationships, and becoming as complex as the play’s spiraling plot.

This material multiplicity, particularly as understood through trans-corporeality and continuity, is what makes Cleopatra a site of ecological storied matter. As I noted in the introduction of this chapter, Oppermann tells us that storied matter is a focus on “matter’s creativity,” which arises when human and more-than-human agencies and things collectively intertwine into larger narratives of existence (21, 31). Consider, for example, a vegetable garden. Multiple human and more-than-human things work in tandem to allow it to flourish or wilt: nightly watering, the temperature, its placement in or out of direct sunlight, insects, and soil composition. Each of these elements may have harmonious or competing intentions with the others; for instance, the watering and soil composition is likely determined or aided by the gardener, while insects seek only to sustain themselves by eating and thus damaging the plants. Together, various agencies and things both human and more-than-human work (sometimes together) to produce the outcome of that year’s garden: a good pepper harvest, but a poor tomato one. And as the gardener clears out the plants for the season and the cold wilts whatever vestiges remain, many more instances of storied matter arise, end, or are continued. These moments of storied matter occur on enormous scales—like climate change—and on miniscule ones—like a loaf of freshly baked bread, hot from your own oven.

Cleopatra's storied matter is generated in this same way, by the competing and aligned forces of a multitude of beings and things both human and more-than-human. Cleopatra and her choices—both for herself and for her country—are the human aspect of this storied matter. It is those various other selves—land, water, serpent, excrement—that are the more-than-human forces, and that sometimes aid Cleopatra or work against her. For example, as landscape of Egypt, Cleopatra is great and magnificent; but as excrement, she is denigrated by the Romans, particularly Caesar, even while Antony worships her as his “serpent of old Nile.” As storied matter, the Egyptian Queen is composed of layers of narrative: the slithering of a spontaneously generated serpent, the flooding of the Nile, her love for Antony, and her theatrical dramatics. While Cleopatra's identities, or various selves, may never fully dissolve into one another—thus retaining difference—these narratives do, for they intertwine *into* the story of Cleopatra. The implication or outcome of Cleopatra as storied matter is the very text of Shakespeare's play, for without her storied matter it could not exist, at least in its current form. This figuration is, I argue, a vision of narrative based within trans-corporeality and continuity. This kind of narrative is governed by unity, or the dissolution of various parts into one complete whole, even as aspects—or beings/actants—of that narrative remain distinct; we can, again, think of how Cleopatra slips through the noose of language's need to categorize, where categorization is often based on an insistence of delineation and dualism, rather than similitude within difference. Thus, even as Cleopatra refuses to be captured in language, her materiality, her theatricality, and the choices she and her various selves make twine together in an assemblage of storied matter that determines the fate of Antony, Cleopatra, Rome, and Egypt collectively.

Indeed, this storied matter comes to a climax—as the play's structure inevitably demands—in Act V, Scene ii, when Cleopatra slips through Caesar's grasp and ends her own

life. Cleopatra senses that while Caesar may send emissaries with soothing words to her monument, he intends for her to become his prize, or trophy, to show off as a memento of victory to his fellow Romans. As she tells Proculeius, Caesar's envoy, she will not be

pinioned at your master's court,
Nor once be chastised with the sober eye
Of dull Octavia. Shall they hoist me up
And show me to the shouting varletry
Of censuring Rome? Rather a ditch in Egypt
Be gentle grave unto me; rather on Nilus' mud
Lay me stark naked, and let the waterflies
Blow me into abhorring... (5.2.52-59)

Cleopatra outright declares her own intentions: "This mortal house I'll ruin." She will, in other words, kill herself to escape Caesar's clutches, refuse "the sober eye / Of dull Octavia," and avoid being put on display before "the shouting varletry / Of censuring Rome." She turns to images of the alternative she would prefer: "a ditch in Egypt" as her "grave" or to be placed "on Nilus's mud / ...stark naked, and let the waterflies / Blow me into abhorring." The Norton edition's footnote states that to be "Blown into abhorring" means that Cleopatra would prefer the waterflies "Lay their eggs on me (thereby breeding maggots) so that I become disgusting, abhorrent" (footnote 1, p. 2713). As food for flies and maggots, she imagines herself as kinds of waste—refuse, dung—that will generate new offspring in the form of maggots. But she also prefers to remain one with "Nilus's mud" through spontaneous generation, providing her with the opportunity to be waste in myriad ways: as cast off refuse, as part of the mud, as the source of spontaneous generation, and through this generation, transforming into dungy creatures that

would grow from her corpse. She insists she will remain herself by controlling her own ending—her own narrative.

Cleopatra's method to evade Caesar's grasp is to rely upon herself, both in terms of her own ingenuity at the method of her death and in using one of her various selves as this method. She turns to a character known only as the Clown to procure this method: "Hast thou the pretty worm / Of Nilus there, that kills and pains not?" To this, the Clown replies, "Truly, I have him...his biting is immortal...the worms an odd worm" (5.2.238-239, 241, and 250-251). Interestingly, by choosing to end herself using "the pretty worm / of Nilus"—an asp—Cleopatra's method of suicide is self-referential. Per above, Cleopatra is a serpent, and thus the asp represents a punning on suicide, or taking one's own life. Said differently, she kills herself by herself, or with herself, as the snake. When the Clown declares that "the worm's an odd worm," we might be reminded of Antony and Lepidus's discussion of the crocodile, which is also a discussion of Cleopatra; the crocodile and Cleopatra alike "beggar all description," as does the snake here in being "odd." Additionally, the bite of the snake will be "immortal," a moment seemingly misspoken but entirely accurate, for Cleopatra does indeed become immortal in history and the collective imagination through the snake's bite. Or, as the play indicates,

CLEOPATRA: *[She takes an asp from the basket and puts it to her breast]*

Come, thou mortal wretch,

With thy sharp teeth this knot intricate

Of life at once untie. Poor venomous fool,

Be angry, and dispatch. O, couldst thou speak,

That I might hear thee call great Caesar ass

Unpolicied! ...

Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,
That sucks the nurse asleep?" (5.2.294-301)

This moment explicitly stages Cleopatra taking her life into her own hands, choosing to die as a way of thwarting Caesar and determining her own fate. She cajoles the snake until it bites at her breast, poisoning her; then, addressing her handmaidens, she declares, "Dost thou not see my baby at my breast, / That sucks the nurse asleep?" The snake is transformed into her child as well, both Cleopatra and those she should care for. This is—again, pun intended by the play—a poisoned image of maternity, for it will leave her children and citizens without her and thus subject to the whims of Rome. Cleopatra, however, also (re)births herself here as she makes herself "immortal" by taking her own life at the bite of the asp. She chooses the time and method of her death, and unlike Antony, is successful in this endeavor to control her own narrative, or to write her own ending.

Even Caesar, stubborn as he is and as much as he disparages the Queen throughout the play, cannot help but admit her prowess in thwarting him. Upon finding her dead body—carefully staged to be gazed upon like another marvel or wonder in a curiosity cabinet, and covered with an asp's trail of slime—Caesar notes that she is "Bravest at the last," and has "levelled at our purposes, and, being royal, / Took her own way" (5.2.325-327). Said differently, Caesar admits that Cleopatra has thwarted and outsmarted him in taking her own life. She has decided how she will be read as an agent of storied matter and gazed upon as a spectacle of theatrical wonder. She has ruined his chance to show her off like a prize of war in Rome, and has altered the narrative he wished to spin of his success in war. Cleopatra thus outwits a general and statistician and, through successfully killing herself, acts more Roman than a Roman—than

Antony, whose drawn out suicide was one long debacle at the end of Act IV.¹³⁰ Cleopatra, at the end, wins; Cleopatra as the embodiment of multiple kinds of—but particularly of serpentine—excrement wins, and excrement thus writes its / her own narrative. What has given Cleopatra the power to do so is her excremental status as storied matter, as various kinds of selves with transcorporeally and continuously intertwining narratives. The asp, one part of Cleopatra’s self, dissolves her story and her life with its “immortal” bite, ending the play in a vision of unified wholeness which is Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Cleopatra and Excremental Ethics

Cleopatra’s death may end her story, but her significance does not conclude with the asp bite. Rather, Shakespeare’s Cleopatra offers readers options for exploring more ethical engagements with the material substances and entities we typically demean—if we choose to read against the narratives Romans and others long spun of her as a flighty, manipulative

¹³⁰ Gordon Braden indicates that early modern understandings of suicide were contradictory, for suicide was both banned in law and yet continually represented artistically, as “suicide figures repeatedly and memorably in Renaissance drama.” Laws, particularly in relation to the Church, condemned suicide and “were enforced during the period more aggressively than in the centuries that precede and follow” (37-38). Yet simultaneously, early moderns tended to like all things Roman, as they imagined the roots of much of Western Europe—the English boasted this was particularly true of England—were conceived in the expansion and rule of the Roman Empire. A considerable amount of Roman history and myth offered a counter-narrative toward suicide that differed entirely from that of law and the Church, for in Roman tales “aristocratic suicides [were] widely regarded as heroic and admirable” (38-39). Indeed, Braden estimates that “suicide figures in 90 percent of the plays” set in ancient Rome (42), and that the plays Shakespeare based off Plutarch are a clear instantiation of this idea (49). Jacqueline Vanhoutte concurs, adding only that it was particularly those early modern individuals “who had access to education, and therefore to classical literature,” who could conceive of the heroic and noble elements of dramatic suicide, and that otherwise, suicide was considered “a transgression against the laws of God, of nature, and of the state” (153). Leaving aside our own current conceptions of suicide, it is apparent that killing oneself in early modern plays was fraught with competing discourses which evoked religious and ethical concerns. Nonetheless, Cleopatra’s is meant to seem Roman—to be worthy and brave, but “In a distinctly Egyptian variation,” whereby “Egypt is by Egypt valiantly vanquished” (Kinney 185). This is a narrative to which Antony aspires, but doesn’t quite manage, as he bungles his own end.

whore.¹³¹ By instead focusing on how Shakespeare's excremental Cleopatra represents herself and celebrates this self, we can interrogate some anthropocentric, misogynistic, and racist scripts. In what follows, I sketch out how we may do so and the implications for reinterpreting an excremental Cleopatra using excremental ethics, or an alternative consideration of forms of waste to offer empowerment and potential revision to demeaning scripts.

To understand Cleopatra's potential to challenge anthropocentrism, we can return to the idea that the play casts her as literal excrement. At first blush, this alignment appears demeaning, but as I have explored above, it offers the Egyptian Queen a unique ecofeminist power throughout the play. In *Cleopatra*, more-than-human and human entities / actants are all equalized into vital materialities that work in tandem to demonstrate how Cleopatra's power is predicated upon Bennet's ideas of the power of things, for "bodies enhance their power *in or as a heterogeneous assemblage*...[agency then] becomes distributed across an ontologically heterogeneous field" (23). Excrement and Cleopatra are co-constitutive, generative, and encapsulate binaristic oppositions—thus eroding dualisms—throughout the play in a manner that refuses to let the human subject ever be separated from place or its excretions. Again, such categorization of Cleopatra seems paradoxical, for we often like to imagine our excrement as separate from ourselves and our identities, at least after it has exited our bodies. (Think flushing toilet, then compare this to the urge you feel to hold it when there is no other option but a Port-A-Potty.) But Cleopatra tells us we cannot be separated, for she is constantly categorized by the play as actual forms of waste; even the chamber pot cannot remove her from excremental life, for the play specifically and repeatedly describes her body and her identity as brown effluvia. Or

¹³¹ For a truly excellent feminist interpretation of the historical Cleopatra—in which this exact issue is tackled—see Stacy Schiff's *Cleopatra: A Life*, briefly touched upon in the conclusion to this chapter below.

as Mentz says when writing on *Antony and Cleopatra*, “It comes at us from both sides of our world, the living and the dead...Thinking brown pushes us into hybrid spaces...Brown is the color of intimate and uncomfortable contact between human bodies and the nonhuman world” (193). Indeed, the play’s constant depictions of types of effluvia, references to excremental critters, and descriptions or stagings of Cleopatra, demonstrate how excremental waste is ever present, forcing acknowledgement of a substance we often like to ignore.

Such forced acknowledgement is most explicit at Cleopatra’s death, where she imagines herself dissolving into mud and spontaneously generating new creatures. Again, she declares,

Rather a ditch in Egypt

Be gentle grave unto me; rather on Nilus’ mud

Lay me stark naked, and let the waterflies

Blow me into abhorring... (5.2.56-59)

As Gabriel Egan contends, the final scene of the play “is intensely focused upon the transformation of Cleopatra’s body after death...Cleopatra imagines giving herself up to the transformatory creatures of her own country” (118). Here, the asp, an excremental critter, aids Cleopatra in her own transformation from living being to rotting corpse, where her decomposing body may birth new beings in an extension of her own boundaries. This birthing then extends the dimensions of her excremental assemblage. Dan Brayton’s essay on *Antony and Cleopatra* suggests this as well when he writes, “Cleopatra’s death by serpent is explicitly described in terms of slime as a kind of excremental presence...Once again slime becomes a word associated with the...uncertainty of boundaries and borders” (87). Brayton refers to the moment when a guard detects the trail the asp has left on Cleopatra’s body after her death, and indicates this same slime is found “upon the caves of Nile” (5.2.342). Caesar and his guards, then, find a trail

evocative of excrement upon Cleopatra's body, a final image that erases all doubts concerning the Queen's identification with excrement and her body's meeting with waste in death. Moments before, the Clown told Cleopatra the asp's "biting is immortal" (5.2.241)—a clear hint of Cleopatra's immortality as elicited by her suicide—but what also "is immortal" here is Cleopatra's willingness to embrace the excremental and to use such excrement to ensure her story will be generated in manners closer to her own wishes than those of Rome after her death. A human subject may direct and steer this assemblage of excremental beings, but in so doing, Cleopatra must align herself with the more-than-human world in a manner that collapses distinctions between subject and object and makes her a signifier of the ability of the more-than-human to shape the human.

Consequently, Cleopatra's death makes clear to audiences and readers alike that we can never escape the embrace of excrement, and can never tell our stories as ones that are sealed off from effluvia. Mary Thomas Crane alludes to this interpretation as well, for in her reading of the play, "Egyptians...reflect an earlier view that environment shapes subjects;" this is a view that relies upon "Aristotelian science," wherein "the earth and its inhabitants were made of the same interchangeable stuff" (7, 5). Cleopatra makes us face our contemporary excremental denial, shoves it, fetid and rotting, into our faces as she gallivants across the stage. She continually reconstructs herself through excrement across the play, indicating that Cleopatra's story cannot be understood as separate from excrement, and thus neither can our own. To be ethical beings who are trans-corporeally and continually enmeshed in an undeniably excrement-ridden world, we must, like Cleopatra, confront our shit. In fact, Cleopatra tells us we will be ethical when we begin to engage with our excrement in a more visceral manner. The play therefore provides a template for reconceptualizing waste's place in our lives and our interactions with it, urging us to

treat that which is commonly denigrated as having undeniable importance in the construction of everything around us. Perhaps this will lead us to more ecologically friendly practices, where instead of sealing ourselves off from waste, we compost more and flush less, and are more willing to reuse than to turn objects into dangerous waste that piles in dump sites near oceans or the residences of those who live in poverty.

Through a gendered lens, *Antony and Cleopatra* also unflinchingly relates how the men in the play—even Antony—often see Cleopatra as nothing more than the stereotypical jezebel, a racialized term for a hyper-sexualized woman who relies upon eroticism to manipulate men. She is referred to as, for instance, a “whore”, a “gipsy,” and a “witch” (4.13.13, 28, and 47). Each of these terms is loaded with a history of the demonization of women, particularly when they are powerful and / or sexual. They are words from the very core of misogyny, lobbed at women who have escaped patriarchal control. And interestingly, these categorizations of Cleopatra are spewed by Antony in Act IV, Scene xiii after the loss of the final battle with Caesar. He misogynistically demeans her in his anger over her perceived treachery, falsely believing she has made a deal with Caesar’s envoy behind Antony’s back. Stunned for once into silence, Cleopatra flees to her monument for protection and then decides that she will test if Antony still loves her by faking her own death. While it is the report of her death (and his ultimate loss against Caesar) which then prompts Antony to turn his sword upon himself, Cleopatra never betrayed her lover—other than to lie of her death. The play makes explicit, then, that she is not a “whore,” “gipsy,” or a “witch,” but is rather a Queen dealing with by love and misogyny in a world ruled by men who fear her feminine power.

Instead, the play suggests we should turn and redirect ourselves to Antony's earlier praise of Cleopatra, in which he seems to enjoy Cleopatra's power over him. Jokingly chastising her in Act I, he declares,

Fie, wrangling queen,
Whom everything becomes—to chide, to laugh,
To weep; how every passion fully strives
To make itself, in thee, fair and admired! (1.1.50-53)

That Cleopatra is a “wrangling queen” suggests she is “contentious, noisy, [and] clamoring” (*OED* 2). However, this is not a critique but praise, indicating that Cleopatra is adept at getting her way or at swaying the situation to her own ends. Cleopatra, in other words, reads a situation and acts accordingly; she is intelligent and resourceful. Such a representation of the Queen early in the play is useful to help us understand how Cleopatra later outwits Caesar in Act V by escaping him through death. In addition, she is someone “Whom everything becomes,” or is, in all temperaments and situations, appealing, powerful, and fully in control. In other words, even if she is “wrangling,” it is well suited to her; she makes any “passion” seek to be “fair and admired.” She is also, Antony later admits in a conversation with Enobarbus, “cunning past man’s thought” (1.2.132). While the play frequently highlights Cleopatra’s materiality and sexuality—sometimes praising, sometimes demonizing, depending on the situation and the character interpreting her—Cleopatra is always able to be smart and sensual, authoritative and alluring, feminine and in control. She offers a way for us to question the narratives spun about women as foul, demonic whores and to instead see them as multifaceted beings who are not either / or—not just a Mary / Eve dichotomy—but are beings of complexity, just as men are. Although I have argued extensively for the materiality of Cleopatra, this same materiality also

highlights—by throwing into contrast—how she is more than just a body as she uses her mind to rearrange the physical world to best suit her needs. Again, per Antony: “She is cunning past man’s thought”—she is smarter than the men who would seek to make her subservient or write her destiny for her. Cleopatra always insists upon making her own choices.

Cleopatra is also initially demeaned, and then recuperated, through her status as a mother. Caesar in particular scoffs at her as a mother, questioning whether Julius Caesar truly is the father of Cleopatra’s firstborn son Caesarion and then describing her children with Antony as “the unlawful issue” of nothing more than “lust” (3.6.6 and 3.6.7). While we might question Cleopatra’s suitability as a mother—she does abandon her children and her citizens in death—she also taps into the power of the mother to aid her in making her own choices. Indeed, as explored above, the asp that she uses as her method of suicide is described by Cleopatra as “my baby at my breast” (5.5.300). While at first the script of Cleopatra as a mother is used by Caesar to cast her as a whore, Cleopatra rewrites this script to instead demonstrate excremental agency in choosing the time and manner of her own death, and the way in which her legacy will be remembered. Or, as Staub contends in examining Cleopatra’s alignment with Egypt and the Nile through spontaneous generation, the Queen “offers a version of the unchecked fertility of the female body” that “posits [her] tendency to escape boundaries and paternal control” (74). I wish to add that Cleopatra’s fertility and (spontaneous) generation, her alignment with the land- and waterscapes of Egypt, similarly allows her to escape patriarchal control as embodied in the Roman Empire and Octavius Caesar. As slippery, wet and leaky female Nile, she is uncontainable; as Egyptian serpent, she is unconquerable, for her suicide allows her to effectively wriggle out of Caesar’s grasp, leaving his plan to display her as a scopophilic attraction in Rome thwarted.

Again, this same figuration holds true when we understand Cleopatra as a sexual being. She is covertly or overtly referred to as a “whore” multiple times throughout the play, and the Romans appear to believe she has pried Antony, and earlier Julius Caesar, from their clutches using nothing more than sensuality. To again quote Agrippa, a Roman, “She made great [Julius] Caesar lay his sword to bed. / He ploughed her, and she cropped” (2.2.233-234). If Cleopatra has “made...Caesar lay his sword to bed” during their sexual intercourse, she is—as explored above—passive Aristotelian landscape implanted with masculine seed. It is, of course, notable that such a description of Julius Caesar and Cleopatra’s relationship comes from a Roman man.¹³² When Cleopatra describes her sexual dalliances with Antony, however, the roles are quite different: during one of their many raucous interactions, she “drunk [Antony] to his bed, / Then put my tires and mantles on him whilst / I wore his sword Philippan” (2.5.21-23). Here, Cleopatra’s oft remarked upon “infinite variety” comes to encompass gender as well. Indeed, we see a queer portrayal of gender when Cleopatra gets Antony drunk and then puts him in her “tires and mantles,” the garments of her station and gender as Queen of Egypt, while she then dons “his sword Philippan.” Antony becomes feminine, while Cleopatra takes the masculine phallus embodied in the sword. She reverses, in other words, Agrippa’s earlier imagining of her as nothing but feminine material waiting to be inseminated. Rather, she casts herself as containing playful gendered and sexual agency which unnerves the highly patriarchal state of Rome.

But if we are to account for Cleopatra’s myriad identities, we must also consider her as a raced woman. Shakespeare carefully crafts her as a dark-skinned individual: she is said to have “a tawny front” (1.1.6), and Caesar later says that Antony has been “tippling with a slave” in

¹³² Shakespeare also enjoys his verbal wordplay throughout the text: the two countries in question, Egypt and Rome, pun upon their gendered associations in their English spellings, with E(gy)pt as gyno- for female, and Ro(man) its male counterpart.

dallying with Cleopatra (1.4.19). Indeed, it is important to consider the implications of aligning a racialized woman with excrement, for brown bodies are often racially denigrated as dirty or impure in contrast to white skin; this is evidenced through the continuous oppositions drawn between Cleopatra and Octavia throughout the play. While historically the Ptolemy line were said to be rulers of lighter complexions, Cleopatra commands the absent Antony to “Think on me, / That am with Phoebus’ amorous pinches black, / And wrinkled deep in time” (1.5.27-29), thus explicitly aligning herself with blackness in a manner that gestures both to her skin tone and ethnic background. As Mentz, to whom my own reading of the play’s use of excrement is indebted, notes,

it is not possible to talk about brown, stinking bios-fragments without being overcome by our culture’s most insistently social brown, human skin color. This racialized brown stains my metaphors [of excrement], so that it is difficult to argue that brown is the color of shit, excess, and revulsion without courting racist codes...But brown logic proclaims that all things mix together, the ones you want and the ones you try to reject, living bodies and dead matter and pernicious cultural fantasies. (194)

With this language, Mentz “bracket[s]” issues of race for later work, as he finds it both beyond his current consideration of brown ecology and beyond the specified length of his chapter in the collection *Prismatic Ecology*. On this last point I concur with him, for to engage in questions of race in *Antony and Cleopatra* is no easy task, but nor is it one that should be ignored. In fact, a consideration of Cleopatra as a racialized being is an entire project unto itself. That said, I also will be unable to do adequate justice to the portrayal of brown skin in the play, but I do want to

consider the implications of aligning a brown-skinned Cleopatra with celebration of brown excrement.

In the early modern period, Cleopatra's raced identity would have been a complex one that simultaneously aligned her with "the sixteenth-century's veneration of Egyptian learning [and] a narrative of African degeneration" (Archer 1). For example, John M. Archer indicates that early modern Europeans relied upon older notions of Egypt as wise and venerated, but the more recent slave trade cast those of darker complexions as innately inferior (8). Egyptians straddled this dual conception held by sixteenth-century white Europeans, as does Cleopatra, for she is at once "with Phoebus' amorous pinches black" while also "wrinkled deep in time." Yet the context in which Cleopatra voices these lines is important, for she imagines Antony's longing for her and her own desire for his swift return so that their romance may resume. For Archer, she therefore "unites antique meaning and sexuality" (21). Similarly, Joyce Green MacDonald extends this idea by insisting, "Cleopatra links her race to a story about masculine desire and masculine surrender" (70), where race is central to Rome's imperial impetus and Cleopatra's sexual desirability throughout the play. Cleopatra again engenders multiple meanings, rendering her "the exotic woman, who...[signifies] the fascinating, sexually compelling and distant real of the Other" for both the fictional Romans and early modern playgoers (Callaghan 53).

Consequently, Cleopatra as a character relies upon racist and misogynistic early modern conceptions of racialized others, but retools them—again, she describes herself "with...amorous pinches black"—in a vision of feminine sexual prowess that allows her to thwart masculine domination and remain in control over her would-be Roman colonizers. Consider again, for example, even Octavius Caesar's marked deference to her at the play's end, and his exclamations that in suicide she was "Bravest at the last, / She levelled at our purposes," and in death appears

“As she would catch another Antony / In her strong toil of grace” (5.2.325-26; 336-38). While the play continually associates Cleopatra with the unchecked sexuality of a jezebel, at the end, this dark-skinned woman is celebrated for her cleverness, bravery, and beauty. She is, as always, multitudinous; or, as Dympna Callaghan so accurately insists, “Instead of using the usual Renaissance conventions for depicting women in terms of the polar opposites, the virgin or the whore, the paragon of female obedience or the witch, Shakespeare presents us with a character whose very fascination lies in the curious admixture of these qualities” (53).

Antony and Cleopatra thus both denigrates and celebrates Cleopatra’s race, or at the very least, Cleopatra celebrates her own race, imagining her black skin as a reason for Antony’s love and desire for her. As always, this play is not either / or, but a squirming amalgamation of and, and, and, where Cleopatra embodies multiple meanings that appear to contradict, but settle into the alluring figure of a woman who “did make defect perfection” (2.2.237). Subsequently, it is not that I am purposefully identifying a raced woman with excrement, but that Shakespeare’s play has overtly made this move, and in so doing, complicates the significance of both race and excrement. Cleopatra, who is arguably one of Shakespeare’s most compelling and multifaceted heroines, is celebratory both of her race and her overt alignment with waste in manners that challenge racist and human-centered scripts. I will not claim that Shakespeare is arguing against racism, for *Antony and Cleopatra* relies—as so many other of his plays do—upon early modern racial theory, but instead contend that Cleopatra confronts and complicates issues of race through her declaration and celebration of her race as a source of her sexual allure. This idea also, of course, contains racist undertones, but simultaneously enables us to better conceptualize how Cleopatra exists along borders of multiplicity and contradiction, where her race is both despised by others yet upheld by her, and where her alignment with excrement is both a source of disgust

and titillation.¹³³ Cleopatra, then, may enable modern readers to engage with both race and excrement in alternative manners that uphold categories that are frequently denigrated both historically and in our own present moment. She is, problematically or not, always sexually arousing in her alignment with otherness and excrement, and most of all, with plethora.

However, we also cannot ignore the potential problems that arise in relation to the excessive plethora of an excremental Cleopatra. One problem occurs in terms of how humans—even women, who can also enact patriarchy, colonialism, racism, and other forms of domination—drain resources from the natural world. As plethora and excess, Cleopatra soaks up everything around her: waste, snakes, land, water, Antony, and narrative. In a world dominated by Roman colonialism, Cleopatra herself threatens to become a colonizer. And arguably, at times she does, particularly when she uses other things and entities to extend her own subjecthood, as she does when Enobarbus recounts her appearance on the barge before the marketplace in Act 2, Scene ii. We must also contend with the issue of an individual human Cleopatra who oversees her own fate when the ecofeminist paradigms of Alaimo and Plumwood urge us to see that we are all a part of larger ecologies that extend our intentionality. Again, in ending her life, Cleopatra abandons her role as Queen of Egypt, leaving her children and her nation—citizens, landscapes, waterscapes, excremental critters, and more—to be invaded by Rome.

But notably, there are no neat resolutions to the issues of anthropocentrism, sexism, and racism in *Antony and Cleopatra*; Shakespeare's play, and particularly his Cleopatra, preclude neatness. Further, the Bard was not an ecologist—let alone an ecofeminist—and we, as contemporary interpreters of his plays facing contemporary issues, cannot expect the writings of a white man from late sixteenth-century England to ever adequately or fully address issues

¹³³ And, of course, racism does not preclude sexual desire.

involving ecology, gender, and race. While Shakespeare certainly witnessed the ecological devastation brought upon England by the Little Ice Age and the pollution of coal-burning industries, his plays are decidedly focused around the human: human relationships, struggles, mentalities, and politics. Reading Shakespeare through ecofeminism is often a reading against the grain, and requires that we as scholars are willing to note where there is potential for concepts of progress, and where problematic representations occur. This argument is not to dismiss places this chapter does not adequately address, but rather to note that the complexity of Cleopatra only leaves us with equally complex answers in relation to ecology, gender, and race. Nonetheless, when moments that can be read progressively do appear in Shakespeare's works, early modern and ecofeminist scholars with an interest in ethics must press upon them.

Ultimately, Cleopatra as a challenge to anthropocentric, misogynistic, and racist scripts is best summed up by returning to the figure of the lizard; or, in her particular case, to the figure of the crocodile. Again, as Antony tells a fascinated Lepidus, "It is shaped, sir, like itself, and it is as broad as it hath breadth. It is just so high as it is, and moves with it own organs...[it is] Of it own colour, too" (2.7.39-42 and 44). This crocodile, this Cleopatra, is a being of dangerous allure, unable to be rendered because it—*she*—determines her own course in a testament to the narrative agency of types of waste. She "is shaped...like itself," or by herself, just as she is of her "own colour, too." Rather than be belittled or cowed by demeaning scripts of her gender, sexuality, or race, Cleopatra embraces and celebrates these oft denigrated aspects of herself, remaining unapologetically herself—unapologetically crocodilian, or excremental. Her status as kinds of excrement is what affords her so much power and allows her to not only write her own story, but to determine the outcome of others as well.

Conclusion

Cleopatra lingers—and not just Shakespeare’s Cleopatra, but an entire teeming mass of Cleopatras. She has been rewritten and reread and reinterpreted in a multitude of ways, ways as plethoric as Shakespeare’s depiction of the Egyptian Queen. She abounds in popular culture even into the present day, from Elizabeth Taylor’s 1963 film portrayal to an odd little book called *Cleopatra VII: Daughter of the Nile –57 B. C.* by Kristiana Gregory in the *The Royal Diaries* series for young girls, a book I owned and read over and over as a child.¹³⁴ Like Antony, I couldn’t—I can’t—get enough of Cleopatra, and to rediscover her as an adult through an ecofeminist lens is a joy.

Cleopatra was recently reimagined as a feminist icon by the historian Stacy Schiff, whose delightful biography of the Queen, titled *Cleopatra: A Life*, follows the monarch from childhood to her untimely death. Schiff’s careful exploration reveals the kinds of education, choices, and circumstances Cleopatra experienced and how she sought to navigate a world ruled by men. As with Shakespeare’s Cleopatra, Schiff’s historical rendering shows a queen who does not just survive, but thrives, a brilliant chemist, strategist, student, and ruler. In Schiff’s own words,

A goddess as a child, a queen at eighteen, a celebrity soon thereafter, she was an object of speculation and veneration, gossip and legend, even in her own time. At the height of her power she controlled virtually the entire eastern Mediterranean coast, the last great kingdom of any Egyptian ruler. For a fleeting moment she held the fate of the Western world in her hands. She had a child with a married man, three more with another. She died at thirty-nine, a generation before the birth of Christ. Catastrophe reliably cements a reputation, and Cleopatra’s end

¹³⁴ Unfortunately, my childhood copy was at some point either lost or donated, but I frequently browse the children’s section of bookstores to see if a new copy may appear.

was sudden and sensational. She has lodged herself in our imaginations ever since. Many people have spoken for her, including the greatest playwrights and poets; we have been putting words in her mouth for two thousand years. In one of the busiest afterlives in history she has gone on to become an asteroid, a video game, a cliché, a cigarette, a slot machine, a strip club, a synonym for Elizabeth Taylor. Shakespeare attested to Cleopatra's infinite variety. He had no idea. (1)

Schiff is right; enough speaking now, no more "putting words in [Cleopatra's] mouth." It is time to simply recognize that the "serpent of old Nile" owns her excrement laden narrative.

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