FEELING WASTE: MATERIAL SENSATIONS IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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In eighteenth-century England, waste was ubiquitous. Londoners dumped their vessels in the street. Corpses from plagues and fires created innumerable problems for overfull cemeteries. Advances in medicine meant extraneous teeth, blood, and other unsavory items need to be disposed of after their extraction. Despite this ubiquity, however, scholars have only recently begun to interrogate how people understood and experienced bodily waste. In this study, I show that three writers – Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, and Tobias Smollett – each tried to understand waste through embodied knowledge and affects. In doing so, they situated themselves in direct conversation with the Enlightenment’s shifting understanding of emotional and sensorial experience, where deep feeling was increasingly depcorporealized and subject to rationalization and reflection. Swift, Pope, and Smollett each recognized this affective change, and each writer sought to examine, critique, or even reify the Enlightenment’s intellectual realignment. These writers used literary representations of waste to explore whether the Enlightenment could truly strip desire and disgust in particular of their ability to evoke multiple, full-bodied sensations and how this affective change would affect their world.
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In a poem by Mary Jones titled “Holt Waters” (1750), a young woman jumps out of her carriage and runs away from her compatriots. Fleeing from their stopped coach, she looks around frantically for something, but cannot seem to find what she is searching for. Through free indirect discourse, we can see that she is in crisis as she tries to find someone who is currently at home: “What shall she do? Her wants are pressing, / And speedily require redressing” (ll. 73-74). Finally, after coming across a cream-pot, she decides that she must satisfy her urges and pisses in the cream. Then, she fills the pan of milk, a jug of ale, and other items in the kitchen to such excess that the omniscient narrator pleas for her to stop. Her exuberance overwhelms the reader and narrator alike, and both are titillated and unsettled by the mixture of urine and drink. In one scene, we savor the narrator’s luxurious description of the drink that “Nay Jove himself, the skies protector, / Would call such liquor heav’nly Nectar” (ll. 83-84), and in the next narrative moment, the narrator’s dialogue suddenly seems like our own: “O stop, dear nymph; alack! forbear; / Spoil not our cheese! Our butter spare!” (ll. 94-95). Jones, however, is bent on spoiling the goods – both the kitchen’s delights and our narrative pleasure – and uses Cloe’s waste to inspire the affects that do so.

In eighteenth-century England, waste was ubiquitous. Londoners dumped their vessels in the street, and they stomped through the filth on their daily outings. Corpses from plagues and fires created innumerable problems for overfull cemeteries. Advances in medicine meant extraneous teeth, blood, and other unsavory items need to be disposed of after their extraction.

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1 Mary Jones, *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse. By Mary Jones* (Oxford: Printed by Mr. Dodsley in Pall-Mall, etc., 1750), 93-100.
Despite this ubiquity, however, scholars have only recently begun to account for all this waste, realizing that notwithstanding the increased concerns about decency and virtue of so much Enlightenment literature, these writers lived in a world full of filth. As this scholarly reckoning has taken place and more critics have worked to expand our understanding of the eighteenth century’s affective world, the question remains why was discussion of this waste so avoided? The bawdy humor that had so dominated print cultures of previous centuries slowly vanished over the course of the 1700s. By the end of the century, the literature of choice focused on sentiment: a cognitive process that emphasized the thought and reflection that comes after strong feeling.\footnote{There is no static definition of “sentiment” in the eighteenth century as emotion terms like “passions” and “affects” frequently shifted in meaning. Philosophy has noted that some valences of eighteenth-century sentiment differed from other systems of feeling in that “sentiment” is more calm, is tempered or refined, and serves as the basis for moral or aesthetic judgement. For an overview, see Amy M. Schmitter, “17th and 18th Century Theories of Emotions” in The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, edited by Edward N. Zalta (Winter 2016 Edition), accessed April 2, 2018. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/emotions-17th18th/} The Romantics would notoriously sum up this notion in a different way: “emotion recollected in tranquility.”\footnote{See William Wordsworth, Preface to Lyrical Ballads (London: Printed for T. N. Longman and O. Rees, Paternoster-Row, By Biggs and Co. Bristol, 1800).}

This thesis documents the supposed disappearance of discourses on waste and importantly the transformation of feelings inspired by encounters with waste. In evaluating texts from different moments of the eighteenth century, I argue that waste never truly disappeared from the literature but instead was subsumed under a new affective system – one that not only saw a rigid distinction between rational thought and bodily knowledge, but privileged the former over the latter. Writers understood the affective change that was occurring around them and sought to highlight, examine, critique, or even embrace aspects of this new decorporealized regime. Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, and Tobias Smollett, Alexander Pope in particular each
work through the intricacies of these emotional and sensorial changes by examining how desire and disgust, as full-bodied affects, are non-incorporable, are mistranslated, or progress into a new system of knowledge-making that separates previously entangled understandings of affect and intellect. In doing so, they draw attention to the ways in which this new affective system redefines romantic courtship, literary culture, and health rejuvenation that change the situation of the individual within each social structure. These three interventions are important not just because of these writers’ personal interest in them, but also because these interventions were the targets of larger Enlightenment discourses of improvement and progress.

Initial twentieth-century theorizations of waste treated the material as universal and constant. Since waste was conceptualized as universal to the human experience, it was subject to essentialist perspectives that viewed the rigid boundaries of waste and the feeling it inspires as constant. Waste is inherently disgusting. Mary Douglas’s important work, however, fundamentally changed this perspective by arguing that concepts of filth, both physical and social, were ritualized. The process of separating waste defined the ritual of doing so as desirous while the material was abjected. In other words, pollution was not ontological, but rather epistemological.4 With this new understanding of waste as historically and socially constituted, new explorations started into specific moments of waste, spawning a whole field of waste studies where the process of regulation and the waste’s ontology are understood as fundamental constructs of modern society.5 This work has only recently reached the field of eighteenth-

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5 While too large a field to fit in a single footnote, some characteristic studies include Susan Signe Morrison, *The Literature of Waste: Material Ecopoetics and Ethical Matter* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), David Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in*
century studies. Some of the first discussions of waste were tied to definitions of the eighteenth-century Other and how the boundaries of selfhood were determined by the Other’s ability to (re)produce waste. Some of the most recent studies have focused on how refuse and leftovers trouble the conventional conceptualization of the Enlightenment as improvement. These crucial interventions have filled in significant gaps in our archive, and they have given us an intellectual lineage that shows how our own understandings of waste have descended from the Enlightenment. In this push to reintegrate waste into discussions of the eighteenth century, however, scholars have not fully articulated the valences of sensation and experience that accompany the waste in discursive encounters. While waste studies has been integral to our understanding of the manufacture of abjection and its accompanying affects, eighteenth-century waste is never truly separate and therefore is never truly abject.

As waste studies proliferated, the history of emotions and senses grew into existence through the work of scholars like Lucien Febvre, William Reddy, and Barbara Rosenwein. These fields upended traditionally essentialist notions by recognizing that emotional and sensorial experience was defined by context, not by a purely biological system of relays. Realizing the need for a better framework to approach feeling, Febvre published one of the first works on the

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8 Of course, this is not to say that the history of emotions and senses does not recognize the importance of biology and neuroscience in determining how emotions and senses function within the individual body. In fact, scholars like William Reddy have sought to unify history with the natural sciences in order to give a fuller picture of experience.
subject, explaining sensibility’s role in history.\textsuperscript{9} Later, in more vigorous theorizations of how to analyze emotion in history, Reddy and Rosenwein proposed two different organizations under which emotion could be understood to function. For Reddy, the emotional regime model emphasized that a singular system of emotion would become dominant in any given society and would serve the purposes of larger social necessities, like facilitating large-scale political change.\textsuperscript{10} In almost direct opposition, Rosenwein proposed an emotional community model that allowed for multiple organizations of feeling to coexist, sometimes held by separate populations and sometimes shared across commonly held boundaries between otherwise distinct groups.\textsuperscript{11} In both systems, emotion is understood as more than just an individual sensation; it is also a social phenomenon, defined by group experience, definition, and interpretation. While the field is still determining which model works best and for what purposes, there has been a growing practice of using both systems of feeling, and indeed, as I hope to show throughout this thesis, there are moments where the separation between community and regime seems crucial for understanding how Enlightenment knowledge production processes were determined. Importantly, however, this emotional framework almost entirely omits the physicality of emotion. The history of emotions relies heavily on a post-Enlightenment theory of emotion, where experience can be articulated and discussed almost completely through rational discourse. In addition, the history of emotions has also reified the binary between subject and object, where individuals or communities produce feeling between one another but rarely trouble the boundary of the


individuated subject. In these models, emotion defines humanity instead of fundamentally questioning how this experience might show how experience is defined by and identified through material objects. At the same time, affect frequently relies on a modern, or even postmodern, understanding of the self that does not account for historically situated difference in feeling, often creating moments where these affective models do not fully map onto the eighteenth-century subject. Because of this, I have adapted Reddy and Rosenwein’s terminology to affective regimes and communities in order to express the idea that desire, disgust, and their accompanying feelings are articulated through historical context, but without reifying those experiences as defining the boundaries between individual, community, or nation state. Instead, I recognize feeling’s ability to create physical sensation or trouble the subject-object boundary, and at times, feeling will act counter to its larger regime’s forces. Joining these two fields allows for an understanding that encountering waste was an experience where the liminal was felt: where the bodily remnant can both arouse and revolt in ways that can be understood through rational discourse but also produce a series of thoughts, sensations, and feelings that remain muddied and intangible because they remain deeply embodied. Full-bodied affects, while expressible, can never be fully expressed because they are not centered in one part of the body,

12 Recently, there have been efforts by scholars like Katie Barclay who attempt to address this issue within the history of emotions by closing the philosophical gap between it and new materialism. Notably, however, Barclay understands that this is also a realignment for the history of emotions. See Katie Barclay, “New Materialism and the New History of Emotions,” Emotions: History, Culture, Society 1, no. 1 (2017): 161-183.
13 I want to thank the “Affect, Aesthetics, Ecopolitics” Mellon Sawyer Seminar panel at the New Biopolitics Georgetown University conference for clarifying this point of how affect in fact troubles emotion.
like the brain; they are tied to cognitive, affective, and biological processes all at once. These problems of desire and disgust are in many ways what the Enlightenment decorporealization of feeling was meant to address.

Before this transition, waste could be understood as noticeable, but not the unruly, disruptive force it appears to be in the eighteenth century. A quick look at the opening round of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester’s “Régime de vivre” (c.1673) shows how the mind and body were so intimately linked that waste might even be considered quotidian:

I Rise at Eleven, I Dine about Two,
I get drunk before Seven, and the next thing I do;
I send for my Whore, when for fear of a Clap,
I Spend in her hand, and I Spew in her Lap:
There we quarrel, and scold, till I fall fast asleep. (ll. 1-5)\(^\text{15}\)

While clearly provocative, Rochester emphatically places these “spews” and “spends” into the cavalier’s rigid schedule. Instead of reflecting on the waste, the reader sees that the material not for its inherent quality but as engrained into his daily routine. This moment passes, and the reader continues for a dozen or so more lines to focus their attention more acutely on the man’s egocentricity and his aggression.\(^\text{16}\) Even during this moment where the man is obsessed with not intermixing his waste with his prostitute, the reader is focused on his actions towards her and less on the remnants. In other words, the waste is present, but unmarked. The cavalier felt desire and disgust strongly but did not seriously interrogate or intellectualize them. These affects were bodily processes that followed the hours on the clock, and his waste was intimately tied to them.

\(^{15}\) Paul Hammond, ed., Restoration Literature: An Anthology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 108-109. While his text identifies the poem as of uncertain origins, others have hypothesized that it is by John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester. Because the poem’s composition date is more important for my purposes, I use Rochester solely for the sake of clarity.

\(^{16}\) Peter J. Smith, Between Two Stools: Scatology and its Representations in English Literature, Chaucer to Swift (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2012), 145.
While no one poem can embody the Restoration’s affective regime, this one gives us a snapshot of how waste was a composite part of embodied experience.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, a new, disembodied understanding of strong affects started within the upper echelons of philosophical thought. Building on Descartes’ mind-body divide, John Locke most famously posited in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) that instead of sensation and emotion being mixed into a singular affect that is felt throughout the entire body, the mind would decipher any meanings from the unorganized relays of the sensory organs. Instead of the body receiving equal weight in the processing of affective knowledge, for Locke, the mind served as a great organizer by which the disordered sensations of the body could be rendered: “And if these organs, or the nerves which are the conduits to the mind’s presence-room (as I may so call it) – are any of them so disordered as not to perform their functions, they have no postern to be admitted by; no other way to bring themselves into view, and be perceived by the understanding.”¹⁷ In other words, without the brain there to take in this information, a person would not be able to make sense of their experience. While this might seem like a precursor to modern neuroscience and our contemporary understandings of the brain, it is worth emphasizing that this was a radical departure from previous understandings of bodily experience. Before the introduction of Cartesian dualism during the late early modern period and, here, Locke’s insistence on the mind as necessarily separate from the body’s processes, the mind could not be readily conceived as somehow distinct from the body. A person would not have thought as a brain in a vat. This new affective community, however, developed a system of feeling that by the end of the eighteenth century would extend beyond the elite and become a

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regime, where the vast majority of people unquestioningly participated in its strictures and may not notice their involvement.

How the eighteenth century determined the boundaries by which affective and physical experience might be sensed is integral to understanding the initial responses that this affective regime change elicited. By looking at three of the eighteenth century’s major literary thinkers, I hope to explore how desire, disgust, and their accompanying bodily affects were processed through the eighteenth century’s shifting understanding of how certain feelings and sensations were embodied. At the microlevel, I marry close reading with historicist interpretation, showing how the text’s (de)generative meanings occur within the works and how those meanings were shaped by the authors’ worlds. In particular, I also deploy a kind of “phenomenological formalism,” where I interrogate the multiple intellectual meanings of the literary work alongside the ways the word works on the reader’s body. The eighteenth-century writer was intensely aware of how the idealized reader would speak, mouth, or trace with their fingers the words of what they were reading, and in response, they composed their texts to evoke strong feeling through that reading process which expands those figurative and metaphorical readings into affective ones. At the macrolevel, I start with the smallest scale of subject, the individual, and make my way up to the community and finally the nation state. While each chapter addresses other articulated subjects as well, I hope to show how these writers understand that excrement’s affects trouble sites of articulated subject and blur the boundaries between individual/group and subject/object. Swift, Pope, and Smollett each recognized how this decorporealization of feeling would ultimately restructure and reify previous organizations of thought, and each attempted to address it in their own ways.
In my first chapter, I examine how Jonathan Swift deployed waste’s affects in order to complicate the increasing importance of romantic affection in courtship. In “The Lady’s Dressing Room” (1732), “A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed” (1734), and “Strephon and Chloe” (1734), Swift’s excremental poetry forces the reader to experience the conflicting affects of desire and disgust expressed by young lovers in order to highlight the thin border that separates them. In doing so, he shows that these epistemological boundaries increasingly elevated love as a hegemonic feeling during the early eighteenth century and how romantic courtship was falsely constructed through the separation of desire and disgust. In showing how easily these boundaries could be dismantled, Swift exposes the ways gendered and sexualized power could also be maintained or undone because of their similar social construction. For Swift, the polarizing feelings that women’s waste inspires are not intrinsic to women, but to the categorization of women within a system of erotics.

In my second chapter, I show how by linking reproductive waste to the creative process, Alexander Pope acknowledged the literary process as an embodied experience and warned that literary culture was under attack by a new class of writers whose discernment was deadened. In the four-book version of The Dunciad (1743), Pope shows how writers desirously and disgustingly mishandle their sexualized production and, crucially, how that deadening of experience that should be conjured from waste might proliferate to others through their writing. Through their abortions, sexual residue, and excrement, the writers in The Dunciad demonstrate how the literary world as a future site is a land of dull writing because it is one of dull feeling.

Finally, in my third chapter, I explore a moment of transition, where Tobias Smollett’s The Expedition of Humphry Clinker (1771) shows how its protagonist navigates the old and new affective regimes. Starting with a traditional understanding of embodied experience, Matthew
Bramble’s travels across Britain bring the reader through the familiar full-bodied and undifferentiated valences of desire and disgust inspired by waste encountered in England. By the end of the novel, however, his transformation to a rational and semantic understanding of sensation distances strong feeling from the body and understands such feeling primarily through progressive and constructive discourse. Where Pope and Swift are more critical of this new regime, Smollett accepts its reality and shows its lineage through a good-hearted curmudgeon’s diatribes and eventual silence on various urban wastes. Bramble ultimately serves as an accessible, model citizen that can serve to better highlight the nation’s transition to this new system of feeling, where waste is best thought of within rational discourse and without full-bodied sensation.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment’s affective regime has taken hold, and people write about these affects in a way that signals their larger decorporealization. In my conclusion, I briefly show how his disembodiment is visible in texts as diverse as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) and Jane Austen’s *Sanditon* (c.1817). For these writers, desire and disgust continue to be somewhat embodied, but waste serves a site where strong affects have been stripped away from experience, in favor of intellectual or spiritual understandings of self and the boundaries that define humanity. By abjecting their waste and the full-bodied feeling it inspires, the characters in those novels demonstrate how they try to intellectualize their feelings, emphasizing the use of feeling only through its subsequent reflection. While we continue to feel with our bodies to some extent, the literature of the eighteenth century points to the transition period that defines both what aspects of embodiment are no longer part of modern culture and the ways our mind has rationalized and transfigured feeling and sensation as a result of this affective regime change.
Chapter 1

Unlacing Swift’s Excremental Women

Jonathan Swift’s scatological poems are perhaps the most infamous literature featuring waste in the eighteenth century. Viscerally engaging and vexing in content, these poems have evoked a robust scholarly debate over how best to understand them.\(^{18}\) Despite such a lengthy critical conversation, much of this analysis has shirked the gross details of the poem, with a newer article even pointing to such avoidance in its own title.\(^{19}\) Most likely, this is because the poems’ treatment of waste still elicits a strong feeling from the reader, and it is usually negative. We have attempted to engage with the poems’ content almost in spite of these feelings, as if our previous discussions of these poems’ misogyny, Freudian narcissism, or romantic love should be considered only through rational dialectic, not through their affective qualities. This chapter is interested in analyzing that “usually negative” feeling because the poems are clearly working to produce more than just simple disgust. In his excremental verse, Swift is obsessed with both outlining the diverse emotions the characters themselves feel and, importantly, imparting such complex sensations to the readers. No matter how much we try to read these poems as wholly disgusting, such negative feeling at times falls away in highly calculated rhetorical and structural


maneuvers. Swift works to maintain that how his characters experience in the poems will align with and inspire similar feeling in his readers. Throughout the narrative, he guides the reader through both the characters’ feelings and the emotions and sensations that the reader is meant to feel. During some moments, the reader feels disgust when examining the gross remains of his female characters. During others, the reader feels the desire of the narrator or male characters in trying to control the female body through fully knowing it.

Swift’s representations of feeling the complexity of waste in his poems marked him as an outlier even among his fellow satirists. In their deployment of the traditional satiric grotesque, his contemporaries ultimately depart from the mean realities of waste to discuss the larger ideals or concepts that it may symbolize, where excrement could function as a metaphor for political affiliation or art. Swift, however, rebukes these generic standards.²⁰ His satire is about the waste and the seemingly contradictory feelings it inspires. His subject matter – the woman and her waste – is not just a choice laden with misogynistic implications, but one that acknowledges the integral role women play within the organization of society and waste’s ability to disintegrate women’s containment within that typology. Having identified that women’s bodies act as a locus for exclusionary, binary feeling, he uses their excrement and their cosmetic leavings to disrupt the reader from their increasingly reified emotional trajectory. He makes the disgusting desired and the desired disgusting through the female body, and he shows the dualistic model between the two affects to be untenable. In collapsing the boundary between these two affects, he stresses how these sensations towards women complicate their role in marriage, reproduction, and sexuality. Using waste as his vehicle, Swift’s recognition of multi-valenced feeling obscures the

simplistic types of virgin, wife, and prostitute, de-situating the boundaries of “woman” in eighteenth-century England. In lampooning the increasing affective rigidity of courtship, he interrogates the supposed limits of male erotic feeling and unmoors women from their culturally defined positions. Orchestrating this subversion of romantic/sexual practice, Swift de-stratifies the containment of women within the organization of Enlightenment thought and disrupts attempts to know them in a separated and disembodied romantic context.

His first scatological poem, “The Lady’s Dressing Room,” printed in 1732, was his initial attempt at tackling these feelings. Swift begins the poem by giving “an Inventory” of what a young lover finds when he sneaks into his mistress’ bedchambers (l. 10). In short, the room is filled with bodily waste of all sorts that we experience with Strephon, stopping at each item to examine and admire. Little by little, the discoveries Strephon stumbles upon become increasingly foul and come to an affective climax at Caelia’s chamber pot. The narrator, who frequently interjects with his own thoughts about Stephon’s expeditions, guides us through the action of the poem while also explaining Strephon’s feelings as well as his own quasi-omniscient sensations. The division between these two principal actors – Strephon and the narrator – has been one of the major obstacles in understanding the intent of the poem as their perspectives often muddy together. There does not seem to be any noticeable distinction between the two in voice or style; the only moments of clear division are marked by explicit interjections that are meant to draw attention to the narrator’s reflections and away from Strephon. As William Freedman has argued, Strephon and the narrator are not separate individuals, but instead parallel thought processes experiencing the bedchamber together; they are both Swift, but take two perspectives on the
same matter which are sometimes different and sometimes similar.\textsuperscript{21} While they may be formally separate, as Freedman argues, the reason why their perspectives often collapse and overlap is because they are derivations of the same Swift. Regardless of whether this framework translates beyond a Foucaultian author-function Swift, Freedman’s reading of the voices is helpful here because it explains why their individual perspectives are so blurry: Strephon’s and the narrator’s perspectives are divided only by their interpellation of the ideologies of desire and disgust envisioned by the author function of the poem.\textsuperscript{22}

As part of Swift’s project, Strephon’s and the narrator’s perspectives cannot stay separate because the ideologies of desire and disgust functionally collapse into one another. Because the content of the poem is so focused on the feeling, the narrator must interject to ensure that we do not misconstrue Strephon’s emotional trajectory. While at the beginning of the poem the narrator is quick to condemn Caelia as “haughty” (l. 2), half-way through he is excited to imagine Caelia plucking out worms from her nose (ll. 63-68). In contrast, Strephon at the beginning of the poem was eager to examine her “besmeared” smock, “display[ing] it wide” (l. 13), but by the middle of the narrative, he is “frightened” (l. 61). The desire felt by Strephon bleeds into the narrator’s perspective, and the narrator’s disgust is increasingly experienced by Strephon. They are no longer in control of their feelings, and the binary distinction between these two affects begins to disintegrate. Their own visceral responses shift and are relocated with each experiencing a different sensation than when they first entered the chamber. The structure of the entire poem


\textsuperscript{22} Here, I mean it does not matter whether this is how Swift, the historical person, envisioned his poem. Instead, I argue that this is how his author function is working within the poem. For a full discussion on the difference between author and author function, see Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?” in \textit{The Foucault Reader}, edited by Paul Rainbow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 101-120.
confuses where desire and disgust are situated by mixing together the divergent and similar responses to the waste through these two actors.

The climax of the poem brings this muddying to the surface when our suitor notices Caelia’s chamber pot. When Strephon opens the vessel, the narrator goes on a short digression focused on searching for Hope at the bottom of Pandora’s Box. A master of this comedic rhetorical device, Swift links these classical, high-minded descriptions of Epimetheus to this much baser discovery. After this parodic interlude, Swift returns to the contents of the chamber pot and how Strephon interacts with it:

So, Strephon, lifting up the Lid
To view what in the Chest was hid,
The Vapours flew from out the Vent;
But, Strephon, cautious, never meant
The Bottom of the Pan to grope,
And foul his Hands in search of Hope. (ll. 89-94)

The narrator fills this moment with a sensory panoply. Strephon sees and smells Caelia’s waste; he is accosted by its “Vapours.” Swift cheekily invokes an imaginative touch, where the narrator assures us that Strephon would not reach into the pot’s contents while also using decidedly visceral language like “grope” and “foul” to help the reader imagine such a dreaded feeling. The use of the word “grope,” however, has a kind of doubling, where it points towards a still amorous encounter. “Grope” held the same sexual resonances in the eighteenth century as it does today and in this poetic moment is aligned with “foul.” This waste is titillating and revolting for Strephon. The next stanza takes this feeling further, referring obliquely to Caelia’s “Secrets of the hoary Deep!” (l. 98). Swift uses another classical reference (Milton) to satirically glorify her waste, but he also blurs the distinction between Caelia’s excrement and a kind of erotic signifier.
It takes no leap of imagination to see the double entendre of “secrets of the deep” on female genitalia, and when read aloud, the word “hoary” would also sound like “whory.”

Swift links the whitish grey excrement with a figure that simultaneously elicits both desire and disgust in the eighteenth-century imagination: feminine sexuality. In pointing to how the vagina, the virgin, and the prostitute all share proximity with waste, Swift complicates the thin border between desire and disgust, gesturing towards the untenable ways in which Enlightenment society has begun to try to feel both in isolation. Normally, the sexualized woman is supposed to be desirous or disgusting, but not both. As other scholars have already noted, the chamber pot serves as a holder of material and metaphysical chaos, where the aesthetic becomes indiscernable. By quoting Milton, Swift is drawing attention to his use of the divine in the poem. Linking the goddess to the gross, quotidian concerns is of course a mechanism of Swift’s satire, but it is one that highlights the miracle of somehow being able to momentarily displace the waste and disgust. On one hand, Swift calls Caelia a “Goddess” to parodically join her ethereal appearance to her earthly filth. On the other, he notes that she somehow does manage to organize it and hide it from onlookers, if but for a moment (l. 3). When the divine returns at the end of the poem, it is “Vengeance, Goddess” who seeks to punish Strephon for his “peeping” of the waste (ll. 118-119). While Strephon might have tried to substitute Caelia’s shit for “amorous Fits,” Vengeance hoists all of women onto Strephon. She punishes him by forcing him to imagine every woman’s “stinks” and “odours.” He is cursed with originary knowledge, able to “imagine” all and yet is unable to organize it. There is no longer his singular beloved, but instead unindividuated women whose unquantifiable waste proves too much for him. Swift’s chamber

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23 Indeed, this play between “hoary” and “whory” has been noted in other contemporary publications. See “whory, adj.” OED Online (Oxford University Press, January 2018).
24 See Baudot, “What Not to Avoid in the Lady’s Dressing Room.”
pot reveals that within this originary chaos, desire and disgust are one in the same and must be felt together, and no mere mortal can organize it to excise one feeling or the other.

In the stanza following the discovery of the chamber pot, Swift delays the climax of the poem in order to bring this conceptual problem to its clearest point. In this digression, the narrator abruptly pivots to a long discussion of cooking “Mutton-Cutlets, prime of Meat” (l. 99). He cautions at length against letting the fat drip into the fire causing a “stinking Smoke” and “greasy Stench” that would overtake the meat (l. 105, 107). After this gustatory exercise, he ends the digression by tying it back to Caelia’s excrement:

So, Things which must not be exprest,
When plumpt into the reeking Chest
Send up an excremental Smell,
To taint the Parts from whence they fell; (ll. 109-112).

In a visceral comparison, Caelia’s genitalia, like poorly cooked meat, is polluted by its excretions. This juxtaposition is meant to be humorous in its shocking connection, exchanging the culinary pleasures of meat with an immediate and explicit sexual/excremental sensory experience. The poem cultivates a form of desire in its culinary pre-climax moment only to surprise the reader into finding themselves dropped back into the chamber pot. This sensorial desire is switched quickly to a full sensory disgust, with such evocative language like “plumpt” and “reeking.” If the poem were to end here, this may be solely disgusting – a virulently misogynistic rant against the filth of women that leaves nothing but the chaos in the chamber pot. However, Swift changes course. He spends the rest of the poem (ll. 115-144) scolding Strephon for feeling this and losing his desire for women. In a rejoinder to “wretched Strephon,” he asks him, “Should I the Queen of Love refuse, / Because she rose from stinking Ooze?” (l. 130). He ends the poem encouraging the reader to appreciate “such gaudy Tulips rais’d from Dung” (l. 144). In another coarse image that links an erotic signifier with bodily waste, Swift forcefully
insists that we feel desire here too, no matter how much we may have empathized with Strephon and his own aversion to Caelia’s chambers.

How do we make sense of this sequence in the poem? Other scholars have defined this as a kind of false binary – either you have sex knowing this distinction between desire and disgust is unreal, or you don’t have sex at all – but there does not appear to be a third option. There was no escaping filth in the eighteenth century, and the chamber-pot’s physical (and unhidden) location within Caelia’s bedchamber insists on that linkage of sex and filth. Swift’s conclusion that we reckon with the filth is not just satirical glee in getting to “rub our noses in it”; he acknowledges that waste and the feelings it inspires cannot be ignored. In switching abruptly from the chamber pot to Caelia’s “secrets” to a discussion of meats, Swift uses a cycle of metaphors that unmoors separate feelings for Caelia. By reducing Caelia to pieces of former flesh – excremental, sexual, and culinary – Swift forces the reader to find their connection. In the metaphor of eating meat, are we eating Caelia? Are we eating her shit? Is this disgusting? Is this desired? Swift hoists these questions on the reader because he has no simple answer. These “Things which must not be exprest” cannot be expressed. In this inability to delineate disgust versus desire, the distinctions that Enlightenment intellectualization increasingly tried to construct between sex, food, and waste collapse. Through her waste, Caelia becomes an unquantifiable, bodily experience that encapsulates multiple feelings and sensations without being able to sense them in isolation – they overwhelm. Swift’s final stanza articulates this problem and comes to the only conclusion that is expressible: women can never truly be separated from their waste and thus they must be appreciated within it. While still playing into misogynistic tropes of women as dirty and as objects to be appreciated via their bodies, their filth becomes integral to the experience of disgust and desire. Instead of the either/or dichotomy that
women’s bodies were placed under in his contemporary society, the woman cannot be just desirous or just disgusting. The Queen of Love had to rise from stinking ooze. The tulips are gaudy only because they grew in dung. For Swift, the desired and the disgusting become inseparable when it comes to sex and waste – a singular, unnamable sensation that overwhelms the mind and the senses.

Swift stands in stark contrast to his contemporaries by weaponizing these full-bodied affects to undermine the burgeoning bodily separation that would make their muddled experience less powerful. As Carolyn Korsmeyer has argued about the aesthetics of disgust, he “capture[s] in a breathtaking manner something terrible that we may recognize as true.” Bringing the distance between desire and disgust to zero, Swift’s poetry delimits the roles women play in eighteenth-century society and emphasizes how flimsy those affective bounds are. He argues both that romantic love towards women should not be abandoned and that an uncritical love is foolish. He complicates the process of sexual reproduction by making it both hellish in its earthiness and near-divine in its inability to be purely categorized. He shows how the female body becomes a site that is a nightmare and a dream. The contradictory work of previous scholars debating whether Swift’s poems are about misogyny, Freudian narcissism, or critiques of materialism are thus all correct because they all function within the Enlightenment binary between desire and disgust and the increasing subjection wrought by the mind-body divide. Using the excremental woman as a cudgel, he opens these debates about the role of women as a sexual partner, a potential wife, a site of lived experience, and thus, an integral part of defining knowledge within English society. Swift unfetters the reader from conventional reading practices.

of literary didacticism or pure entertainment and leaves them to swim, or more likely sink, in these uncertain waters. Re-entangling the sensations he and his contemporaries feel towards women, Swift attempts to re-embry the experiential knowledge that underwrites the empiricism integral to the Enlightenment intellectual project of truly knowing something by measuring, naming, and stratifying it.

After Swift released “The Lady’s Dressing Room” in 1732, he then published a pamphlet in 1734 that contained three new poems: “A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed,” “Strephon and Chloe,” and “Cassinus and Peter.” “Cassinus and Peter” presents a wholly male perspective that engages a similar dynamic, where Swift transcribes the dialogue between the two eponymous friends. Following a familiar comical trajectory, Peter comes to the same conclusion as Strephon in “The Lady’s Dressing Room”: “Oh! Celia, Celia, Celia sh—“ (l. 118). While unique in its insistence on Cassinus’ own masculine excremental horrors (his “Breeches torn, exposing wide” and “His Jordan… Between his Legs, to Spew or spit in” (l. 15, l. 20-21)), the poem lampoons its young lover’s naiveté about how women inevitably defecate. The repetition of the name “Celia,” sans the additional “a” in “The Lady’s Dressing Room,” seems to emphasize that Swift is revisiting his previous material, both in content and in form.

The other two poems in this pamphlet, however, do something a little different. In “A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed,” we find no male suitor at all. Instead, a streetwalker named Corinna has returned to her shabby apartment after a night’s failed attempts at finding a john. Perhaps this lack of a notable male presence is why previous scholars have tried to study this poem as separate or different from Swift’s other scatological poetry; without a clear suitor, the linkage between waste and its erotics is less clear. However, Swift’s choice to publish it

26 A chamber pot.
alongside other poems about excrement points to a conscious association on his part. Just like in “The Lady’s Dressing Room,” Swift agonizes over and luxuriates in every detail of waste Corinna removes from her body, juxtaposing it against ironically bodiless terminology like “lovely Goddess” and “nymph.” Unlike Caelia’s comparatively tame pastes and powders, Corinna removes and undoes whole parts of her body: “a Chrystal Eye,” “Her flabby Dugs,” “A Set of Teeth” (ll. 9-24). In this poem, a woman’s waste is not just what she voids from her body, but what she continuously puts back into it. Unlike the chaos of the chamber pot, Corinna’s waste is deliberate and measured. When she removes her eyebrows, she “smoothly lays” them in a book to press (l. 16). She is “dex’trous” when removing her “Plumpers” from her cheeks and is careful to “wipe… clean” her crystal eye once it has been removed (l. 17, l. 12). In a kind of acknowledgement of her body’s filth, Corinna systematizes her leavings, attempting to maintain a semblance of fastidiousness. In systematizing it, she is also trying to experience and understand it. She “first displays” her eyebrows before pressing them in the book (l. 15). She “explores” the festering wounds on her body (l. 29). Of course, this segmented organization cannot last, for when she rises, she discovers that a rat stole her “plaster,” her cat pissed on her plumpers, and a pigeon ate some of her “issue-peas” (ll. 57-64). The unruly, unorganized natural world reasserts itself on such human attempts to organize and understand her body parts.

In contrast to the present Strephon and absent Caelia, Swift stresses the feelings and sensations of the poem’s female protagonist. We follow Corinna through the entirety of the narrative, experiencing what she does over the course of a single evening. While never letting us forget how we should be (and at many times are) disgusted by her, Swift’s narrative focus on her actions insists on a kind of empathy for her. When describing how “with gentlest Touch, she next explores / Her Shankers, Issues, running Sores;” (ll. 29-30), Swift uses no over-the-top
grotesquerie, no digression that traps the reader into feeling something they didn’t want to feel. He uses a plain-language description, emphasizing if anything Corinna’s pain in detailing how “gentle” her hand must be and how she will “explore” her wounds, hinting at a kind of hesitation towards encountering these wounds herself. Again, we encounter an imaginative touch, where Swift pushes us to go the full distance and imagine the wince at having similarly explored our own wounds with softest touch, putting us in the shoes of Corrina. His next couplet is almost sweet in its narratorial judgment: “Effects of many a sad Disaster, / And then to each applies a Plaister” (ll. 31-32). The waste then is not just revolting, but also rehabilitating. When our attention is focused on the “Bolus” she must take – a spherical medicine that is larger than a pill – we leave the disgusting nature of Corinna’s waste to focus on her use of it for empathetic self-care. Unlike many contemporary mean-spirited diatribes against the filth of prostitutes, Swift spends much of the narrative developing our feeling openly for Corinna.

The singular amount of waste in this poem, however, might make it hard to believe that Corinna is a sympathetic character. Swift’s hostile subtitle, “Written for the Honour of the Fair Sex,” smacks with real vitriol towards women and their bodies and especially for Corinna. The bodily remnants in “A Beautiful Nymph,” however, borders on the absurd in their unrelenting nature. As Claude Rawson notes in his reading of the poem, while there are certainly moments of real disgust, “Swift’s horrific particularity may be a nudge and wink to the reader, implying some jokey undercutting… a playful excess comparable to that of the political invectives, where an over-the-top intensity comes over to some extent as a self-disarming stylistic sport.”27 While the flabby dugs and crystal eye might first start off as disgusting, the overwhelming quantity of the waste tied to a single individual eventually undercuts the negative affect, making room for

empathy for Corinna. Unlike in “The Lady’s Dressing Room,” Swift never takes us away from the subject of our poem for a digression on classical literature or culinary exercises. Instead, his unflinching stare at our prostitute ensures that the reader’s disgust is abated somewhat; we become more accustomed to the remains and they begin to lose their shock value. We are meant to feel something that is not purely negative. While scholars have argued that she is either an object of compassion or disgust, in fact, she is both.\(^2\) Dating back to the biblical story of Rahab, the hooker with a heart of gold has been ever-present in western civilization, and its configuration insists that the prostitute can be disgusting in her sin-stained body and yet be a person with which we empathize.

With this empathy established, Swift then guides the reader from compassion to a desirous religious experience. After Corinna goes to bed, Swift takes us inside of her sleeping mind, starting and ending with her more picaresque dreams of finding a john (ll. 39-56). This picaresque delight helps develop empathy for our protagonist; in steering our outlook towards Corinna’s sins from abhorrence to excitement, he complicates our shallow feeling of disgust towards her and her misdeeds. At greater length, however, Swift outlines her nightmares:

\begin{quote}
With Pains of Love tormented lies;  
Or, if she chance to close her eyes,  
Of Bridewell and the Compter dreams,  
And feels the Lash, and faintly screams (ll. 39-44).
\end{quote}

The sensation this passage is supposed to invoke is more opaque. Careful to draw the reader’s attention to her venereal disease (“Pains of Love”), Swift also has us read about Corinna’s physical punishment in prison. For a modern reader, this may not be desirous or disgusting; we

\(^2\) For a discussion of this dynamic, see Louise Barnett, *Jonathan Swift in the Company of Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 167-170. Problematically, as I will discuss later, Barnett situates herself explicitly on the side of disgust despite noting this binary.
may perhaps simply be empathetic towards her plight. For Swift’s reader, however, it also plays upon the erotics of moral reform. The physical punishment of immoral women has a long history of being an erotic exercise, where reforming the strumpet is both necessarily disgusting but also desirous. Traditionally, the disgust comes from the sin that resides in a woman’s sinful body. Acknowledging sin as a kind of moral waste, the punisher is filled with desire at his ability to exert control of the woman and her body, returning her to virtue by expunging such filth. The empathy of moral reform joins desire and disgust. The previous empathy Swift has cultivated transitions into a complicated erotic practice, where returning Corinna to civility through whipping becomes desirous. Even the phrasing of the whipping hints at a less than painful experience. Corinna vaguely “feels” the Lash and her screams are only “faint.” Corinna’s opaque physical responses confuse the boundary between desire and disgust by invoking a practice that deliberately plays on the tenuous border between the two. Her light pain allows the reader to engage in a bit of sadistic feeling, finding delight in knowing that while the pain is not severe enough to truly harm, it is still present. Swift pushes the reader into a moment where they too find an erotic zeal in her abject sin and the excitement for her salvation. He is revealing how the relays between desire and disgust in fact undergird moral reform, making the supposedly disgusting prostitute a space for desire. The prostitute’s reform, then, brings the reader closer to a consciousness about the tenuous boundaries dividing these affects.

While this might seem like a fleeting moment in the poem, Swift brings up this juncture of religious and erotic practice more explicitly in the latter half of Corinna’s dreams. In her

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29 James Kincaid gives a particularly good explanation of how this dynamic works in Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture (London and New York: Routledge, 1994). While his study focuses on Victorian culture, his description of this erotic practice rings true of misogyny in the eighteenth century as well.
pursuits, Corinna avoids many a constable or watchmen, “But never from religious Clubs; / Whose Favour she is sure to find, / Because she pays them all in Kind” (ll. 54-56). Who these religious clubs are is uncertain; Rawson and Ian Higgins argue that they are either dissenting conventicles or religious reformers. Nevertheless, the joke here is that she sleeps with these zealots. Swift’s use of the term “religious Clubs” is particularly rich in its multi-faceted meaning. On one level, “Clubs” is a stand-in for the men’s erections, their sexual practice imbued with their “religious” zeal. Their desire is both fervent and even morally minded. On another, “clubs” holds a distinctly physical resonance. They are tools which they intend to use on Corinna. Unlike the secular peacekeepers, Swift is pointing to how the moral reformers find Corinna particularly alluring in her ability to serve as a totem that moves between the desired and the disgusting in their reform practice. Swift shows how the waste-filled woman creates a space that complicates the binary between desire and disgust. By shedding light on the practice of turning the disgusting sinful woman into the desired virtuous woman, he emphasizes the space in between where the woman’s uncertain moral status removes the boundary between them. A woman’s virtue – one of the most frequently used emblems for the eighteenth-century woman’s sexual appeal – is upended by Swift as an easy way to distinguish between desire and disgust for her. In developing empathy for her and then pushing us into desire, Swift attacks another kind of knowledge, i.e. religious, as a way to structure cultural value and Enlightenment thought, showing that it too cannot fully spiritualize and disembody feeling.

Unlike “A Beautiful Nymph,” “Strephon and Chloe” is much closer in structure and intellectual project to “The Lady’s Dressing Room.” Swift once again presents us with a naïve

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lover, Strephon, who believes his fiancée is near perfection in her cleanliness and virtue. A much longer poem than the other two (three hundred fourteen lines), most of the poem primes the reader for their first night in bed together. Swift painfully builds up Strephon’s new wife’s near decorporealization in contrast to his own mean features: “his prickled Beard, and hairy Breast!” (l. 92). In Swiftian fashion, the climax of the poem comes when Chloe must use the chamber pot. As she relieves herself, Strephon hears the “fuming Rill” and is surprised by how the stench “struck his Nose.” In response, he decides to also use the chamber pot, letting “fly a Rouzer\(^\text{31}\) in her Face” while doing so (l. 192). At this moment, Swift signals that the neo-classical, ethereal love between them has vanished, “the little Cupids… Flew off, nor ever more appear’d” (l. 614). After this, the narrator laments at length and in excruciating detail that if Strephon had just encountered her waste beforehand, their marriage would never have collapsed into mere disgust. As in “The Lady’s Dressing Room,” this lambasting of Strephon highlights how the waste serves as a site that is both desirous and disgusting. While the poem is too long to go into each moment of waste, one representative example is Swift’s initial description of what makes Chloe so appealing: not her intrinsic features, but instead her lack of bodily excrement. She has “No Humours gross, or frowzy Steams, / No noisome Whiffs, or sweaty Streams…” (ll. 9-10). In setting up his trap to make Chloe’s later intransigence more jarring, Swift relies on notions of desire as naturally tied to the body, but couched in negatives. The ideal female body lacks all traces of its bodily nature; a body is only ever attractive in spite of itself. While he seemingly enforces the boundary between how a woman presents her body in the private and public, he slyly inserts the increasing contemporary fears about the body by linking desire so explicitly with no-waste. Chloe never allows her body’s filth to become apparent, yet it is omnipresent in her

\(^{31}\) Flatulence.
lack of it. When the narrator later criticizes Strephon for not peering through a fence to watch Chloe defecate, he enforces the similar linkage between waste, desire, and disgust. If he could have seen her “Distortions, Groanings, Strainings, Heavings,” he would have been able to still feel desire for Chloe (l. 241). These facial expressions listed in a single line betray an excitement, humorous for both its scatological nature and arousing in its sexually-charged voyeurism. In the next line though, Swift returns us to the excrement, viscerally sensing its material: “’Twere better you had lickt her leavings” (l. 242). Swift’s use of waste proves that the boundaries between these socially opposed feelings can be removed and that this excrement can elicit a complex, unorganized feeling that recognizes the scatological directly as sexual.

After Strephon and Chloe have devolved into their lowest forms and Swift has finished reveling in the waste, the poem ends with something strange: a sober call for moderation. Comparing a husband’s task to that of a builder’s, Swift argues that the naïve lover’s passion must be built on firmer foundation:

On Sense and Wit your Passion found,  
By Decency cemented round;  
Let Prudence with good Nature strive,  
To keep Esteem and Love alive.  
Then, come old Age whene’er it will,  
Your Friendship shall continue still:  
And, thus a mutual gentle fire,  
Shall never but with Life expire. (ll. 307-314)

In contrast to the more tongue-in-cheek endings to the other poems, Swift gives a reasonable sounding solution to the problem of excrement in marriage: one must approach their spouse with “decency” in order to maintain esteem, friendship, and love. Perhaps this is why many scholars view “Strephon and Chloe” as an unsuccessful poem: it ends with too rational advice after such a vulgar and irrational treatment of waste. The ending might even be read as kind-hearted or merciful after such a mean-spirited focus on gory entrails throughout the first two-thirds of the
Later writers would take Swift’s ending this way, deeming it legitimate enough for the educational benefit of young lovers. For example, in “An Essay on Matrimony” in The Lady’s Magazine, one writer quotes the ending as a true description of matrimony while omitting any mention of the irony of the poem.

Another reason why the poem’s ending might seem unsuccessful, though, is because the subject of Swift’s satire shifts. The first two-thirds of the poem are obsessively concerned with disgust and desire comingling, where disgust might ignite or extinguish desire. This final third discards all that previous discussion of feeling and insists on a rigid, stoic-minded view of marriage. The shift seems abrupt not just because of the tone shift but because the perspective of the poem changes: it shifts from that of a visceral marriage to decorporealized matrimony. There is no radical redefinition of marital feeling – instead, Swift finds it easier to redefine what a marriage might be. This kind of ending is not revolutionary in thought as other writers have written at length about rationalizing marital expectations for centuries before. This is the same message in Lucretius’ De Rerum Natura, and just five years before Swift composed this poem, Daniel Defoe published his Conjugal Lewdness: or, Marital Whoredom which, despite its provocative title, addresses how to balance the earthly expectations of marital obligations with matrimonial fulfillment. Instead of advocating for a radical compartmentalization of feeling that the Enlightenment affective regime seeks, Swift directs us back to the long history of people redefining marriage for their own purposes.

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33 “An Essay on Matrimony,” The Lady’s Magazine 11 (July 1780): 356. Most uses of the poem in this context seem to come after 1760, almost thirty years after the poem’s initial publication, and almost always omit the rest of the poem and the poem’s title.
While more beautifully wrought than the ending to “The Lady’s Dressing Room,” Swift’s “Strephon and Chloe” engages in the same emotional practice as he does there: the poem desensationalizes marriage. While not as acerbic in tone or insistent on experiencing all aspects of amorous feeling, the poem returns the relationship between man and woman into something quotidian, where the body and its waste become unmarked again. Unlike the ways in which romantic love would later become the foundation of marriage by the end of the eighteenth century, Swift argues that marriage must first start with “sense and wit.” It is the combination of mind and body that must guide a young lover, not solely “passion.” He does not argue that the experience of desire or disgust ever dissipates. Rather, his instructions seem to gird the reader for such sensations, preparing us with a way to approach waste with good humor and even cultivate erotic feeling within it. Just as Swift tells us to embrace the ooze, he argues here that we might maintain “a mutual gentle Fire,” a mild-mannered allusion to the conjugal aspect of marriage. While Swift can suggest how to maintain a marriage, he has no way to explain away the desire and disgust that will remain present within it. He can only provide us with a way to feel them sensibly.

While cognizant enough of this problem to write four poems on waste’s ability to conjure such feelings, each poem’s avoidance of a final, conscious confrontation with untidy feelings highlights Swift’s acknowledgement that even he could not fully reckon with their complexity. Instead, documenting ad nauseum waste’s emotional and sensory relays – where the principal characters, the narrator, and Swift himself cannot identify where disgust ends and desire begins – acts as a finger in the eye to the reification of human understanding that Locke and Descartes were advocating for. The poems do not seek to solve or even explain the problem of feeling because they can only describe it. Neither is there any Freudian negation of desire/disgust or a
clear articulation of romantic love. Instead, the incomprehensible nature of Swift’s works comes from them being about the incomprehensible: the uneasy acceptance of affective muddling. While desire and disgust are so often established as polar opposites, these poems force us to reckon with the eradication of this binary and question whether we can truly understand such feeling.

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While we must keep Swift’s emotions in historical context and imagine them as historically constructed, it is important that we do not conceptualize them as primitive or unaware. When Louise Barnett eschews the possibility of compassion for Corinna, she does so by labeling such a feeling a twenty-first-century perspective, ironically calling such a modern view “enlightened.” Just as we can experience a mix of emotions or feel torn between two feelings, Swift’s world was more than capable of complex affect. In his poem, “To Stella Who Collected and Transcribed his Poems,” Swift demonstrates such an awareness of the multifaceted nature of feeling:

One Passion, with a diff’rent Turn,  
Makes Wit inflame, or Anger burn;  
So the Sun’s Heat, with different Powers,  
Ripens the Grape, the Liquor sours (ll. 117-120).

Swift recognizes that a singular passion can produce a number of contingent emotive results, ranging from positive to negative and generative to destructive. Even the word “passion” was just as capacious and unruly in the eighteenth century as our “feeling” or “emotion” is today. Simple binary articulations of desire and disgust were artifacts of human construct just as much as they are now. The historical difference is in where those boundaries were placed and how

Swift’s world attempted to strengthen and weaken those borders. As we have revisited previous assumptions about Swift’s supposed stoicism and insistence on reason and rejection of feeling, we must also become aware of the ways in the rigidly singular notion of eighteenth-century passions is in fact just the conscious attempt to understand and classify feeling by the period’s writers. Those classifications belied their expansive and varied lived experiences. As the product of similar processes of organization and abjection, waste exposes how such intellectual organization is defined by human endeavor. As Sophie Gee points out in her reading of Swift, “leftovers are valuable and important for their own sake, not because they can be reclaimed or rehabilitated. Swift insists on the reality of waste in order to rebuke his political adversaries.”

In other words, Swift understand that waste, like feeling, is unruly enough to encompass complexities in its own right. Swift equates feeling with waste; desire, disgust, and their originary sensation cannot be reclaimed for a particular eighteenth-century ideology. Just as there can be no way to organize excrement and its feeling, there is no way to rehabilitate functional notions of virginal/sinful womanhood, reproduction, or romantic love.

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Chapter 2

Pope’s Embodied Culture War

Because of *The Dunciad*’s difficulty and its hyper-specificity to Pope’s historical context, much of the critical work on this poem has focused on an analysis of the poem’s successes and failures as a satire and how the mock-epic’s intricacies reflect the author’s complex life. In addition, its tortured publication history has elicited a complex discussion about the differences between each edition and Pope’s changing opinion towards his satirical targets. While that work has been invaluable for understanding this poem, little of this criticism takes into account Pope’s fascinating use of waste. Like Swift, avoiding the waste in this mock-epic ignores something crucial that might surprise a reader today: Pope joins individuated, real authors with the visceral quality of material waste to construct his satire. Where other contemporary writers lean on stock names or character qualities, e.g. the Drapier or Mr. Peachum, Pope explicitly references real people, and as Helen Deutsch has noted in her study, Pope’s turn to the material and particular is a marked shift from his emphasis on the universal and abstract in his earlier verse works. This evolution in Pope’s writing style, where bodily waste takes on an increasingly visible role in his poetry, requires increased scrutiny as it is clearly meant to evoke

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37 *The Dunciad* was revised and republished three times after its initial publication in 1728, leaving four editions that differ from each other in sometime major ways.
38 Helen Deutsch, *Resemblance and Disgrace*, 176-188.
strong feeling in his readers through the representation of confused or even contradictory feelings in his characters.

When we examine Pope’s satire of contemporary writers and the current state of the writing profession in London, the particularity in his use of bodily waste appears surprisingly modern in the poem’s specific denunciation of Grub Street and the hack-writer community. Where excremental satires like Swift’s relied on generalized caricatures, Pope skewers contemporary people in his poem, linking gossip about their writing production with evocative descriptions of waste. What is unique about this particular bodily waste, however, is its reproductive quality. Pope fills his waste land with excrement and digestive remains, but he also fills *The Dunciad* with an assortment of abortive remnants: false births, malformed progeny, spilled seed, and undeveloped tissue. These are remains that continue to proliferate, finding ways to expand outwards from their original site of (un)creation and engendering catastrophic change for *The Dunciad*’s world. This reproductive waste asserts the familiar valences of disgust that alimentary waste provokes, but it also points towards a previous site of desire: material produced in the former heat of erotic passion. Only later does this product of passion become disgusting in its incompleteness or disfigurement. Because reproduction is so linked with traditional women’s roles, much of this waste is maternal in nature, allowing Pope to play upon the binary distinctions of desire and disgust women’s bodies elicited in the reader’s mind, where the leaky female body, while supposedly being an object of desire or disgust, was in fact an object of both. This play between the desire and disgust of maternal waste is integral to Pope’s larger project where his satire of Colley Cibber and his fellow hacks warns that their writerly production brings
about incoherence and imaginative destruction. Pope portrays their (re)productive writing abilities as a way to undo the universal traits of good literature cemented by the ancients and to deploy the unorganized nature of imagination in a way that disorganizes boundaries of thought and intellectual order. While their individual writing experiences are often linked with sexual zeal, the hacks’ attempts at composition appear disgusting to the sophisticated reader until Dulness’ rise obliterates the ability to sense the difference between desire and disgust at all. With no sense left to lead men, Pope frets over a world where the body’s importance is erased and its place in defining culture uncertain.

Susan Gubar has already argued something similar in her classic analysis of Augustan satire: “The debased arts of the female serve the Scriblerians as an emblem of the corruption of literary and ethical standards in Walpole’s England.” Gubar is right to note that for Pope, male mindedness devolves into female mindlessness, but he does not end his causal chain there. The Dunciad’s final stopping point is the true nightmare: female mindlessness then devolves into brainlessness, where the rudimentary signifiers of humanity are expunged and replaced with inanimate, unformed, or even dead objects. Seemingly reifying some of the Enlightenment’s concerns about literature, the poem argues that a lack of literary taste not only blurs the distinctions between good and bad, high and low culture, but also dissolves culture as a whole, leaving only embodied feeling with no larger intellectual system to make sense of it or find a use

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39 I have chosen in this chapter to focus on The Dunciad in Four Books because the fourth book is integral to understanding maternal waste’s power in the poem, and the Four Book version gives us the most full-throated version of such an apocalypse. All references to the text will be taken from The Dunciad in Four Books, edited by Valerie Rumbold, revised edition (Harlow, UK: Pearson Longman, 1999).

40 Susan Gubar, “The Female Monster in Augustan Satire,” Signs 3, no. 2 (1977): 389. Ellen Pollak’s reply to Gubar in the subsequent issue of Signs makes a compelling case for why such an analysis may not apply to Swift, but she does not take issue with this as a fair characterization of Pope’s work.
for it. Without this social structure, Pope’s individual can no longer exist and disintegrates under the weight of his unruly imagination: material everywhere, feeling everywhere, and yet no way to form it. In this chapter, I argue that Pope traces how these anxieties of culture are always embodied, where even the most abstract and high-minded components of civilization are centered in bodily processes. In his world, the greatest fear of culture’s unraveling is being unable to consciously direct the body’s affects towards literary and social good. In no longer being able to write through one’s entire body, Pope tries to make sense of the Enlightenment’s new affective regime by upholding that literary quality matters while portending of a world where bodiless production might end any sort of cultural production.

In the first book of *The Dunciad*, Pope gives us our intial look at the world wrought by the obliteration of discernment and a disembodiment of cultural feeling. He describes the Dunciad as a land of dreariness, ruled over by the goddess Dulness. Pope’s initial description of the goddess immediately cements her as a grotesque maternal figure, a “Mighty Mother,” as she will later be called. In this first description of her reproductive abilities, Pope describes how she gives birth to the monstrous un-creations of literary waste:

Here she beholds the Chaos dark and deep,  
Where nameless Somethings in their causes sleep,  
‘Till genial Jacob, or a warm Third day,  
Call forth each mass, a Poem, or a Play. (I.55-58)

Playing on a similar parody of *Paradise Lost* that Swift deploys in his excremental poems, Pope ironically presents the originary abyss that would soon be organized into order, only for it never to come to fruition. Instead of divine omnipotence, to perform her motherly abilities, Dulness requires the partnership of a man for her creations to proliferate. The “genial Jacob” who assists her is a satirical representation of Jacob Tonson, a bookseller, in which Pope accuses him of an all-too-eager desire to publish whatever piece of writing that comes his way. When he qualifies
Jacob as “genial,” Pope deploys a sophisticated double entendre in which “genial” relies on its generative meaning in two ways. He is genial in the large amounts of writing he publishes as a bookseller and genial in his sexual capacity, taking on the role of male producer alongside goddess Dulness. What is produced from their intercourse is “a mass, a Poem, or a Play.” At first glance, this triad shows how their procreative abilities haphazardly manufacture a biological mass or a literary production. However, this edition’s contemporary footnote clumsily seeks to clarify the meaning further: “That is to say, unformed things, which are either made into Poems or Plays.” The need to add a footnote points to just how unruly Dulness’ procreation is. A single line cannot fully delineate what her miscarriages are, and instead this progeny must be explained as a mass that is then later formed into a poem or a play. Dulness’ reproduction is first shown to be so disorderly that it even manages to escape the structure of the poem, spilling into the footer of the text.

In the next pair of couplets, the narrator goes on to describe how Dulness’ progeny develop despite not being fully delineated as clear pieces of writing:

How hints, like spawn, scarce quick in embryo lie,
How new-born nonsense first is taught to cry,
Maggots half-form’d in rhyme exactly meet,
And learn to crawl upon poetic feet. (I.59-62)

Pope uses biological language here to alienate Dulness’ reproduction from any romantic notions of childhood. This new poetic offspring are “spawn” which swiftly leave the womb, despite having been “scarce quick.” Her children are “maggots,” where the word plays on the literal sense of insect and its contemporary use similar to “whim,” again pointing to their slapdash

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41 “Quick” here refers to when the fetus was first able to move in the womb.
quality.\textsuperscript{42} Despite being messy or not fully structured, they manage to go through the developmental stages of walking and talking, finding ways to expand outwards from their original bounds. Because they are underformed, though, they are in fact “nonsense.” While meant to poke fun at the garbled nature of hack writers’ concoctions, Dulness’ ability to produce “namelessness” and “nonsense” signifies a kind of larger existential crisis; she can produce abstracted waste through her ability to create nothing. Dulness’ evacuation of meaning — her non-being — gives her the ability to deconstruct the order and value of the modern world, which Pope critiques with much greater specificity in Book IV.\textsuperscript{43} But this non-being in this first book is intimately tied to her role as Mighty Mother: the unruly feminine that can overturn a supposedly male-constructed culture. Her destructive power lies in her ability to reproduce through her connections with men, where their ability to write and publish gives her embryos the viability needed to make all the world dull. These embryos born out of desire turn disgusting in their lack of value for the men and their ability to bring themselves into conception without them.

Throughout the rest of the first book, Dulness is portrayed as a kind of gruesome mother exemplar, tending not only to her own creations but to many creatures and life-forms outside of human borders. In one instance, she “nursed her Owls,” birds associated not only with night, and therefore a lack of clarity, but also death and passivity (I.271). In nursing them, Dulness is again represented as a life-giver to death, a woman whose desirable fertility cultivates creatures associated with disgust. When she speaks, her monologue acknowledges her subversive role as non-mother: “And I, a nursing-mother, rock the throne… And suckle armies, and dry-nurse the

\textsuperscript{42} Alexander Pope, \textit{The Dunciad in Four Books}, edited by Valerie Rumbold, revised edition (Harlow, UK: Pearson Longman, 1999), 106, n. 61. Indeed, “Grub Street” is a similar play on the comparison to maggots.

land” (I.312, 316). Dulness here emphasizes how she reverses the development of man, bringing the various powers of the nation back to a perverse infancy. She feeds whole armies and “dry-nurses” the land; her mothering power should be terrifying in its absolute power and yet because her goal is to lull all to sleep, she seeks to eradicate the sense that would articulate such a disgust (I.318). Despite her productive appearance, she is also not a true mother. She suckles grown men and pointedly dry-nurses the land, meaning she tends to it but is not linked to it through her body. Instead of fulfilling the role of true mother, who seeks to produce progeny for the sake of furthering society, her motherhood is devoid of any future-minded meaning except for endless proliferation. Her maternal abilities are meant to secure her own power over men’s domain and thus subvert the natural order by reversing the development of man and his land alike. As Pope fears, she is capable of eradicating literary taste through this ability to disembody her creative process, and her subsequent waste shows the frailty of distinctions between good and bad culture.

Pope’s consistent emphasis on this reproductive quality of motherhood plays on its ability to elicit both disgust and desire through the uncertain reproductive body. The Mighty Mother offers the desirous ability to create new life with a seemingly unlimited fertility. Yet, her progeny is actually disgusting: a continual birth of non-children as unformed fetal tissue and inhuman creatures. Men’s reproductive abilities do not produce a desirous child, a narrative signifier that would double as a successful piece of writing and a representation of their posterity. Instead, men are rewarded only with an unending pregnancy. For men of the Augustan period, pregnancy and the actual birth of a child would be something repellant because it served as a domain almost exclusively ruled and shaped by women, where seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century men actively avoided trespassing and were pushed out by midwives and other
female caretakers.\textsuperscript{44} Mighty Mother’s hideous procreative ability entices her writers with the promise of a heritage, where the work produced might be something to be remembered by. In stark contrast, she leaves them only with half-formed poetic masses that revolt by forcing men into the aberrant space of pregnancy and uterine power. Pope uses this maternal affective system to demonstrate how hack writers have in fact been entrapped by this ceaseless reproduction. In endlessly creating pamphlets and partly finished works for the sake of posterity, these Grub Street writers have gone blind to the disgusting quality of their creations. As the “Mighty Mother,” she signifies the contradictions of maternal power, simultaneously capable of enticing and repelling through her erotic ability to produce life.

This invocation of birth matter as disgusting, however, was a recent innovation in literary history and it shows the increasing acknowledgement of how culture was embodied. Before Pope, classical and Renaissance poets would typify their own poetic process through sincere invocations of labor and pregnancy, describing the difficulty of starting or finishing writing with a kind of wonder. Starting around the time of Dryden’s verse, or the mid-seventeenth century, the metaphor of birth was displaced from the author’s own process and re-situated on the bad poet’s attempts, where the writers switched the metaphor to a more explicit, disgusted discussion of abortion.\textsuperscript{45} The explosion of print during this period also contributed to this shift in poetic

\textsuperscript{44} Indeed, before male physicians would play a larger, more standardized role in pregnancy during the second half of the eighteenth century, women in the local community would look after pregnant wives, and female midwives would be their primary medical practitioners. See Laura Gowing, \textit{Common Bodies: Women, Touch, and Power in Seventeenth-Century England} (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

\textsuperscript{45} For a history of these birth images in poetry, see Terry J. Castle, “Lab’ring Bards: Birth Topoi and English Poetics 1660-1820,” \textit{The Journal of English and Germanic Philology} 78, no. 2 (1979): 193-208. By the Romantics, writers would switch back to a more positive writing/pregnancy comparison but also one that was more spiritual, less embodied.
(mis)births where publishing one’s work was likened to abandonment. Poets no longer marveled at their own pregnant bodies, full of thought, but reviled the hack’s inability to retain and shape their creations within their own corpuses. Throughout this poetic evolution of birth topoi, these writers understood their intellectual travails as embodied experiences, where desire and disgust were channeled through the poetic imagery of sexual reproduction and delivery. Pope’s Dulness is not a monstrous outlier in her ability to unravel man and world alike through her reproductive body, but instead a synecdoche of these writers’ primal fears about how generative culture might escape their discernment within their own embodied experience. Pope’s emphasis on the pregnant body highlights how the use of embodied culture can ultimately be used to dismantle the boundaries between what is and is not worthy of distinction within literature and edification.

While Book I spends much of its space devoted to describing Dulness’ reproductive horror in her new world order, Pope explains the poet’s embodied experience more explicitly through his interrogation of the individual hack-writer: the means by which Dullness managed to originally overtake the world. Describing the main character, Cibber, Pope explains that before his rise to the role of king of dullness, Bays47 was already a prolific waste re-producer:

Round him much embryo, much abortion lay,
Much future Ode, and abdicated Play;
Nonsense precipitate, like running lead,
That slipped through cracks and zig-zags of the head;
All that on Folly Frenzy could beget,
Fruits of dull heat, and sooterkins of wit. (I.121-126)

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47 Throughout the poem, Pope alternates calling him Cibber or Bays, a reference to Cibber’s role as Poet Laureate.
Strewn about Cibber are all of his literary malformations — his abandoned plays he would never finish, his odes he promised to compose but would not write. Pope paints these remnants as abortions to portray Cibber as an unsuccessful mother similar to Dulness. However, his maternal waste as a writer signifies a different kind of failure of motherhood, where he is unable to fully discard them nor fully tend to them. They are all in different stages of development, but all hideously nonhuman: “embryo,” “abortion,” and “nonsense precipitate.” Where Dulness’ waste learns to cry and walk, Cibber’s lies still. His head also doubles as a kind of perverse birth canal, where these deformities escape “like running lead” through “cracks” and “zig-zags” in his skull, grotesquely oozing out of negative and broken openings. Pope defines these emissions as “fruits of dull heat,” once again pointing towards Cibber’s toxic literary womb and the lack of passion his work inspires, but also giving us a tongue-in-cheek jab at his sexual inadequacy. His procreative activities are not desirous but instead lackluster, “dull.” He fails as both man and woman: failing to have zealous intercourse, creating malformed spawn, and ultimately miscarrying them. Cibber’s incomplete gendered duties mirror his incomplete writings as he fails multiple modes of meaning-making where his disconnection with his body produces nothing but unsensible waste.

This body anxiety extends not just to gender, but larger systems of culture and human experience. Pope brings Cibber’s literary abortions to a climax by ending a couplet, and the entire sentence, with “sooterkins of Wit.” Like the other miscarriages Pope describes before, “sooterkin” could mean both a physical and a compositional abortion: an aborted fetus or an aborted piece of writing. However, the term’s Dutch etymology offers an additional abortive
The word’s foreign nature was such a conscious component of the word that Samuel Johnson would define it as “a kind of false birth fabled to be produced by the Dutch women from sitting over their stoves.”

Cibber’s abortion is not only a failure of his authorship and gender, but also one of his nationality. By producing a Dutch abortion, Cibber can’t even write like an English hack. “Sooterkin” is also a kind of inhuman birth. A common trope in European folklore at the time was the fear of women giving birth to small animals like toads and rabbits, and John Cleveland would even go on to note in one of the earliest uses of “sooterkin” that such deformed progeny was “not unlike to a Rat.” By questioning the nationality and even species of Cibber’s abortion, Pope is questioning all boundaries of what makes Cibber a person. While at first glance this might seem like just a mean-spirited satire of Cibber, Pope’s critique echoes common anxieties about authorship and personhood. The role of the eighteenth-century author was to apply his own thoughts and knowledge to shaping his literary creation; if he cannot create coherent literary images, he has failed at mastering his imagination and thus is still not in complete control of his mind. Because his births are malformed, inhuman, or even inanimate (“running lead”), Cibber reveals that his own thoughts are chaotic or even absent while still situated within his bodily affects. His maternal/species-less waste represents the failure of connection with his body and the disorganization of mind, with waste that simply oozes from him. As the Poet Laureate, his writerly failure is presented as mobile and fluid, capable of escaping his individual production and mixing with the work of other writers.

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48 In fact, one of sooterkin’s frequent contemporary uses was a stand-in for “Dutchman.” “sooterkin, adj.” OED Online (Oxford University Press, January 2018).
49 “sooterkin, adj.”
50 Ibid.
Pope writes that to reshape this writerly excretion, Cibber tries to steal pieces from writers like Moliere, Shakespeare, and Fletcher. He “sucked all o’er, like an industrious bug,” leaving behind the remnants as “half-eat scenes,” but ultimately, he still cannot produce his own work (I.130-131). Pope needles Cibber, connecting him with blood-sucking parasites, but also panning him for being a poor scrounger. Cibber attempts to ingest the intellectual work of others, but notably, he cannot fully incorporate them – they are left as only “half-eaten.” In trying to steal from the lifeblood of other writers, Cibber ignores the fact that his ineptitude comes from within. His inability to produce good work comes from the disorganization and uncreative mess within his own imagination. Cibber can try to ingest the works of external others, but it is his own maternal impressions that continue to deform his work. By focusing on Cibber with such particularity, Pope uses his image to assert the truth of his critique. There is no general stand-in for the hack-writer, but instead the real poet laureate who is depicted rummaging through massacred literary works. If Cibber is capable of producing such monstrous writing, then what might that make Grub Street? Pope’s metaphorical transformation of Cibber into a disgusting creature emphasizes how the hack writer’s mismanagement of their imagination leaves them unmoored from their capacity to understand themselves, leaving them to ingest and destroy the exemplars of culture.

While the Poet Laureate’s destructive writing process might seem unique, Pope explores how Cibber’s experience is in fact a hallmark of cultural confusion, where the inability to discern how the body works in cultural production is exemplified through how every hack has their own destructive writerly experience that is simultaneously embodied and unexamined. During Book II, Bays’ coronation is celebrated with a series of games, including scatological competitions like a urination contest and sewer diving. These excremental Olympics are meant to showcase the
shameful abilities of Pope’s satirical targets. The first game is a race between Edmund Curll and Bernard Lintot, two booksellers, who attempt to catch a poet referred to as “More,” seemingly so that they may publish him. During the race, in an attempt to overtake Lintot, Curll sends a prayer to Jove for his divine intervention. In a moment of excremental humor, he sends the missive through the god’s privy, and Cloacina, the goddess of the sewer, responds to his petition instead because he usually prays to her. Pope skewers Curll here by affirming his need to rake his work from the sewer, valuing poetic filth more than true literature. Pope’s language describing these encounters, however, is distinctly sensual:

Oft had the Goddess heard her servant’s call
From her black grottos near the Temple-wall…
Where as he fished her nether realms for wit,
She oft had favoured him, and favours yet. (II.97-102)

The literal reading paints Curll as a sewer-diver, fishing for wit from its sewers, but Pope’s second couplet affirms that this waste-fishing is an erotic situation. Parodically coding the sewers as “her nether realms” and deploying the heavily laden term “favour,” Pope presents this moment as a sexual encounter, where Curll’s result may be the production of further literary waste. Cloacina was not only the divine caretaker of sewers but was also the protector of sexual intercourse in marriage.\(^{52}\) The joke here links sex and excrement in ways that are meant to titillate and shock, but importantly, Pope highlights that the production of literary dullness is in fact a desirable experience to those with an undiscerning eye. Despite being the embodiment of cesspits, Cloacina can entice Curll with what he may find below her covers, and Curll believes that he might actually catch something of worth from her rather than what he may find from within his own mind.

\(^{52}\) In biology, the cloaca is also the posterior orifice in some animals which serves as the single site for reproduction, digestion, and excretion.
This interaction with Cloacina does not actually produce “wit,” nor could it, since the only offspring would be dullness. Instead, Curll is “Renewed by ordure’s sympathetic force, / As oiled with magic juices for the course,” which allows him to win the race (II.103-104). Again the linkage between the excrement’s force and the sexual waste of their encounter are what help propel Curll forward in the race, but here there is another footnote, elucidating that these magic juices are an allusion to ointments that allow witches to fly. In providing us with this seemingly extraneous information, Curll’s reproduction is linked even more so with something that is unnatural or even anti-natural. Relying on the use of blasphemous magic, Curll presents himself as a figure who is all too ready to help overturn the natural order that Dulness seeks to conquer if only so he may have fleeting moments of publication success. Of course all of these efforts in the race do not lead to any real literary reward. When Curll wins and finally catches the poet, the phantom figure disappears, and Curll is left only with “the brown dishonours of his face,” (II.108). Despite being visibly covered in the humiliating remnants of his sewer-diving, Curll does not “heed” good sense; he does not recognize his own status as abject. This lack of awareness allows Dulness to trick him again into a second race with three more ghostly poets. Despite being covered in obviously disgusting excrement from work that he should find shameful, Curll finds the process desirable, regardless of whether or not it produces his desired work. Curll chases his own perverse sensations that are never generative but are instead regressive and masturbatory.

In the next competition, Pope brings this obsession with self-pleasure to the forefront of his critique. The patron overseeing the game announces that he will reward the hack that “tickles him most.” After quickly summarizing the attempts of Paolo Antonio Rolli and Richard Bentley, Pope brings our attention to Leonard Welsted, another author who attacked Pope in an earlier
satire. While Rolli’s and Bentley’s scenes of writing are treated chastely if absurdly, Pope links Welsted’s attempt at poetic creation overtly to masturbation. When it is his turn to win the patron’s prize, Pope describes his effort in a way that emphasizes its physicality: “But Welsted most the Poet’s healing balm / Strives to extract from his soft, giving palm” (II.207-208). The joke here is that Welsted tries unsuccessfully to concoct something of poetic worth from his writing, but the linkage to masturbation shows that, like Curll, Welsted treats the production of writing as a degenerative experience of the individual. Pope’s emphasis on his “soft, giving hand” evokes the sensuality of the moment but also feminizes Welsted’s appendage. The hand is supposed to be a productive site, where the Poet’s “healing balm” might give meaning to the working hand, but its masturbatory location is one doomed for reproductive failure. Indeed, Pope follows this couplet with one hinting that Welsted couldn’t even manage to elicit its desired erotic ending: “Unlucky Welsted! thy unfeeling master, / The more thou ticklest, gripes his fist the faster” (II.209-210). Welsted is overeager in his production and instead of following his own natural feelings, he mismanages the process, exerting a poor hand at the work. Just like Curll, Welsted focuses on the erotic process of writing instead of its final outcome, while simultaneously unaware of the disgusting quality of his production.

In a twist, however, the next couplet reveals that it was not just Welsted’s production that should be viewed as masturbatory. While the winner ultimately steals the prize through plagiarism, Pope reveals that the others were busy attending to other matters: “each hand promotes the pleasing pain / And quick sensations skip from vein to vein” (II.211-212). In trying to fulfill the patron’s request to be “tickled,” Pope shows that each writer has only been tickling themselves. Their masturbatory efforts are the site of Pope’s disgust, where their reproductive writing is given extensive bodily description – “pleasing pain,” “quick sensations skip from vein
to vein” – to underscore their desire and to heighten our disgust at their attempts. Pope uses this competition to highlight how many hack writers in fact write gratuitously, mistaking the desire they feel about their own writing as sincerely held by others. Their inability to recognize that their efforts would not produce successful literary work is just as disgusting as their actual process. During the game, we hear nothing about the patron’s response to Welsted or the other masturbators. Instead, the patron is only tickled by the finished product that is stolen from someone else. While Pope is clearly attacking plagiarism in this section, he is also satirizing the lack of discernment in hack writers, and their inability to recognize their own feeling – “pleasing pain” – leads to them not knowing how it might align with others’. Dullness, the quality, creates not only an inability to understand the feeling within themselves, but also a lack of understanding of others’ feeling. Whatever lies inside the poet’s mind is what is expressed outwards, and like all of Pope’s descriptions of the poetic process, the external manipulation of such unprocessed feeling cannot structure or generate writings of worth.

In Book III, Pope continues much of the same satire, but here, he deploys prophecy from Pope’s highest literary touchstones, ancient Greco-Roman literature. He takes us inside the dreams of Bays who sleeps in Dulness’ lap. In Cibber’s dream, he crosses the River Styx to meet with the shade of Elkanah Settle, a real writer whose last name gives Pope more ammunition for his attack on the hack-writers. After explaining the intricacies of nonsense and the destruction of learning across the ancient world, Settle hands over his poetic mantle to Cibber. While reusing many of the same waste motifs from the previous two books, Pope closes Settle’s monologue by predicting Dulness’ future triumphs: “prepare / For new abortions, all ye pregnant fair! / In flames, like Semele’s, be brought to bed, / While op’ning Hell spouts wildfire at your head” (III.313-316). While this is similar to Pope’s previous linkages of abortions and compositions,
Settle declares a fully formed prophecy. Switching to the archaic “ye,” Settle compares the future production of writer’s work to Semele’s pregnancy, referencing the classic myth where Jupiter revealed himself to Semele undisguised and she burned to death in the wake of his divinity, leaving the fetal Dionysus to be sewn to Jupiter’s thigh. Settle’s parodic invocation of the birth of tragedy is meant to appear ridiculous in comparison to the waste that the hack writers produce in Dulness’ name. Their own work is to bring about a different, negative literary revolution. However, by bringing up Semele, Settle also forewarns what will become of the hacks: they and their works will be swept away, leaving behind only their unfinished works to be used by Dulness. While the previous two books had warned of the writers’ inability to discern true feeling, Pope shows that when Dulness achieves her full power, their own identities will be dissolved. Pope forewarns of the writer’s inability to write themselves into existence and how their failings will ultimately lead to their own dissolution, leaving them incapable of even unorganized feeling in the Mother Monster’s new land of unfeeling.

The hacks’ lack of sense leads to their actual eradication, both physical and cultural, in the final book. Book IV brings Bays’ reign to a close as Dulness herself finally takes over the world. As the cascades of waste finally collapse the order of the universe, Pope warns us in the argument that Dulness has come “to destroy Order and Science.” As Cibber awakens from his dream, Dulness “mounts the throne; her head a cloud concealed, / In broad effulgence all below revealed” (IV.17-18). When Dulness assumes her position at the head of the world, Pope brings the distance between the previous abortive waste and excrement to zero. In a head-to-toe description of Dulness, we get to see what is up her skirts. Pope’s foonote here points us to the

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53 The rituals of the cult of Dionysus are thought to be the roots of Greek tragedy and the creation of theater.
adage, “The higher you climb, the more you shew your ass,” ensuring that we do not miss the joke. By stressing Dulness’ “effulgence,” Pope ironically paints her nether regions as intensely radiant. While previous descriptions of excrement were linguistically separate from the signifiers of pregnancy and abortions, Dulness’ reign makes their origins indistinguishable within the bright light of her waste. While Dulness readily shows the world her horrors, the world is blinded by her light and cannot recognize them. The universe is now just as unseeing as the epic’s previous hack-writers were to distinguishing her disgusting truth. Dulness is now concealed, leaving her free to tear down the other boundaries of discernment within modern society.

Through each succeeding moment, we see how she has subordinated the arts and the intellectuals, the editors and the schoolmasters to her rule. When she finally opens her mouth and gives her declaration to her newly subjugated land, she demands that her servants help subordinate Science and Wit: “Break all their nerves, and fritter all their sense, / One trill shall harmonize joy, grief, and rage” (IV.56-57). The waste is no longer an individuated experience of desire within the hack writer that elicits disgust from the sophisticated reader. Now, it is a tool that is meant to eradicate the boundaries between all sensations, destroying the skills to sense desire and disgust among writer and reader alike. By commanding their nerves be broken, Dulness demands that the reader’s bodies be forcibly wrought like the hack-writers, so they may not be able to understand the difference between “joy, grief, and rage.” While previously positive and negative emotions might have been understood and organized as separate, here they are reduced to a single noise that will not be properly felt through the body. Where Science and Wit would have been the great arbiters of discernment, able to define difference in all aspects of the world, Dulness brings them under her command and strips them of their power, leaving both writer and reader unable to organize their own imaginations. After addressing her subjects at
length and bringing her declaration to its infamous climax, “And Make One Mighty Dunciad of the Land!,” Dulness concludes her work with a massive yawn, and in response, the whole world nods to sleep (IV.604). Chaos is returned and “Universal Darkness buries All” (IV.656). Dulness has brought the world back to its originary abyss, before the order of society had brought it to discernment. She has completed her un-mothering, reverting life back to its unsensing, unconscious embryo form. Pope’s diagnosis of the state of writing is grim. His mock-epic outlines how the individual hack-writers insensitivity will unravel the structures of modern culture, leaving all unsorted and therefore inhuman.

Pope uses the lives of contemporary writers in The Dunciad not only to lambast his critics or those who too readily sought out easy money in exchange for poor art. His satire highlights a much larger fear: bad writing’s contagion can undermine the definitions by which we understand ourselves. In a world where the ability to use language was intimately linked with humanity, or at least with elite classes of humanity, poor writing was an existential problem. While the contemporary battles between the ancients and the moderns are often reduced to whether modern writing could ever surpass the ancients in its quality, that only describes the surface of this cultural anxiety. Pope warns that these concerns are not just snobbish quarrels over what constitutes “good” writing, but what writing says about his society and how it actively constructs and destructs the foundations that hold it up. Firmly on the side of the ancients, Pope sees modern hacks as a threat to these institutions. These moderns’ inability to tell the difference between beneficial and wasteful writing could lead others to lose their discernment, and thus both writer and reader would distort and make indistinguishable the categories that define how to understand English culture. In her article discussing Pope’s interrogation of the Other, Carole Fabricant makes the important point that “Whereas Swift’s writings offer a continuing critique of
the political implications of representation, Pope’s linguistically and aesthetically exploit the latter while mystifying or naturalizing the consequences of its operations in term of power relationships.”

54 The Dunciad exploits the vulnerability of embodied feeling and its organization; the text presents us with a world where the mystification of discernment leads to the end of all culture. Pope sees that disgust is an integral feeling that can assist in discerning writing that harms instead of helps, and his satire merely takes such fears about the disembodiment of such helpful affects to its most extreme. After all, dullness reflects both a kind of boredom a text might elicit – its lack of innovation or adherence to successful classical tropes – and an incapacity to understand. When something is dull, its features cannot be distinguished clearly. Instead, Pope reifies disgust as the proper tool to use in order to perform that kind of discrimination. Self-obsessed pleasure derived from a text or its production is not enough to tell if a text has value; disgust is crucial if we are to recognize if harmful texts are to be separated from the helpful.

Chapter 3

Smollett, Bramble and (Dis)embodiment

Nearly three decades after Pope’s four-book *Dunciad*, Tobias Smollett published his own excremental epic: *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*. Following the Bramble posse as they traipe through England and Scotland, the novel provides multiple perspectives on British cities and the island’s physical environment. Part farce, part picaresque, and part sentimental novel, Smollett’s work is truly innovative in its deployment of multiple narrative voices. While Matthew Bramble is the patriarch of this family and the driving force of the story, Smollett allows us to experience Bath, London, Gloucester, Edinburgh, and a variety of other spaces through the sundry eyes of its letter-writing characters. In these places, each character provides their own take on the landscape’s waste. Jeremy Melford, Bramble’s nephew, gleefully relates the gore and filth of Britain to his friend, Sir Watkin Phillips, for amusement. The comic foils, Winifred Jenkins and Tabitha Bramble, both relate their interactions with waste in order to demand sympathy from their letter recipients. Lydia, the novel’s ingénue, maintains her genteel, feminine decorum and avoids discussing the bodily horrors her compatriots eagerly relay in their epistles. These characters remain relatively constant in their descriptions of waste and their (in)attention to its emotional and sensory resonances, except for our central character, Matthew Bramble, whom Smollett uses to focalize the narrative.

Over the course of the novel, Bramble’s letters and their discussion of waste undergo a progressive change. At first, he begins his missives to his friend and doctor, Richard Lewis, by detailing every bit of waste he encounters and the deep disgust that it elicits within him. During the Bath and London episodes especially, Matthew sends many letters to Dr. Lewis bemoaning
the ubiquity of the filth and its adverse effect on his health to the point that these hyper-
imaginative discussions of waste make the reader question Bramble’s state of mind. Bramble not only deals with the reality of the waste, comically detailing the streets and pump rooms he visits, but also grapples with the filth’s overwhelming ability to proliferate in his mind, inducing the new sensations he cannot help but contemplate and feel. By the end, however, he has dropped this discussion of waste. He rarely mentions the gout and illness that had originally plagued him or the filth of his locales that his illness made him more predisposed to languish over. Instead, he spends most of his letters to Dr. Lewis marveling at the wonders of Britain’s natural beauty and recounting the exploits of his family, his friends, and of course, his servant/lost son, Humphry Clinker. While never truly abandoning the previous sensations of his body, Matthew’s focus shifts to the sentimental, where the feelings attached to his nation and social community become bodiless, more of a high-minded idea than visceral feeling. Where the previous feelings were integrally tied to the waste that confounded him, Bramble manages his inner machinations by compartmentalizing his strong affects and thus stripping them of their bodied sensations.

In this chapter, I argue that Matthew Bramble depicts a Britain in affective transition. In his dogged attempts to intellectualize his disgust towards the rampant filth and his perverse desires to proliferate it, Matthew manages to undergo a personal transformation, in which his physical healing is predicated on an initial mental reconstitution. Unlike Pope or Swift, both of whom regard the embodied experience as unavoidable and perpetual, Smollett manages to produce both the full-body affects of desire and disgust but also the decorporealized sentiment that can overcome the trappings of the individual body. In critiquing Britain’s cities, its people, its lands, and their inherent waste, Smollett upholds the new intellectual order in which understanding waste as external, empirical and separate can define and even enhance individual
subjectivity and reify collective experience under distinctions like national boundaries. In fact, through Bramble’s transformation, he provides a guidebook to help others navigate their own mind-body divides. While previous writers used waste to critique this new affective regime, Smollett uses Bramble to present and further the classic Enlightenment narrative of progress throughout Britain where increasing knowledge of the greater social context molds a greater individual restraint against supposedly inferior, undifferentiated affects like desire and disgust.\(^{55}\)

Much of the scholarship on *Humphry Clinker* focuses on Matthew Bramble and this obsessive detailing of waste and its physicality. Because these descriptions are often couched alongside medical discourse in the novel, many have noted how fears about social corruption are paired with bodily corruption.\(^ {56}\) Bodily waste is frequently subsumed into larger discussions of how Smollett uses contemporary material as a vehicle to forward larger social critique while simultaneously advocating for ways in which such dross can be overcome.\(^ {57}\) While most note the disgusting nature of the waste, few have discussed the ways in which perceptions of the waste change over the course of the novel, taking it as a constant or arguing that the Bramble posse leaves behind the waste altogether once they leave England.\(^ {58}\) As I hope to show, there is nothing constant in Matthew Bramble’s perception of waste and just as he undergoes a deep spiritual

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\(^{55}\) Here of course, I am borrowing from Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982). While his work has come under criticism in recent years, I believe that Smollett’s understanding of this new affective regime of the Enlightenment is parallel to Elias’s vision of modern social processes.


\(^{58}\) See Eric Rothstein, “Scotophilia and *Humphry Clinker*: The Politics of Beggary, Bugs, and Buttocks,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (Fall 1982): 63-78.
transformation throughout the course of the novel, he experiences an affective realignment that brings him into line with the new, decorporealized feeling drawn from sentiment.

Bramble’s first encounter with the filth of the English city, in Bath, establishes the traditional affective regime and how it understood waste. By the publication of The Expedition of Humphry Clinker, Bath had rapidly developed into one of the most infamous spa towns in England. Smollett’s audience would have been familiar with both its healing qualities and its rising status as a town of fashion. Matthew Bramble, however, is not impressed when he arrives. As others have noted, Bramble notes at length his hypersensitivity to external stimuli, how he is almost too embodied in being plagued by unwanted bodily sensations. When he undergoes his first treatments, he is disgusted with a child with a skin disease being let into the pool with the other bathers: “Suppose the matter of these ulcers, floating on the water, comes in contact with my skin while the pores are all open. I ask you what must be the consequence? … it is very far from being clear with me, that the patients in the Pumproom don’t swallow the scourings of the bathers” (52). This evocative scene is clearly meant to disgust the reader in its grisly detail of bodily residue in the baths’ waters. Matthew Bramble produces a familiar sensory panoply, inviting us to imagine the horrors of seeing pus floating on the water and reviling at the possibility of ingesting some of the matter. Smollett climaxes this affective response through the phrase “swallow the scourings” where the back vowels and implosive consonants make the reader mimic such a dreaded gulping when spoken aloud. Bramble may be presented to the reader as a man disturbed, but Smollett brings us into his perspective and ensures that we too are

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overwhelmed by this grotesque imagination. In doing so, he also mimics the previous literary affective systems that the Augustan writers deployed, where the writing simultaneously disgusts and excites with its hyper attention to detail. Bramble is not just plagued by the actual filth, but also by his obsession in documenting it and expanding it through his imaginative experience.

Bramble first appears as a curmudgeon – somehow too good for one of the most fashionable sites in England – and his critique of Bath links these visceral details to a stinging critique of England’s own people. In first lamenting the inclusion of the child in the bath, Bramble ultimately aims his censure at his own countrymen, decrying the terrible wines in England and resigning himself to the fact that “there is no nation that drinks as hoggishly as the English” (53). Smollett has Bramble link the bathwaters with English wine in order to elicit a similar disgust towards England’s own insufficiencies. The bathwaters are just as heinous in their composition as the production of England’s own gustatory “pleasures.” As Eric Rothstein has noted, Smollett frequently deploys this negative affect as an inversion of England’s own use of disgust as a critique of Scotland, where accusations of “beggarliness, mange, and filth” were frequently lobbed at the Scots.61 While Smollett’s nationalist critique may try to reduce England’s animus towards Scotland, Bramble’s gross experience of illness in Bath highlights a similar anxiety about inferior taste as a precursor to the greater social rot of Britain at large. Just as Bramble’s “open pores” could take in sickness, the nation could indiscriminately take in poor substance, such as the bad taste as demonstrated through a national lack of sensitivity in commodity production, that would ultimately harm. The body, individual or politic, could be infiltrated in disgusting ways.

While this might be viewed as another paranoid projection within Matthew’s mind, it is important to note that bodily apertures were a common anxiety for the eighteenth-century reader. As Annika Mann has noted, Smollett used this similar language about “openings” and “taking in” to reflect greater fears about the involuntary nature of corruptive forces, from physiological ailments to toxic ideological states. Anything that was harmful – material or immaterial – could be absorbed through seen and unseen openings, including such tenuous boundaries as the individual and the nation state. The printed text would then act as a remediative force, where the novel simultaneously depicts these horrors in their proliferation within the safely defined boundaries of a narrative and acts as a cure for their reality. In this schema, the novel is both a diagnosis and a treatment where a narrative allows for such unarticulated anxieties to be identified and mollified. For Smollett, this purgative process forces the reader to encounter waste so directly that it produces Verfremdungseffekt, where the reader, made aware that they are reading a literary text, becomes more able to identify and critique the larger social frameworks the text is addressing. By dislodging the reader from the narrative moment, Smollett pushes the reader to become cognizant of and critique their own lived grotesqueries as embodied Englishmen. In disrupting the mimetic drive of the text through this process, the text pushes the reader to compare their own bodily processes more acutely to those depicted in the novel and become more aware of the dual affective structures that Britain was processing and Humphry Clinker holds in its narrative.

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One of the subsequent letters from Matthew again produces a moment of alienation produced through the cultivation of disgust. In recounting the “compound of villainous smell’s” in Bath, Bramble writes to Dr. Lewis,

Imagine to yourself a high exalted essence of mingled odours, arising from putrid gums, imposthumated lungs, sour flatulencies, rank armpits, sweating feet, running sores and issues, plasters, ointments, and embrocations, hungary-water, spirit of lavender, assafoetida drops, musk, hartshorn, and sal volatile; besides a thousand frowzy steams, which I could not analyse. Such, O Dick! is the fragrant aether we breathe in the polite assemblies of Bath. (72)

Starting this passage with an imperative, Smollett instructs us to “imagine” such a sensorium, but unlike the previous bodily horrors that were spread across multiple pages, here Smollett suffocates us with undifferentiated detail. There are no sentences or even verbs to give us respite, and by explicating such a gratuitous number of wastes, the list even loses some of its humor towards the end. With the more medical or scholarly “assafoetida” and “sal volatile,” Smollett pictures the waste in unfamiliar, jargonistic terms. Finally, they all combine into an unintelligible “aether,” not unlike Pope’s morass of dullness. While Matthew may be unable to distinguish every stink in the air, his obsessive detail draws attention to the unreality of this imaginative disgust. Hyper-real in its specificity, the list once again reminds the reader of the literariness of this moment, titillating readers through the conscious, humorous linkage of Bath to this miasma.

Through this irony, Smollett allows the reader to become more aware of Matthew Bramble’s mental contradictions. Despite all of the avowed disgust, Matthew Bramble documents each bodily waste and waste product with excruciating particularity. The seemingly unconscious subject change during the list hints at Bramble using the waste to come to grips with his own anxieties about his health; it is not just the overwhelming nature of the bodily waste that is detailed, but also the noxious medicines. Many definitions of the grotesque traditionally emphasize that its power comes from a mixture of comedy with fear and lunacy, where
contemporary anxieties can be articulated through displacement.\textsuperscript{63} However, both Matthew and the reader are aware that these grotesqueries go beyond mere disgust. The grotesqueries inspire desire for the waste’s ability to provide revelation about one’s own larger situation. Robert W. Uphaus has argued similarly, noting that Smollett makes the repeated case that there is wisdom to be had in “working… through excess.”\textsuperscript{64} As the ultimate excess, bodily waste serves as a uniquely powerful thing to channel such knowledge. While the eighteenth-century reader is forced out of the narrative at moments of disgust to become more aware of Smollett’s critique of England, Bramble himself becomes aware of the country’s faults through this affective alienation as well. After writing this digression, Matthew returns to a serious inquiry about why he had ever left his hometown in the first place, wondering, “\textit{O Rus, quando te aspiciam!} – I wonder what the devil possessed me” (73). The recollection of Bath’s waste and its disgusting nature brings him to a state where he can more honestly grapple with his own failing mind and body. Quoting Horace’s \textit{Satire}, Matthew jumps from the embodied feeling of disgust to high abstraction, where he can recognize that the promises of Bath’s healing abilities fall short of giving him his yearned-for health. However, so early in the novel, he has not sufficiently worked through this affective excess and instead he travels elsewhere for remedies.

When the Bramble cohort arrives in London, Matthew does not find it any better than Bath, but by the end of his trip, Bramble starts to transcend the overwhelming nature of his bodily feeling. After reminiscing about the superiority of his own idyllic farmland in his first London letter to Dr. Lewis, he abruptly shifts his focus to the horrors of London. Pent up in his


room due to his illness, Matthew surveys all of the urban filth that he can see from his window and recounts his experience from his brief excursions in the streets. He ends yet another grotesque litany by noting that “Human excrement is the least offensive part of the concrete, which is composed of all the drugs, minerals, and poisons, used in mechanics and manufacture, enriched with the putrefying carcases of beasts and men; and mixed with the scourings of all the washtubs, kennels, and common sewers, within the bills of mortality” (129). Interestingly, while still cognizant of the bodily waste in London’s streets, Matthew does not separate the excrement from the industrial waste left to molder. The wastes intermingle and augment one another; the corpses of animals and townspeople “enhance” the mechanical remnants that litter the pavement. The human excrement is still offensive, but is less offensive than this mixture of manufacturing waste and corpse material. Here, London’s urban waste is no less disgusting than the bodily remnants left in the street. By ending his description with this inclusion of other waste matters, Bramble diverges from his previous screeds against the excrement outside his room. Despite the disgusting remnants that still abound in his letter and in his imagination, Bramble writes less about its visceral affects in his letters to Dr. Lewis and attempts to shift his excremental vision to new objects, namely British cities and landscapes.

Bramble’s more muted responses reflect not only his changing mental state, but also that London was a less materially filthy city than Bath. During the eighteenth century, all of England would be familiar with London’s grime and reek, knowing that the population boom had made the Thames a virtual cesspit and the city-streets paths to be avoided. During the time period of Matthew Bramble’s expedition, however, London was a city that was becoming cleaner and healthier. While still filthy, Bath was actually in a kind of hygienic decline, where London would
This rise in hygiene coinciding with Matthew’s improving mental processes might seem like a reinforcement of more traditional ideals of medicine, where external stimuli augment or harm one’s health, but this progression of physical cleanliness stands in contrast to the social decay Bramble still encounters in the city. When reflecting on the possibility of a good society in London, Bramble laments that the material filth acts as a barrier to full enjoyment: “But what is the society of London that I should be tempted, for its sake, to mortify my senses and compound with such uncleanness as my soul abhors? All the people I see, are too much engrossed by schemes of interest or ambition” (132). While Bramble found some good company in Bath in old friends who were not from the spa town, London is defined by its toxic society; those “engrossed” people are other abjected parts of the cityscape. The city’s disgusting material and social waste act as an impediment for Matthew to obtain improvement of his total health, both physical and spiritual. The filth that fills London streets is not just a physiological health hazard, but one to Matthew’s interiority or as he puts it, his “soul.”

This discussion of London’s people marks a shift in tone and vision from Matthew Bramble’s initial evaluation of the English that we get in Bath. Where the “polite assemblies” of Bath are inherently linked with the miasma of illness that soaks the town, Bramble is careful here to separate the people of London from their waste. In his first step back to health, he acknowledges the material waste of the city while simultaneously affirming that people are separate from it, despite their otherwise still noxious qualities. In Bath, the waste was so overwhelming that he could not “analyze it”; the child and his pus-filled sores were one in the

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same. In this purgative process in London, Bramble distances man from his waste in a way that allows him to see both the urban waste and the unseemly residents as distinct and separate while still harmful. Separating man from his waste through his letter-writing, he can more seriously evaluate its effect not just on his body but on his greater spiritual being. His articulation and management of bodily waste show how Bramble’s disgust with his surroundings highlights not only the failures of eighteenth-century medicine, but any objective measures of national and spiritual health. Bramble continues to find that the treatments of the city do not provide relief, and his disgust serves as an indicator for the success or failure of his treatments and his eventual recovery. It is through his self-determined reflection that Bramble undergoes a true kind of healing or medical practice, where by writing his disgust, he can expurgate the noxious remnants of ill bodies as well as his own ill thoughts.

In his final letter from London, Bramble makes this revelation explicit: “I find my spirits and my health affect each other reciprocally… every thing that discomposes my mind, produces a correspondent disorder in my body; and my bodily complaints are remarkably mitigated by those considerations that dissipate the clouds of mental chagrin” (163). He categorizes his negative affects as “discompositions” and “disorders,” emphasizing their ability to subvert a supposedly clear and intellectualized version of his senses while also borrowing the clearly medical and remediative language of physical treatment. Crucially, he establishes that the mind and body are not in a cycle of cause-and-effect, where the body is the root cause of the mind’s effect, but they are rigidly distinct from one another. In contrast to the unorganized and overwhelming sensation of Bath, Bramble takes the first step towards his affective transition and eventual management of feeling by defining its directionality and systematizing it. He has not previously attempted such a management of his own body and psyche. In his following
observation about the effects of his prescription, he writes, “the pain and sickness continued to return, after short intervals, till the anxiety of my mind was entirely removed, and then I found myself perfectly at ease” (163). Bramble is not only relaying back to Lewis the successes and failures of the doctor’s treatment, but also documenting that his new theory of body and mind provides him with relief from the disgusting symptoms of illness from which he had been suffering. In mixing the passive language of “entirely removed” and the active language of “found myself,” Bramble is shown to be reworking his treatment by redefining the ways in which affects like disgust may constitute his bodily experience.

This is perhaps initially unsurprising to the modern reader who, by this point in the novel, has read Bramble’s multiple critiques of Bath and London and how to better manage their urban organization, but the importance of this revelation should not be understated. For Smollett’s contemporary, this understanding of personal health would stand in stark contrast to established medical theory. Indeed, Smollett, a trained physician, was intimately familiar with the Galenic model of the body, and earlier, he had even written An Essay on the External Use of Water, where he advocated for measures like warm baths in order to balance the mind and body through external measures. The main purpose of traveling to spa towns centered on the belief that one’s physical surroundings are crucial in determining one’s physical health and thus their mental disposition. In this previous model, a pathological condition was a physical state, not a mental one. Bramble’s status as the gouty, wealthy male character would further serve to emphasize

66 Importantly, spa towns were also viewed as sites of social improvement. The most fashionable spa towns dotted the Mediterranean coast, taking advantage of both the healing properties of the sea and the cultural heritage of continental Europe, with many being close to sites visited during the Grand Tour. Roy Porter, Bodies Politic: Disease, Death and Doctors in Britain, 1650-1900 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 89.
this past model. Relying on the “patrician malady” trope that would be familiar to Smollett’s audience, Bramble would easily fit the role of the stock character whose search for relief was marked by little change in his physical condition, but heightened mental acuity. His affective transformation – coming not from the benefits of any particular city but from his reflection and thought – would be given a kind of literary credibility since gout, like many other illnesses, would be seen as a marker of superior creativity and genius. A common literary trope, his health problems give him the ability to recognize what others cannot. While some of Bramble’s previous lamentations make us question his state of mind, he has paired his paranoid imaginations with high literary abstraction and observant social critique in what maintains his wit as sound. In the above revelation, however, there is no additional monologue on filth that precedes this moment. Instead, Smollett presents the moment as sincere and measured, and with that clarity, the affective shift rings as true and newly disembodied from Bramble’s past physical suffering.

This transformation, while not complete, continues as Bramble moves farther north towards Scotland. When the cohort arrives in Harrigate and Matthew undergoes a sulfur water treatment there, he laments, “after I had made shift to swallow it, my stomach could hardly retain what it had received. – The only effects it produced were sickness, griping, and insurmountable disgust. – I can hardly mention it without puking” (172). While still projecting a twinge of disgust from onomatopoeic words like “griping” and “puking,” Bramble immediately shifts course in the next sentence: “The world is strangely misled by the affectation of singularity”

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(172). He goes on to critique fashionable medicine, noting its similar qualities to poison and the treatments’ lack of efficacy. By switching from the singular sensation to social context, he is able to reinforce this new system of feeling he has discovered in London, where he stops the body from wreaking havoc on the mind through its obsessive affects by closing off corporeal experience in favor of intellectual conjecture. In “hardly mentioning it,” Smollett not only has Bramble bombard the reader with at-length reflection, but he also has him demonstrate its cognitive process. He gives up on the lengthy, embodied discussions of disgusting waste and instead focuses on social critique as the method by which he can better regulate his own health. Bramble does this again in miniature when he discusses the dank nature of English churches:

> When we consider, that in our churches, in general, we breathe a gross stagnated air, surcharged with damps from vaults, tombs, and charnel-houses, may we not term them so many magazines of rheums, created for the benefit of the medical faculty? And safely aver, that more bodies are lost, than souls saved, by going to church, in the winter especially, which may be said to engross eight months in the year. (188)

Instead of writing obsessively on the intense sensory details of corpses being so near parishioners in the church, Bramble is able to recognize this as repulsive without suddenly descending into an unending imaginative disgust that suffocates the ability to understand and organize the material. Bramble recognizes the waste as abject but is able to separate the body from the mind and decorporealize disgust as a thought and even offer a light joke about the church. Instead of dwelling on how his body is accosted by such “air” and “rheums,” he shifts his focus to progressive thought where he tries to determine how safe the church might actually be. By deploying self-conscious humor and his ability to intellectualize these affects to Dr. Lewis and the reader, Bramble shows his distance from the past affective regime of undifferentiated, embodied feeling and his embrace of the new bodiless, rational Enlightenment system.
While this chapter focuses mostly on Bramble’s letters, Smollett uses the other characters’ later letters as contrast to show this momentous change in Bramble. When the caravan finally reaches Edinburgh, the other characters are immediately struck by the immense amount of filth within the city. Indeed, Edinburgh’s unique mixture of sewage stench and smog was well known and earned it the contemporary nickname “Auld Reekie.” Silent about Bath or London, the other characters write at much greater length about Edinburgh’s waste. Jery starts his judgment of the city by warning his compatriot that “The first thing that strikes the nose of a stranger, shall be nameless” (222). Winifred remarks how frequently she hears people from above shout, “gardy loo,” the quaint misspelling of the warning, gardez-vous, that let street-goers know that chamber-pots were being emptied from the windows (227). Bramble, however, is markedly silent about the city’s disgusting urban contents. In one moment, Smollett even plays on the reader’s expectation that Bramble will go into one of his obsessive rants on the city’s filth. After briefly noting how difficult it is to walk through the city without getting a “polluted shoe,” he writes, “As to the surprising height of their houses, it is absurd in many respects; but in one particular light I cannot view it without horror; that is, the dreadful situation of all the families above, in case the common stair-case should be rendered impassable by a fire in the lower stories” (226). In thinking Bramble will notice the horrors of sewage being so frequently flung into the streets, as Jery and Winifred do, the reader is surprised to find that Bramble is more interested in these poor families’ well-being. In place of disgust or obsessive desire, Matthew cultivates sentiment for their plight. He distances himself from the bodily affects his cohort feels while reifying this bodiless thinking and feeling through rational discourse about greater social good.
Bramble’s omission here signifies a turning point in the novel where discussion of waste almost completely falls away from the rest of his letters. While letter-writers like Jery still revel in the gore of Indian torture in the Americas and other moments of extreme bodily waste, Matthew abandons the focus altogether. One of the few instances where he even mentions the specifics of disease again is to praise the city, Cameron, for doing so well in being absent of it: “This air, however, notwithstanding its humidity, is so healthy, that the natives are scarce ever visited by any other disease than the small-pox, and certain cutaneous evils, which are the effects of dirty living, the great and general reproach of the commonality of this kingdom” (257). Where filth and waste were discussed in their presence and extreme imaginative proliferation, Bramble now can only imagine them as absent objects, items that may produce strong feeling and bodily sensation but are now something to be thought of in the abstract. They are real, disgusting problems for England, but for Bramble and his kinsmen in Scotland and Wales, they are an intellectual pursuit by which cultural values can better be ascertained and defined by managing it and ultimately progressing beyond it.

While Bramble’s affective transformation goes untroubled and his disgust and desire are relegated to the near disembodied, it is important to keep in mind that the other characters maintain their affective systems. All of the other Brambles do not decorporealize their desire and disgust in a way that serves to highlight Matthew’s unique status. While scholars often compare Bramble to the actual Smollett, it seems worth noting here that Smollett at his death seemed to be attempting such a distance, where he could speak about his own death and its subsequent waste with an emphasis on its abstracted function than the affects it might inspire. In one of his final letters, Smollett wrote to his doctor, “With respect to myself I have nothing to say… you shall receive my poor carcase in a box, after I am dead to be placed among your
rarities. I am already so dry and emaciated, that I may pass for an Egyptian mummy, without any other preparation than some pitch and painted linen.”70 In joking with his doctor about the possible functions of his body, Smollett at least seems to present a kind of distance from embodied feeling, treating his corpse as an item that might be managed and supposing a literally decorporeal understanding of his waste.

Conclusion

Escape the Corporeal

Swift, Pope, and Smollett have shown the numerous ways waste channeled bodily affects and how these feelings could exploit and interrogate the Enlightenment project’s insistence on decorporealizing thought and sensation. These writers recognized and responded to this growing movement in intellectual history, and they complicated the notions that romantic, literary, and health cultures could be purely cerebral, highlighting moments of full-body feeling through the mixing of desire and disgust. Despite this antagonism, however, modern culture ultimately reified many of these experiences as centered in the mind. With the cultivation of feelings like sentiment, eighteenth-century writers were successful in separating many of these intellectual systems from physical sensation and the body. In evaluating the work of two writers, Jane Austen and Mary Shelley, I hope to show that by the Regency, both conservative and more experimental writers lived in a world where decorporealized feeling was not only common but part of a ubiquitous affective regime. Where waste previously served as a site that evoked complex bodily affects, waste’s emotional and sensory registers as resituated within the mind-body divide became the emotional regime, and many of those full-body feelings were removed. For Austen, Shelley, and their contemporaries, experiencing waste became a way to escape the body and its more physical sensations and thus structure and contain previously unruly and subversive feeling.

In Sanditon, Jane Austen gives us the most traditional depiction of such disembodied disgust and desire. In her final, unfinished work, we are presented with a scene similar to Bath in Smollett’s Humphry Clinker: a seaside spa town where invalids come to convalesce and return to
health. Here, the reader discovers two sisters, Susan and Diana Parker, who are self-avowed invalids and pursue an array of extreme treatments that ravage their bodies. The protagonist, Charlotte, serves as a voice for the reader, and she questions whether the sisters suffer from any disease at all. Her rationale points towards how the Parker sisters experience their illness and how it appears to others:

It was impossible for Charlotte not to suspect a good deal of fancy in such an extraordinary state of health. – Disorders and recoveries so very much out of the common way, seemed more like the amusement of eager minds in want of employment than of actual afflictions and relief… the eldest brother found vent for his superfluity of sensation as a projector, the sisters were perhaps driven to dissipate theirs in the invention of odd complaints. (198)

While Susan later meets Charlotte’s standards of “actual afflictions,” Austen initially explains the Parker siblings’ performances as “superfluity of sensation,” a nonspecific term for an author known for her precision. By expounding broadly about “disorders and recoveries,” centering them as subjects in early sentences, Austen characterizes the Parkers’ experience as not just a small-minded concern, but also a larger feeling that escapes embodiment. The Parkers’ sensation comes not from their body but from the greater society and its cultural anxieties, where “want of employment” forces the Parkers to reexamine how their bodies are reflective of their unclear status between merchants and the landed gentry. Austen’s emphasis on the amount of feeling, its “superfluity,” and not the quality, presents the Parkers as simultaneously aware and unaware of their situation. Where illness and its desire/disgust matrix were produced as bodily processes for Swift, Pope, and Smollett, Austen highlights how these sensations have become diffuse and are

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71 For example, “sensation” is both an individual feeling and a public reaction, e.g. one can cause a great sensation. “Sensation” could be both physical and emotional, positive and negative; sensations come from your senses and thoughts, but the term’s breadth means consciousness with no indication of what you are conscious of. See “sensation, n.,” OED Online (Oxford University Press, January 2018) for a full description of its contradictions.
no longer strictly embodied. For the rich, illness becomes an individualized, conceptual experience by which they try to escape their self-disgust. Illness stands in for employment and thus alleviates their “eagerness,” a term that had not yet lost its more negative connotations similar to “anxious” and “intensely impatient.”72 For the sisters, being an invalid allows them to escape their traditional identity inscribed by social restriction: young, unmarried women with unclear wealth.

Austen takes this decorporealization a step further when Charlotte describes the Parker sisters’ invalidism as “spiritualized,” both a satirical dig at their quasi-religious devotion to being invalids but also a note that this has converted them to “spirit” – it has given them the breath of life.73 In comparison to their invalid brother who does not adequately perform his invalidism and therefore has “a good deal of earthly dross hung about him,” the Parker sisters have found what can give meaning to them: their illness and its transcendent quality in experience and treatment. In turn, their illness and the purgative treatments they use to rid them of various wastes becomes a way in which they can escape their bodies. Unlike *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* where Matthew Bramble uses his waste and its affects to formulate a kind of clarity about the world that never discards the waste, the Parker sisters relieve themselves of their waste in order to achieve such illumination. They remove their teeth and abstain from food, reducing the amount of waste they produce. Austen, of course, is lampooning these “invalids,” and she presents an ironic version of paroxysmic enlightenment, a supposedly heightened consciousness produced by their illness and their expurgation of waste.74

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72 “eager, adj.,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, January 2018).
While this is clearly satirical, Austen does not exaggerate, instead merely allowing her characters to speak for themselves. While already antiquated, tooth-pulling and other home medicines were not uncommonly viewed as a serious method to better one’s health. Indeed, at the end of her own life, Austen cautiously labels herself as one of these spiritualizing invalids. During the final period of her convalescence, Austen writes to a friend that she is going to Winchester to procure treatment from a man who is not a university-trained physician, saying, “you will be convinced that I am now really a very genteel, portable sort of an Invalid.” While she maintains her caustic tone about this treatment’s ability to cure her, she still travels there and identifies as an invalid, even when her illness is real and ultimately terminal. In this moment of self-disgust, Austen reveals that she too has bought into a system of thought where invalidism is primarily viewed as conceptual and not primarily centered in the body. Invalidism’s true feeling is not inherent to disgusting aches and pains, but to its “gentility” and “portability,” the wealth and ability to move to seek treatment. Austen defines her status as ill through cultural and social factors instead of by her physical symptoms. She is aware of this odd system under which genteel illness works, and despite feeling disgust towards it, she continues to abide by it and seeks to escape it by finding any treatment that might cure her body.

While Austen’s Sanditon might show how more traditional literary communities understood these new sensations, Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein demonstrates how these new disembodied feelings were also present among experimental writers like the Romantics who viewed the expurgation of waste as a way to escape corporealized experience. At the end of the

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75 Roy Porter, Bodies Politic: Disease, Death, and Doctors in Britain, 1650-1900 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 89.
novel, when the monster tells the narrator of his desired fate, he describes a similarly spiritualized experience in his desire to escape his own version of waste: his body composed of corpse-material and his own moral filth. With an almost zen-like tone, the monster says, “I shall no longer see the sun or stars, or feel the winds play on my cheeks. Light, feeling, and sense will pass away; and in this condition must I find my happiness… Polluted by crimes, and torn by the bitterest remorse, where can I find rest but in death?” Unlike Pope or Swift, both of whom highlight the ways in which disgust can function as an affect that produces valued meaning, Frankenstein’s monster can only try and escape his own disgust. Death becomes an escape from the “pollution” of his crimes and instead happiness can be sought after the elimination of “feeling” and “sense.” Because his body has been the instrument of such destruction, the monster wishes to escape his reality for the desire of an uncertain outcome in oblivion’s “happiness.” Unlike the complex and unruly affects of the earlier discussed works, this configuration of desire and disgust here mirrors modern theorists’ interpretations of these sensations: “Disgust is urgent and specific; desire can be ambivalent and vague. The former expects concurrence; the latter does not.” The monster’s sins are clearly repugnant and align neatly with our commonly understood emotional trajectories. The immediacy of murder horrifies and disgusts all, but the monster’s desire for death confuses and is not necessarily felt by others. How does one feel happiness if one no longer has feeling or sense? Would death provide everyone happiness in its departure from life? The monster’s lamentation not only affirms that disgust is felt strongly and is easily understood by others, but his desire for the release of death is individual. 

77 Mary Shelley, Frankenstein: The Original 1818 Text, edited by D. L. Macdonald & Kathleen Scherf, 2nd ed. (Ontario: Broadview Literary Texts, 1999), 244.
Shelley also ensures that we are never given a space in the novel to experience a transgressive desire in the production of waste or death. In Shelley’s corpse scenes, she omits the details of her characters’ deaths and sanitizes the descriptions of their waste, leaving us only with remains that are biologically inert and unproductive. After the monster kills his bride, Victor Frankenstein hopes for one final desirous encounter with his wife’s body. However, when discovering her remains, he finds that “the deathly languor and coldness of the limbs told me, that what I now held in my arms had ceased to be the Elizabeth whom I had loved and cherished. The murderous mark of the fiend’s grasp was on her neck, and the breath had ceased to issue from her lips.”79 Where the corpse might provide some moment of emotional or sensory production, instead Victor is confronted with an assemblage of body parts that do not add up to any larger meaning or affect. Where the old romance trope that values the dismembered corpse could have made meaning here, Victor cannot; Elizabeth is now “limbs,” a “neck,” and “lips” that simply “ceased to be.” Both Frankenstein and the reader are denied any kind of erotic or romantic desire with her remains. Akin to his “emetic disgust and… irresistible urge to avert his eyes” from the creation of his monster, Victor cannot maintain focus on his wife’s remains.80 This brief and fruitless moment stands in stark contrast to the abundance of (re)productive feeling that comes from the body’s remnants in Swift’s poetry.81 Indeed, Shelley even uses this passage to deny other complex affects for the monster outside of desire and disgust. While the previous passage where the monster yearns for death might have inspired sympathy, this death

79 Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 218.
81 While it may seem jarring to link Swift’s excrement to Elizabeth’s corpse, Shelley reduces Elizabeth’s remains to its parts, to its abjected waste. They do not add up to Elizabeth but are instead her leftovers: the material Elizabeth leaves behind as the end-product of her biological processes.
scene ensures that any such positive affect is tempered and flattened, maintaining the reader’s disgust as the primary affect towards “the murderous mark of the fiend.” Shelley presents the monster through singular feelings that are made to simplify and control affects like desire and disgust.

While different texts, *Frankenstein* and *Sanditon* both reify previously embodied feelings as increasingly bodiless. For these writers, not only do disgust and desire become less entangled with one another but they become less entangled with the body. These feelings act as a method by which the novels’ characters try to escape their own physicality, and this process is one that is so common that diverse literary communities share it as a commonly rooted affective experience. Austen and Shelley are representative of the late eighteenth century, where writers sought broader meaning from the destruction of their bodies and what those bodies might signify, whether that be demonstrated through *Sanditon*’s growing anxiety about the status of the landed gentry or *Frankenstein*’s despair that emerges from man’s hubris to command nature. While Swift, Pope, and Smollett worked at the edges of this larger social movements that sought to disembody feeling and thus make it easier to understand and control, Austen and Shelley demonstrate the ways in which this intellectualization of feeling was successful and how it continued to proliferate through literature into the nineteenth century and beyond.

If this decorporealization of feeling seems bleak, it is worth remembering that desire and disgust remain intensely embodied experiences despite such intellectual labor during the eighteenth century to strip them of much of their strength. Whether these feelings remain powerful because of our intentional connection of them to the social order or because of distinct

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physiological features within our anatomy (or a combination of both), our predecessors maintained disgust and desire through their connection to the body and its products. Even Shelley and Austen never truly separate these feelings from waste despite their attempt to erase their presence from the text. Today, we are still just as fascinated and bewitched by the interplay between our bodily waste and our affective responses. The eighteenth century may have succeeded in producing many instances where our response to excrement, sexual byproduct, or illness produces a singular feeling, but the writers critiquing this intellectual trajectory made sure we did not lose the affective knowledge of their muddling. In producing texts that still manage to evoke complex feeling, they preserved methods of interrogation that allow us to undo the structure of disembodied feeling we are so familiar with today. Their work ensures that as we continue to reify methods of feeling and thought, structuring new ways by which we can experience affects, we can find ways to leave space open for unruly feeling through this knowledge production’s waste.
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